

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Noémi Bruzák

President Katalin Novák praying for victim of 2016 terrorist attack in Cairo

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATO foreign ministers' two-day meeting ends

President on official visit to Egypt

Budapest municipal assembly meets

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

HUNGARY TOLD HAMAS HOSTAGE ALIVE

The Hungarian government has been informed by Israeli authorities that one of the Hungarian citizens who went missing is surely alive and is being held by the Hamas terrorist organisation, the foreign minister said in Brussels on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference during a break in a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Péter Szijjártó noted that three of the five hostages with Hungarian citizenship had been released recently after Hamas announced the handover of women and children hostages during a ceasefire in the framework of a hostage exchange. In addition to those three Hungarians, there was information about another two Hungarian males who were believed to be held by the terrorist organisation, the minister said. "We of course will do everything possible for the release of the two men with Hungarian citizenship, just as we did so for the release of the two children and their mother before," Szijjártó said. "And, given the current circumstances, the good news is that we know for sure that one of the two men is alive," he said. Szijjártó said the Hungarian government would do everything possible to make sure that the man is included among those considered for release if the release of male hostages is discussed.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: NATO MEMBERS SHOULD RETHINK 'UNSUCCESSFUL' UKRAINE STRATEGY

NATO member states should rethink their “failed” Ukraine strategy, but most of them show no willingness to do so despite the lack of success seen over the past year and a half, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels on Tuesday. Addressing a press conference during a break in a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Szijjártó said several of his counterparts had emphasised the importance of continuing to support Ukraine, while some had even urged boosting support and stepping up NATO’s involvement. “I expressed the Hungarian position that we still consider valid ... the decision we made here more than a year ago, namely that everything must be done to prevent NATO becoming involved in the conflict and that everything must be done to avoid direct confrontation between NATO and Russia,” Szijjártó said. He added that no proposals that went against this had been put forward so far. The minister said, at the same time, that there was “still an atmosphere of war” among NATO leaders, with “the word ‘peace’ not having been uttered at all at the meeting, even though everyone should finally admit that there can be no solution on the battlefield, because there are only casualties and destruction there”.

Szijjártó said he and his Turkish counterpart had raised the question

of whether NATO should reconsider its strategy in Ukraine given recent developments, arguing that the plans behind the substantial support provided so far had not yielded results. That plan, he said, had been for Ukraine to defeat Russia on the battlefield, triggering political consequences in Russia. “I think today everyone can see -- though they may not admit it -- that this plan has failed,” he said. He said the goals behind Ukraine’s counteroffensive had not been met, arguing that there had been no progress or breakthrough on the battlefield. “This is something several people here admitted, albeit quietly and timidly, but they admitted it,” he said. Szijjártó said he believed this was why it was worth considering whether a “plan B” was needed, pointing out that only he and his Turkish counterpart had brought up the possibility of favouring a settlement through diplomacy.

Concerning the matter of Ukraine’s NATO membership, Szijjártó welcomed that member states were in agreement that such a development was “inconceivable” at present because it would risk the outbreak of a third world war. As regards challenges stemming from the south, the minister said migration and terrorism constituted a “vicious circle”, arguing that the latter was simultaneously a cause and consequence of the former. He said he had stressed that NATO should take firm action against terrorism and support upholding stability in Africa and the Middle East. He said Hungary

was sending troops to Chad and would provide around half a million dollars in financial support to Jordan, Tunisia, Mauritania and Iraq. Szijjártó also said that Hungary this year met its NATO obligation to increase its defence spending to 2% of GDP by 2024. Eleven of the 31 members currently meet this obligation, he said, adding that there are 750 Hungarian troops serving in foreign missions and another 860 are on standby, while there were major defence industry investments ongoing in the country.

TUZSON: PROTECTION NEEDED AGAINST ATTACKS ON SOVEREIGNTY

The justice minister said on Tuesday that Hungary’s sovereignty was being attacked on a daily basis and must be protected. Bence Tuzson told a parliamentary debate on the package of laws that protecting the country’s sovereignty was one of the most important tasks in Hungary today. An amendment to the constitution and the bill on sovereignty protection “has life-changing significance” because “certain international powers are trying to sway Hungarian election results” and gain influence in Hungary, he added. Tuzson said strenuous efforts to take the right to self-governance away from Hungarians were under way, and Europe was on track to become “an empire” whereby nation states were replaced by a United States of Europe. “We must not allow this to happen because this may cause massive long-

