

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Máté Zoltán

Drone shot of renovated Andrassy Castle in Tiszadob

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel**

**1956 December 8 volley commemorated in Salgótarján**

**Stats office publishes CPI for Nov, foreign trade data for Oct**

## TOP STORY

# SZIJJÁRTÓ IN TALKS WITH UKRAINIAN OFFICIAL

Hungary may be open to a request by Ukraine for a meeting between leaders of the two countries, according to the foreign minister, who said there would only be any point to talks, however, if a positive outcome appeared possible.

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó had talks by phone with Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian President's Office, at the initiative of the Ukrainian side, the Hungarian foreign ministry's spokesman told MTI. Máté Paczolay cited Yermak as informing the foreign minister about Ukraine's plans to adopt "several important pieces of legislation". Szijjártó and Yermak were in agreement that bilateral ties called for improvement and decided on a personal meeting to follow. At the talks, Yermak suggested a meeting between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Szijjártó said the Hungarian side was open to the proposal, but added that "it would only have a point if there is a chance that the talks would have a positive outcome ... this would require thorough preparations and preliminary talks." The request for a high-level meeting comes as Hungary has stated its opposition to a proposal to start talks on European Union membership for Ukraine.

## **ORBÁN TELLS SANCHEZ UKRAINE'S EU BID A NON-STARTER**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had phone talks on Thursday with Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez. Noting serious differences between member states regarding Ukraine's EU aspirations, Orbán told Sanchez that Hungary wanted the issue removed from the agenda of the European Council's next meeting, arguing that integration talks would be "untimely" and would lack the requisite preparations, the PM's press chief said in a statement.

Orbán stressed the importance of preserving European Union unity, the statement said, noting that Spain currently holds the rotating EU presidency, which Hungary will take up in the second half of 2024.

## **ORBÁN GREETES JEWISH COMMUNITY ON HANUKKAH**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in a letter greeted the Hungarian Jewish community to mark the start of Hanukkah. "The candles of Hanukkah lit on the darkest days of the year are a reminder that even the longest night can't last forever, and even the most difficult periods come to an end," the letter said.

"This message is especially important now when anti-Semitism is on the rise across Europe, leading to

attacks against innocent people solely because of their origin or religion," the prime minister said. "It gives me a good feeling that even in these difficult times Hungary is an island of peace in the world, where all our Jewish compatriots can live and celebrate in safety". "As the prime minister of Hungary, I greet you all respectfully on the festivity of light and wish that the miracle of Hanukkah bring us all the long-awaited peace," the letter said.

## **TUZSON: CONSUMER PROTECTION TO BE AMONG EU PRESIDENCY PRIORITY AREAS**

Consumer protection is one of Europe's greatest challenges, and it will be among priority areas during Hungary's European Union presidency in 2024, the justice minister said on Thursday. The EU must introduce a common legal framework and rules that can be applied in this area, given the importance of competitiveness to the EU, he said, adding that GDPR data rules were key for the protection of personal rights but economic effects should also be taken into consideration. "The US does not fulfil these obligations and therefore US companies currently know more about European consumers than EU member states that are not allowed to access such data," he said.

Tuzson said the European approach of giving priority to rule-of-law principles to the detriment of competitiveness was a mistake,

and the continent was increasingly falling behind. He called for the EU's competitiveness to be rooted in legal areas related to consumer rights, and national laws must also be enforced in order to achieve this, he added at an event held in the economic competition office. Several state organisations in Hungary were affected by this issue, he said, citing the national food chain safety authority Nebih and the central bank. "Recent years have brought many new tasks: legal materials had to be reviewed, and several thousand checks were launched in connection with inflation," he said. Online, cross-border purchases and internet markets posed the greatest difficulties because it was more difficult to enforce consumer protection requirements on them, he said.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, CHAD TO LAUNCH COOPERATION IN SEVERAL STRATEGIC AREAS**

Hungary and Chad are launching comprehensive cooperation in areas covering security, the economy, humanitarian issues and education, the foreign minister said in N'Djamena. The cooperation programme will cover several strategic areas, Péter Szijjártó told a joint press conference held with counterpart Mahamat Saleh Annadif. Security is the basis for economic development and social stability, and Hungary is ready to contribute to Chad's efforts to guarantee security in

the Sahel -- which is highly important for Europe -- in an effort to bring about successful counter-terrorism endeavours, he said. With parliament's approval, Hungary is preparing to send as many as 200 soldiers to Chad next year for this purpose, he added. "The concrete form of this military cooperation will depend on the decision of your government and your parliament," he said.

