

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Attila Kovács

Hungarian and South Korean house speakers László Kövér and Kim Jin-pyo lay a wreath at the memorial of the victims of the 2019 Hableány tourist boat accident

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office presser on 2022 census

Stats office releases April retail figures

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ, ROSATOM CHIEF DISCUSS PAKS UPGRADE

Additional groundwork will soon begin to prepare the site for the expansion of Hungary's Paks nuclear power plant, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Alexey Likhachev, chief executive of Rosatom, in Budapest.

Szijjártó welcomed the European Commission's approval of the modifications to the contracts of the plant's expansion which he said would make it possible to speed up the construction of the two new blocks with the project applying the strictest nuclear safety regulations, according to a foreign ministry statement. The minister noted that work to thoroughly prepare the site for ensuring a safe operation of the new blocks will begin in early July. Szijjártó said both he and the Rosatom chief had expressed their commitment towards ensuring that the two new blocks should be put into operation at the beginning of the next decade. "We have so far managed to ensure that no sanctions are imposed on the nuclear energy sector," he said. "At the same time, we know full well that sanctions do exist not only in written but in an unwritten form." Szijjártó urged foreign actors he said were "keen to either block or slow down the expansion project" not to do so, because "they will fail", and because "we cannot accept their jeopardising the safety of our energy supplies."

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ORBÁN MEETS ROSATOM CHIEF IN BUDAPEST

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Alexey Likhachev, the head of Russia's energy company Rosatom, in Budapest on Monday. The meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and Kirill Komarov, Rosatom's first deputy director general, Orbán's press chief told MTI. The Rosatom delegation also held talks with Szijjártó, who said after their meeting that further preparations for the expansion of Hungary's Paks nuclear plant would soon begin.

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH AIIB PRESIDENT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Jin Liqun, president of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), in his office on Monday, the PM's press chief said. Orbán and Jin were in agreement that Hungary's policy of opening up to the East was now bearing fruit, with the highest amount of FDI coming from Chinese, South Korean and Japanese businesses, Bertalan Havasi said. Asian commercial banks are also stepping up their presence and activity in Hungary. Hungary intends for Asian capital to play a key role in the achievement of its national economic development goals, and sees its membership in the AIIB as a bridge that promotes its activities in Asia, Havasi said. The meeting was also attended by Economic Development Minister Márton Nagy.

At a separate meeting, Nagy and Jin reviewed the current international financial and economic situation and potential opportunities for cooperation, with special regard to investments and active capital market participation, the economic development ministry said in a statement. Nagy emphasised China's rise in global economic competition, calling the development of its financial system and improving competitiveness "exemplary". Hungary believes in "peaceful connectivity", he said, adding that Hungarian-Chinese relations were on upswing and that China and Chinese financial institutions were key partners for Hungary. China is Hungary's ninth most important trading partner, with bilateral trade turnover exceeding 13 billion dollars, Nagy said. Progress is also being made in financial cooperation, he added. Hungary aims to become a regional financial hub, which could also help it serve as a bridgehead for Chinese financial institutions, the minister said. Hungary has "excellent relations" with the branches of Bank of China, the China Construction Bank Corporation and China Development Bank operating in Hungary, which it aims to strengthen with the AIIB as well, he said. The sides were in agreement on the need to continue deepening financial and economic cooperation, and agreed to continue holding regular consultations. Hungary joined the AIIB in 2017, the ministry noted.

ORBÁN, KÖVÉR MEET S KOREA NATL ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Monday met Kim Jin-pyo, the chairman of the National Assembly of South Korea, the PM's press chief said. Orbán praised the friendly relations between the two countries, noting that South Korea "showed trust" in Hungary's economy right after the regime change in 1989; "they believed in Hungary becoming a success story," Bertalan Havasi cited Orbán as saying. Hungary will continue to support South Korean economic players, a practice that has made the East Asian country the largest investor in Hungary in the past few years, he said.

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér also received his South Korean counterpart for talks. At a joint press conference after the talks, Kövér said inter-parliamentary cooperation could give momentum to ties between Hungary and South Korea. He said strategic bilateral cooperation since 2019 was "the best example" for the benefits of Hungary's Eastern Opening policy. The speakers discussed international challenges affecting the Hungarian economy and hundreds of South Korean companies in Hungary such as inflation and high energy prices, Kövér said, adding that seeking a resolution to those problems could open up new areas for cooperation.