term damage to Hungary," he added. The government has proposed an amendment to the constitution to set up an independent authority for the protection of Hungary's sovereignty. Also, under a proposed amendment to the constitution, the basic rights and obligations of regular staff in the Hungarian Army would be laid down in a government decree. Concerning digital citizenship, the amendment will specify that the state can issue a unique and permanent digital ID for everyone. In line with the bill submitted by ruling Fidesz and Christian Democrat lawmakers, the Sovereignty Protection Office will be set up as an autonomous state administration authority involved in assessment activities and making proposals. The task of the authority will include uncovering any interest representation or disinformation activity carried out in the interest of other states or foreign organisations, as well as activities aiming to influence decision-making by the state and society -- if they can harm or threaten Hungary's sovereignty -- and organisations that receive support from abroad for the purpose of influencing the elections and voters.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: MIGRANTS, HUMAN SMUGGLERS USING AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AGAINST BORDER GUARDS 'UNACCEPTABLE'

The new situation involving certain migrants and human smugglers

opening fire on Hungarian border guards with automatic weapons "is unacceptable", the foreign minister said in Geneva on Tuesday. The ministry cited Péter Szijjártó telling a meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations International Organisation for Migration (IOM) that Hungary had first-hand knowledge of illegal migration, as it is located on the external border of the European Union, on one of the busiest migrant routes through the Western Balkans. He said Hungary's experience showed that migration posed dangers both to transit countries and target countries, as new arrivals "regularly violate borders" and "refuse to cooperate with the authorities". "International legal regulations must be respected by everyone and these regulations clearly define who qualifies as a refugee," he said, adding that persecuted people were eligible for temporary asylum in the first safe state they entered. But this did not mean they were allowed to illegally cross the borders of safe countries to reach a destination of their choice, he added. Hungary, he noted, had allowed 1.1 million people from Ukraine to cross the border. But the situation was not the same at the southern border, he said, further arguing that migrants had already crossed a number of safe countries and were therefore considered as illegal migrants ineligible for asylum.

Szijjártó said the situation was steadily deteriorating, with 275,000

illegal border crossing attempts having been registered last year, and almost 200,000 this year. He said the use of automatic weapons against border guards and police on several occasions had been clear "criminal acts" and appropriate action must be taken against the perpetrators. "People should not be encouraged to set foot towards Europe and risk their lives," the minister said. "The business model of human smugglers must be destroyed, and efforts should be focused on handling the root causes of illegal migration."

Szijjártó said armed conflicts should be increasingly directed towards peaceful settlement, and the development of poor areas must be promoted with investments. Taking into consideration environmental protection concerns was also important, he added. Hungary, he said, had been doing its share while fighting against mandatory settlement quotas. It has implemented development and support schemes in Africa valued at 200 million dollars, while 1,425 African students can study in Hungarian universities with scholarships, he said. Also, Hungary had been among the few countries in the world able to reduce emissions while boosting its economic performance, he said. He confirmed that the government was ready to continue cooperation in the management of the root causes of migration in order to help as many people as possible to live safely in their home instead of being forced to leave.

GULYÁS BRIEFS MPS ON GOVT WORK, SAYS STRONG NATO IN HUNGARY'S INTEREST

At a hearing of parliament's justice committee on Tuesday, the head of the Prime Minister's Office said government offices had done an "outstanding job" providing aid to refugees arriving from Ukraine, while the government system overseeing mandatory price caps on some food products had worked smoothly. Gergely Gulyás said local administration would be transferred from the PM's Office to an independent, new ministry, headed by Tibor Navracsics, on Jan 1. Highlighting the work of Hungary's 313 local government offices, Gulyás said their 2,500 clerks had met 14,300 clients last year, while 250 mobile offices operated in buses had reached out to 3.5 million people. The local government offices processed 40,000 asylum applications, and registered 1.2 million entries from Ukraine, Gulyás said. He noted the government's position that "Hungary does not need to accommodate people arriving in hopes of a better life from the other hemisphere, but when Hungary is the first safe country, it will provide fast, generous, and legally correct assistance." He thanked charity organisations for their assistance to refugees, and said the central budget had contributed a combined 4.5 billion forints to their budgets.

Answering a question concerning Sweden's NATO entry, he said Hungary had an interest in a strong NATO, but

added that "Sweden's membership will not influence NATO's combined defence capabilities." He said, however, that the government had submitted the ratification to parliament. The vote, he said, would be held "sooner or later". He also said "Sweden and its political elite should give some kind of answer concerning their defamation of Hungary." "This issue does not seem to be too important for Sweden, since there has been no diplomatic activity aimed at reaching even a minimum of the settlement of differences of opinion or clarifying Sweden's slanderous remarks on Hungary," he said. Meanwhile, Gulyás said Hungary's law on guest workers would be "Europe's most stringent" legislation, limiting the number of foreign job seekers and restricting their employment to certain positions.