Commenting on other areas of cooperation, he said, the government supports investments by Hungarian companies in three areas that are important to Chad, including safe water supplies, agricultural modernisation and the digitalisation of the economy. Under the arrangements of humanitarian cooperation, Hungary has sent and will continue to send medical missions to Chad, contributing to services offered to around one million refugees staying in the country. Additionally, 25 students from Chad will have a chance to study at Hungarian universities with scholarship, he said.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIAN COMPANY TO MAKE BIOMETRIC PASSPORTS FOR GHANA**

Hungary's ANY Biztonsági Nyomda will produce biometric passports for the citizens of Ghana, under an agreement signed by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó. The Hungarian company would produce an annual 500,000 passports for 13 years, adding that the

contract was worth a total 40 billion forints (EUR 10.5m). "All this shows that it has been worth launching a Southern Opening policy, opening a Hungarian embassy in Accra and that it is worth helping Hungarian companies to success on African markets," the minister said.

### **GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY HAS DEMONSTRATED HOW TO PROTECT THE BORDER**

Hungary has demonstrated how to protect the border, Bence Rétvári, parliamentary state secretary of the interior ministry, told public radio. The European Union's external land borders span 440km, while its internal borders add up to 7,500km, Rétvári noted in connection with a meeting of the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council, where he played a video of the attacks Hungarian police officers have had to endure from armed illegal migrants on the southern border. "It's obvious that the shorter section must be protected against illegal migration," he said, adding that Hungary's border protection worked but would only be effective in protecting the whole of Europe if it could not be bypassed. "This is what should be done on the Bulgarian and Greek borders, too," he said, adding that there had been attempts to talk the Hungarian delegation out of playing the video, but once the video was played, it was met with "stunned silence". Many at the meeting, he said, had snapped photos of the scenes in the video or asked for a copy.

"The reason why they were stunned by the video was because in their mind the job of border guards isn't to protect the border but to help illegal migrants submit their asylum applications," Rétvári said. He said western European media did not report on what is happening on Hungary's southern border, "and whatever isn't covered in the papers doesn't exist to decision-makers, either". The state secretary said Brussels was working on adding exceptions to the EU's planned migration directive that provide a basis for taking in migrants. He added that Hungary was hopeful the central European member states could reach an agreement on the need to protect the bloc's external border in the region.

### **INTEGRITY AUTHORITY PROPOSES REFORMING ASSET DECLARATIONS**

The Integrity Authority has reviewed Hungary's asset declaration system and concluded that it is not fit for purpose, the authority's head said on Thursday, adding that the authority has proposed reforms to increase efficacy. Noting that authority has compared Hungary's system with that of several other countries, Ferenc Bíró told a press conference that international best practice showed that an independent body oversaw asset declarations and had the power to carry out inspections and investigations, with direct access to all relevant databases. The authorities currently have no

such access, he added. The authority has also proposed digitalising asset declarations within 3-4 months, with a uniform system for the recording, managing and auditing declarations, Bíró said. Declarations must include domestic and foreign assets and interests, including income, goods, real estate, intangible assets, gifts, investments, financial claims and liabilities, he said. Also, declarations should be made according to a fixed schedule, at least once every 4 years, he said, adding that in the case of high-risk cases an inspection should be carried out annually. Bíró said sanctions must be consistent and loopholes closed.