Kim urged joint action by Hungary and South Korea in the international

arena regarding the war in Ukraine and nuclear threats by North Korea. He called Hungary “the engine of central Europe” and one of the development centres of the European Union. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1989, Hungary and South Korea have strengthened their cooperation in a number of areas, not only in business but in culture and education as well, he said. South Korea has become one of Hungary’s largest investors, while the turnover of bilateral trade has now reached 7 billion dollars, he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS ON EU TO INCREASE AID FOR JORDAN

The European Union should increase financial support for Jordan to bolster its stability and defence, especially since the country has an important role in curbing migration, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said on Monday, after meeting his Jordanian counterpart, Ayman Safadi, in Budapest. Péter Szijjártó told a joint press conference that the two countries, despite the geographic distance, were facing similar security risks, and that Jordan was also dealing with a war in a neighbouring country. The war in Ukraine has led to rising prices in the Middle East too, and conflicts there often manifest as migration pressure in Europe, Szijjártó said, according to a ministry statement. Peace in both regions is in both countries’ interest, he said. “We know perfectly well that there

are no solutions to these conflicts ... on the battlefield. Those acting against peace or relativising it, and those hindering the success of those steps, are responsible for every death hereafter,” he said.

Another security risk in Hungary, migration pressure, is exacerbated by EU policy, and so “Middle Eastern countries curbing migration that are ready and able to handle the root causes” are very important, he said. Hungary appreciates Jordan’s stance against extremism and terrorist organisations, he said. “We also appreciate that Jordan houses millions of refugees, because otherwise these people would all start for Europe.” Hungary urges the EU and international organisations to increase financial aid for Jordan, he added. The EU should use the European Peace Facility, among others, to fund Jordan’s defence capabilities, he said. Hungary has recently supported 13 development projects to improve the situation in refugee camps, he said. It also offers 400 government grants for Jordanian students wishing to study in Hungary, he said. Szijjártó and Safadi signed a plan on cultural cooperation in 2024-2027.

PRESIDENT NOVÁK: SURVIVAL AS STRONG SOVEREIGN COUNTRY HUNGARY’S TOP ISSUE

Hungary’s most important issue is how it can survive as a strong and sovereign country “in this draughty part of the

world”, President Katalin Novák said in an interview with news portal 24.hu. The president is independent of the government, Novák said, adding that her job was not to explain the government’s decisions, but rather to represent Hungarians and Hungary. “That is my job; that is what the Fundamental Law says,” Novák said. “What happens in Hungary, how we live here and what it is most people care about, in my opinion, are things that are worth talking about.” Novák said that in her talks with her foreign partners, she had found that few had factual knowledge about what was happening in Hungary because “they don’t necessarily get factual information”. She said she had not agreed with all of the government’s decisions during her time in office, adding that she would have welcomed if the ruling parties had ratified Sweden’s NATO accession. It is the sovereign authority of parliament to make a decision in this matter, Novák said, adding she believed that it would be “timely”, which she had told both the foreign minister and the prime minister. Novák said the prime minister had promised her that Hungary would not be the obstacle to Sweden joining NATO. She also said that she had not had to “explain herself” abroad in connection with the government’s decisions, and had answered any questions she could. The president said she herself had asked questions and received answers, adding that she was on good terms with just about all of her European counterparts, and had

also met several of Europe's heads of government.

On another subject, she said Hungarian-Polish relations had not cooled, and were not in any worse shape than a year ago. Novák also said that she did not consider it a responsibility as president to criticise either the government or the opposition. Asked if there could be a domestic political decision in the country about which she felt she had to express an opinion, Novák said: "Definitely." The president speaks on special occasions like a national holiday or a New Year's address, but they can also speak outside of those, she said. Novák said that those who kept track of when she has spoken and what she has said could see what it was she considered important. Novák said one of the president's most important -- "and perhaps most difficult" -- constitutional functions was promoting the unity of the nation. "There are countless things along which we can divide ourselves, but there are values and situations that bring the community together rather than divide it," the president said.