PRESIDENT EMPHASISES IMPORTANCE OF PEACE IN MEETING WITH POPE TAWADROS II

President Katalin Novák, at a meeting with Pope Tawadros II in Cairo on Tuesday asked the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria to do everything possible in the interest of urgent peace. The president added that she will meet Pope Francis in Dubai on Saturday after addressing the United Nations COP28 climate summit. Novák noted that there were wars going on in Ukraine and the Middle East. She said the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip highlighted the kind of tensions differences between religious

groups could lead to. "Hungarians are a peace-loving people, so we'll do everything possible in the interest of there being peace in Ukraine and the Middle East as soon as possible," she said. Novák said Hungary was proud to have been founded on Christian principles 1,000 years ago, adding that this Christianity and Christian culture was defining in Hungarians' everyday lives and holidays to this day. She said it was Christianity that bound Europe together, adding that "when we say that Europe needs diversity, it is meant within Christianity". The president said Europe was diverse enough through its different peoples who all had different histories, customs, cultures, languages even though they were linked by their shared Christian culture.

Meanwhile, Novák said Egypt also set an example of how Muslims and Christians could coexist, expressing appreciation for Pope Tawadros II's role in promoting dialogue between the two faiths. Underlining the importance of families, Novák said there was an average of three children per family in Egypt compared with less than two in Hungary. She added that she wanted to understand how young Hungarians could be encouraged to have children and families. Concerning the aiding of persecuted Christians, the president said Hungarians felt responsible for their Christian brethren regardless of where they lived in the world. Hungary has helped the Coptic community on numerous occasions, she said, adding that they could count on Hungary in the future as well.

Speaking about her visit to Egypt, Novák noted that on Monday she had met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi for the first time. She said their meeting had gone on longer than planned because Hungarians and Egyptians both respected the other nation along with their culture and differences, but also found their similarities. Novák also met two Coptic women who were severely injured in a terrorist attack in Cairo's Coptic cathedral in December 2016. At the meeting at the scene of the attack, the two women thanked Hungarians for the help they received during their rehabilitation in Budapest. The president then travelled on to Giza on a train manufactured in Hungary.

PRESIDENT CALLS FOR INCENTIVES TO YOUNG PEOPLE TO HAVE FAMILIES

"We must make starting a family an attractive option for the next generation," President Katalin Novák said in an interview published in regional daily *Petőfi Népe* on Tuesday. In her interview summing up a recent visit to Bács-Kiskun County, the president noted the government's decade-long work in consolidating family policies, insisting the country had "achieved a pro-family turnaround unparalleled in the welfare world". She said she had visited a family with five children in Tiszaalpár, and the young family was "proof that you can give so much even with modest means".

Concerning Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries, Novák said Transcarpathia Hungarians "may be in the most difficult situation", noting the war and that circumstances for Ukraine's ethnic minorities had "considerable deteriorated in recent years". She added, however, that the Venice Commission's position that Ukraine's leadership had set expectations in terms of improving minority rights and offered "some faint hope". "Ukraine is at war; its becoming an EU member is a distant goal, but the integration of the Western Balkans should be speeded up: this would serve the interests of both Hungary and the EU," Novák said. Concerning her visit to Bács-Kiskun, Novák said her programme had been "packed" with visits, meeting locals, visiting factories, schools, and the country's southern border. Regarding the latter programme, she said: "Hungarian families can sleep in safety thanks to those who are protecting the Hungarian border." She said the country's border control system conveyed a clear message: "Whoever doesn't follow a [legal] path isn't welcome." She added that the point of her visit to the border was to thank border guards for "protecting not only Hungary's security but that of Europe, too".

In Kiskunhalas, the president attended the oath-taking ceremony of 99 young army officers. "It's good to see that more and more young people have a calling to protect the homeland." Meanwhile, the

president said "we Hungarians are present at nearly all locations in the world." Referring to the post-WWI Trianon peace treaty, she added that many Hungarians had been "forced to leave when the country was mutilated". Others, she added, had been "expelled by the communist dictatorship or went abroad to follow their dreams or calling."

Hungarians' extensive presence in the world was, she said, "an asset for the nation". "As president, I seek communication with the diaspora, as ethnic Hungarians have worked for many good causes worldwide," she said.