### **GOVT LAUNCHES HUF 20 BN SCHEME TO BUILD ACCOMMODATION FOR LABOURERS**

The government is launching a 20 billion forint (EUR 52.6m) scheme to build accommodation for 3,500 labourers. At least half of those places must be assigned to Hungarian employees, Sándor Czomba, the state secretary for employment policy, told public TV broadcaster M1. The scheme is designed to improve the “notoriously” low mobility of Hungary’s work force, Czomba said. The scheme will support the construction of modern, sustainable accommodations in two-bed rooms, Czomba said. The companies would be obliged to maintain the accommodations for 10 years. The operators will also have to

accept 4 registered jobseekers after every 80 subsidised places, he added. The new accommodations will be open for seasonal workers and those arriving from within 50km, he said. Since the launch of the first subsidy scheme for labourers’ accommodation in 2017, the government has already ploughed 24 billion forints into creating 4,000 places, Czomba added.

### **DOBREV: DK TO BUILD STRONG SERVICE STATE BASED ON RULE OF LAW**

Opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) MEP Klára Dobrev told an event presenting the party manifesto that DK wanted to build a strong service-oriented state based on the rule of law. Dobrev that the rule of law was necessary so that the strong state belonged to all ten million Hungarian citizens, not only those in power. A state based on the rule of law meant that laws and regulations equally applied to everyone, and the rule of law was guaranteed across all individuals and institutions, she said, adding that a slower legislation process was needed, with enough time left for consultations with the public, civil organisations and experts. She said Hungary did not have a proper constitution, only “something vaguely resembling a fundamental law”. The Fundamental Law should not belong only to the government and the ruling party, it should be “a constitution for all of us”, she said, adding that people needed protection from “excessive

state control”, and the government and executive powers should be made accountable.

Dobrev pledged to introduce regulations that made it more difficult for the government to keep data secret and introduce laws that the majority of people disagree with. “Corruption is killing and suffocating” Hungary, she said, adding that “unless we kill corruption in this country, corruption will kill the country.” She called for the stronger administration of justice, the prosecutor’s office and the police, adding that the role of the state also included protecting the vulnerable. She also said that politicians and NGOs should work together as partners, allowing NGOs to monitor the work of the government.

### **PÁRBESZÉD PROPOSES ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE CONTROL FUND**

The opposition Párbeszéd-Greens is proposing to create a fund to prevent environmental and industrial damage, Benedek Jávor, who heads the party’s list for next year’s European parliamentary elections, said, noting a mudslide in Recsk, in north-east Hungary, in June, where some 50 people had to be evacuated due to damage to some 24 houses. The disaster had been a result of negligence, he said. Jávor insisted that the company responsible, which he said was connected to Fidesz lawmaker Lajos Kósa, had rejected victims’ claims for compensation. The 500 million

forints (EUR 1.3m) the government had earmarked for their aid has yet to arrive, he said, adding there were no plans to restore the environmental damage.

Párbeszéd is now proposing to set up a fund that could cover the costs of environmental damage control and compensation quickly and effectively, he said. The proposal would also oblige companies to conclude liability insurance contracts and financial guarantees for dangerous operations that would adequately cover possible costs, he said. "The environmental security of Hungarians is our priority, and we can't subjugate that to the interests of entrepreneurs with links to Fidesz," Jávör said. "The proliferation of cases shows we can't wait any longer."

### **FINMIN TO VETO ANY MEASURE THAT WOULD PUT PUBLIC DEBT, DEFICIT AT RISK**

Finance Minister Mihály Varga has pledged to veto any measure considered by the budget preparatory working group that may compromise the public debt or budget deficit. "We're in an era when curbing public debt and budget deficit are priorities," Varga told a press conference on Thursday. In such a difficult economic situation in which resources are tighter, these must be allocated more efficiently, he added. Asked to comment on the move of economic affairs from the finance ministry to the economic development ministry headed by Márton Nagy, the minister said that the government's tasks

were determined by the prime minister. "As long as a disciplined and reliable fiscal policy is a priority for the government, and the prime minister counts on my work, this work will continue no matter the structure," he said.

### **HUNGARY, SERBIA AND SLOVENIA TO LAUNCH ELECTRICITY BOURSE IN 2024**

Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia will start operating a regional electricity market in 2024, the energy ministry said. A Budapest-based holding company will be established for the purpose by the end of 2024. The company will be owned by the transmission system operators of Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia. European power exchange EPEX SPOT, to provide the technology for the new bourse, will also hold a stake. The new bourse will cover the regions of Central Europe and the Northern Balkans. The ministry said the regional cooperation would boost the enterprise value of the Hungarian Power Exchange (HUPX) on which transactions affecting 60-70% of domestic consumption are brokered.