Asked how independent she considered herself from Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Novák said she felt exactly as independent as the president needed to be from the prime minister. She said she had said no to the prime minister in several matters. Asked if she would seek the opinion of left-wing prime minister as often as she did Orbán's, Novák said this also depended on the people in question,

adding that she would definitely strive for regular contact. Asked about her and the prime minister's differing views on the war in Ukraine, Novák said there was a difference in how nuanced their positions were. "The prime minister and I agree on the essential issues," she said. "My position is perhaps less nuanced than his, I accept that."

Meanwhile, she said granting a pardon to György Budaházy, a radical activist convicted on terrorist charges, had been one of her most difficult decisions. "In general, the clemency power is the most difficult power for president," she said. "There is no pardon that is not divisive, this is the nature of the matter." She said she believed Budaházy was not innocent or a hero, but an individual who had been sentenced for a crime. The president said she respected the court's ruling and that her decision had not been a political one.

DEFMIN: GEORGIA 'STRATEGIC PARTNER'

Georgia is a strategic partner of Hungary, the defence minister said in Tbilisi on Monday, adding that the two countries would continue to work on deepening their relations. Georgia plays an important role in the South Caucasus, a key region for Hungary, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said after talks with Juansher Burchuladze, his Georgian counterpart, according to a ministry statement. The minister praised bilateral defence relations as "excellent", saying he and Burchuladze

had discussed strengthening it even further. Hungary is involved in the preparation of Georgian officers bound for NATO missions, including the training of helicopter pilots, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said, adding that he and his Georgian counterpart had also discussed opportunities for cooperation in the defence industry.

He noted that Hungary was a committed supporter of Georgia's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. Hungary is convinced that Georgia is ready to be granted candidate member status and to take its rightful place in the international alliance system, the minister said. He noted Hungary's role in the NATO-Georgia cooperation aimed at boosting the Georgian military's capabilities and effectiveness and its presence in the European Union's monitoring mission in Georgia.

According to the statement, Szalay-Bobrovniczky inaugurated a monument to the Hungarian soldiers who fell on Georgia's territory during the second world war. The minister thanked Georgia's government for supporting the monument. Szalay-Bobrovniczky also met Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili during his visit.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER: HUNGARY USED 86% OF EU RESOURCES IN 2014-2020

Hungary called down and used 86% of European Union resources in the 2014-2020 financial cycle,

an outstanding performance among EU member states, the regional development minister said on Monday. Tibor Navracsics inaugurated an industrial facility in Fehérgyarmat, in northeast Hungary, built with a 1.09 billion forint (EUR 2.9m) government grant. The facility consists of a production and warehouse unit and an office and social area building. At the inauguration, Navracsics said that Hungary's excellent use of EU funds promises good projects in the country, besides being an indicator of "excellent and well-founded" Hungarian plans submitted to EU decision-makers. National and EU funds have both supported projects in the region, he added.

NÉZŐPONT: VOTERS AGAINST FOREIGN CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Fully 61% of respondents in a recent Nézőpont Institute survey said political parties should not be allowed to receive any financing for

their campaigns from abroad, the pollster said on its website on Monday. According to Nézőpont's analysis, 60% of the respondents said campaign financing rules should be made more stringent. It said that 78% of ruling Fidesz' supporters found "all forms of foreign financing unacceptable". Some 41% of left-leaning participants said parties should not receive funding from abroad, however, 52% of them "were rather indulgent, probably in defence of their preferred parties", the survey showed. Nézőpont conducted its phone survey between May 30 and June 1 with a sample of 1,000 voting-age adults.

JOBBIK LAUNCHES SIGNATURE DRIVE TO DEMAND 'DECENT' WAGES

The opposition Jobbik-Conservatives party has launched a signature drive demanding "normal wages", senior officials of the party told a press conference on Monday. Group leader György László Lukács said the aim was to "keep

on the agenda at all forums" the necessity to raise wages in Hungary. "Successive governments in the past three decades have ... abandoned Hungarian workers and allowed highly qualified people to be employed with low wages and used the low level of wages to attract foreign investors to the country", he said. For the past 30 years, the wage gap between Hungary and the European average has "continually increased", he said, adding that "several countries that started from the same level as Hungary now have much higher average wages".

CLOSE TO 12,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 5,457 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 6,332 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 59 people, ORFK said on Monday.