OFFICIAL UNDERSCORES IMPORTANCE OF EAST-WEST COOPERATION

International relations must be built on voluntary cooperation and earnest dialogue, and if the West continues to raise blocs it will "lock itself up in a prison", the prime minister's political director told a conference on Tuesday. "Europe would not be where it is today had the East and West not met at a crossroads 2,500 years ago," Balázs Orbán told the conference held in Budapest to mark the 75th anniversary of Hungary-India diplomatic ties. But today the West, in fear of losing its hegemony and a further strengthening of its Eastern adversaries, is forging isolation, he said. "Hungary considers this the wrong strategy, because instead of being a solution, it is slowing down

processes,” the political director said, noting that on the one hand the fastest economic growth was no longer projected to be in the West and, on the other hand, with building blocs the West would only isolate itself from the eastern markets. Hungary’s strategy is however based on the logic of “fruitful cooperation” which seeks to open up the doors to parties seeking cooperation in the world, Orbán said, adding that India-Hungary relations aimed “in a deeper sense” to seek friendship rather than colonisation.

Since the Hungarian government launched its policy of opening to the East in 2012, Hungary-India trade volumes reached records in every year with Hungary’s exports seeing a trifold and imports a six-fold increase, the political director noted. He highlighted an active presence of Hungarian businesses in India’s water management, food processing, defence, pharmaceutical and energy sectors as well as large investments by Indian firms in Hungary employing tens of thousands of people.

In her opening address to the conference, Meenakshi Lekhi, India’s Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, underscored the importance in India’s foreign policy of building and maintaining international relations on the basis of mutual respect towards the values and views of the cooperating countries. The conference was also greeted by the Hungarian and the Indian foreign ministers in their video messages.

MINISTRY: HUNGARY DOESN’T WANT TO LEGALISE EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia is not legally permitted in Hungary, and the government does not want to legalise it, the justice ministry said on Tuesday in connection with a case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The case concerns a Hungarian individual’s petition filed with the ECtHR against Hungary’s ban on assisted suicide and the law prohibiting him from undergoing legal euthanasia abroad, too. The petition is being treated as a priority case by the court. Council of Europe member states have broad discretionary powers when it comes to euthanasia, with most of them, including Hungary, against legalising assisted suicide, the ministry said in a statement. The ECtHR heard experts in the Karsai v. Hungary case on Monday and Tuesday, with the justice ministry representing Hungary. The ministry said Hungary considered “unacceptable” all decisions and aspirations which “enable others to end a person’s life”. The ministry cited Article 2 of Hungary’s constitution and Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which guarantee the right to life. At the same time, neither Hungary’s constitution nor international law, including the ECHR, guarantee the right to die, it argued. The statement said the “fulfilment of dignity and its preservation” were not a political

issue or a matter of worldview, but a fundamental right which could not override the sanctity of life. “The protection of life is primary in Christian culture, including in Hungary,” it added. The ministry said assisted suicide left room for “numerous forms of abuse”, stressing Hungary’s position that “no one can take another’s life for any reason”.

FINMIN: HUNGARY’S BUDGET STABLE

Hungary’s budget is stable, guaranteeing the real value of pensions, family assistance mechanisms and caps on retail energy prices, the finance minister told parliament’s budget committee on Tuesday. Mihály Varga said the central budget also continued to provide pre-financing for EU programmes the community funding “withheld by Brussels for political reasons”. He added that the pre-financing amounted to some 1,000 billion forints (EUR 2.6bn). “The EU is causing damages to the Hungarian economy, the Hungarian budget and taxpayers by refusing to give the country the funds it is entitled to,” he said. Referring to the state of the 2023 budget, the minister said it had been calculated with targeted economic growth of 4.1% in spring 2022. Figures so far have indicated smaller growth and greater inflation, while the public debt is being financed with high interest. This year’s deficit target has been revised from 3.9 to 5.2% of GDP, an improvement on

last year's target of 6.2%, he said. The public debt will have been reduced to 70% of GDP by the end of the year, nearly 4 percentage points lower than last year, he said, adding that the government had taken a number of measures to reduce the deficit and the debt, such as postponing investments. The government decided against imposing austerity measures and left family assistance mechanisms in place, he said. Retaining Hungary's nearly full employment "has been an outstanding achievement", Varga said. "This also shows that there has been no economic recession, just technical recession lasting for four quarters," the minister said.