### **LÁNG: DEPUTY MAYOR 'ADMITS' CITY LEADERSHIP 'BROUGHT BUDAPEST TO BANKRUPTCY'**

Ruling Fidesz's Budapest leader Zsolt Láng has said that the deputy mayor of Budapest had admitted that the city's leadership had brought Budapest to

bankruptcy. Láng said on Facebook that in 2019 when Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony took over the city from his predecessor István Tarlós, reserves totalled 214 billion forints (EUR 560m). "By now, the balance of payments shows minus 5.4 billion forints, in other words bankruptcy," he added. He accused the city leaders of irresponsible management and "squandering the money under their responsibility".

Earlier on Thursday, Deputy Mayor Ambrus Kiss described the 2024 budget of Budapest as the "budget of restructuring", and said "finally we are hopefully over with the series of crises". Kiss said that the series started with the coronavirus pandemic, then came the energy crisis, followed by the crisis caused by inflation.

### **MORE THAN 7,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY**

Fully 4,137 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 3,302 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 Thursday.

### **FARM SECTOR OUTPUT UP 6.5% Y/Y IN 2023**

Output of Hungary's farm sector rose by 6.5% to 4,334 billion forints (EUR 11.4bn) in 2023 as volume climbed



and prices fell, a first estimate released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) shows. The sector's volume climbed by 25%, while prices fell by 15%. The volume of crop production increased by 44%, while the volume of live animals and animal products edged down 0.5%. Gross value added was up 19% and labour input in agriculture was down 4.1%.

## **POLISH MP RECEIVES HIGH HUNGARIAN AWARD**

Tomasz Zielinski, a deputy of the Law and Justice party in the Polish lower house, has received the Order of Merit of Hungary, Knight's Cross, from Hungarian Ambassador Orsolya Zsuzsanna Kovács, in Warsaw. Zielinski has been recognised for his efforts in strengthening social ties between Hungary and Poland, as well as promoting Hungary in his country. In her laudation, the ambassador highlighted Zielinski as one "promoting Polish-Hungarian ties even when it was made difficult by external factors". His initiative -- a competition for Polish secondary school students in connection with friendship between

Hungary and Poland -- "was aimed at the youngest, who can continue the construction of ties," she added. The competition has been held twice, with over 2,000 students participating.

## **ÁDER RECEIVES 2023 PETŐFI AWARD**

Former President János Áder has received this year's Petőfi Award, an honour bestowed by the For Central and Eastern European History and Society Research Foundation and the MOL Group. Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said in his laudation that the former president had made a lasting contribution to the development of post-1989 Hungary.

As a founder of ruling Fidesz, Áder played a decisive role in building a Christian democratic, conservative party out of an alternative and liberal movement, Gulyás said. Áder, the fifth president of the republic after 1989, "served his country for 10 years and his work set a standard," he added. He always worked as a "reliable, respectful, friendly and consistent person ... faithful even when his fidelity was questioned," Gulyás said, also noting

Áder's commitment to the cause of the environment. "János Áder's example shows that environment and nature protection, if truly useful, can only be conservative".

## **HEAVY SNOW DOWNS TREES ACROSS HUNGARY**

Recent intense snowfall across Hungary has brought down trees and broken tree branches, the disaster management authority has said. Firefighters responded to some 300 calls by 10.30am on Thursday, with the snow causing most of the trouble west of the Danube and in and around Budapest. In downtown Budapest, trees fell onto parked cars and roads, bringing down power cables with them. Uprooted trees also fell in front of residential buildings, leaving residents trapped. Fallen trees also blocked traffic on several roads. In the village of Vámosmikola, in northern Hungary, a tree fell on top of a kindergarten. The heavy snow has also brought down power lines in several places across the country. Firefighters are constantly responding to calls for help concerning damage caused by the snow.