FINMIN: HUNGARY PENSION SYSTEM 'RELIABLE'

Hungary's pension system is "reliable", with the government covering pension payouts, Finance Minister Mihály Varga told parliament's welfare committee on Tuesday. Varga said pension hikes were based on economic growth, adding that growth had to be maintained in order to preserve the purchasing power of pensions. The minister said the government had made a commitment to have pension hikes keep up with inflation. Since 2010, the average pension has increased to 217,000 forints (EUR 571) from 97,000 forints and its purchasing power is up around 20%, Varga said. Next year's budget allocates 6,540 billion forints for pension payments,

he said, noting that Hungary's 2.5 million pensioners will see a 6% pension rise in January. Meanwhile, he said an international analysis of the Hungarian pension insurance system could be released soon. The report will also be evaluated by the government, with its recommendations to be put to a public debate in the first half of 2024, he added. The functioning of the pension system must also be secured for the long term, Varga said, adding that there was no need for any urgent intervention. He rejected austerity measures, saying that the government had been against such policies even during times of global economic challenges and instead favoured job creation and price caps.

DK PROPOSES JOINT OPPOSITION LIST FOR LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The Democratic Coalition proposes that "democratic opposition" parties should run on a joint list in Budapest at the 2024 local elections, the party's group speaker said on Tuesday. Olga Kálmán told an online press conference that ruling Fidesz had made it clear in parliament's house committee that it would include on the agenda Mi Hazánk's proposal according to which next year's local council elections in Budapest should be changed to a list-based system. Kálmán said it was actually not Mi Hazánk but Fidesz "that wanted to change the Budapest elections" considering, she added,

that the ruling party had never put any proposals from the opposition onto the agenda. Mi Hazánk "has only played its usual role of Fidesz stooge," she added. Hardly more than six months ahead of the elections, Fidesz, she said, wanted to dampen its "more-than-likely local council defeat in Budapest" by changing the rules. The amendment would result in the same rules being applied at the local council elections as those used in parliamentary elections, "so if the opposition parties want a joint candidate for mayor, they must run on the same list", she added.

OVER 7,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 4,208 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 3,381 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 48 people, ORFK said on Tuesday.

INVESTMENT VOLUME FALLS 12.1% IN Q3

Investment volume in Hungary shrank by an annual 12.1% in the third quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Tuesday. Quarter on quarter, volume dropped a seasonally adjusted 2.2%. KSH said most branches of the national economy had contributed to the decline, with

investment volume rising only in the manufacturing sector, public administration and a few smaller segments. In the manufacturing sector, investment volume grew by 6.3% year on year, while construction dropped by 21.6%. In absolute terms, investments came to 3,781 billion forints in Q3. Manufacturing sector investment accounted for 1,202 billion of the total.

Commenting on the figures, the economic development ministry said the war in Ukraine and the EU's sanctions had affected investment trends in the third quarter, adding that shrinking demand and high interest rates also accounted for the smaller volume. The ministry noted that inflation contracted to below 10% in October, and real wages were growing. The sole factor hindering economic growth and investments was growing positive real interest rates "due to a high, above-inflation base rate", the ministry said. "This is killing consumption and investments..." the ministry said. The ministry welcomed, however, that in manufacturing, including in car and battery making, investments had increased, just as they had done in the first and second quarters of the year.

TURKISH TERRORISTS WANTED FOR MURDER ARRESTED IN HUNGARY

A Turkish man, aged 23, wanted for murder and belonging to an armed terrorist organisation has been apprehended in Hungary in the act of people smuggling with an accomplice, the Zala County police said on the police.hu website. Local police tried to stop a van on road number 76 near Sármellék, western Hungary, on Nov 16 but the driver deflected and tried to flee after driving away and stopping on a minor dirt road. The van he abandoned included ten illegal migrants who identified themselves as Turkish citizens. The Turkish driver, aged 27, was apprehended a few days later near Székesfehérvár, along with a 23-year-old accomplice who had also been involved in people smuggling with a follow-up vehicle. Zala police started a procedure against both and the court ordered their pre-trial detention. The investigation revealed that the younger man was wanted by Turkish authorities for possessing a gun, committing murder and activities as member of a terrorist organisation.

PHILOSOPHER MIHÁLY VAJDA DIES AGED 88

Philosopher Mihály Vajda died on Monday at the age of 88, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences said on Tuesday. Vajda was born in 1935 in Budapest and graduated from Eötvös Loránd University in philosophy in 1958 and then in German language and literature two years later. From 1961 to 1973, at the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, he was a student of György Lukács. In 1973, he was sacked for political reasons. From 1973, he was a visiting professor in Bremen and New York. His research areas were phenomenology, 20th century German philosophy and the theory of totalitarian societies. He defended his academic doctoral thesis in 1992, and in 2000 became the president of the philosophy section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 2001, he was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in 2007 became a full member. In 2005, he was appointed director of the Philosophical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which he headed until 2009. Vajda received several prestigious awards, including the Széchenyi Prize in 1999.