

PHOTO OF THE DAY



New year's cold-water dipping in Szigliget, on Lake Balaton

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the wars
in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

GULYÁS: TEACHERS' WAGES TO RISE BY 32%

The government is working to ensure that teachers' pay rises by 32% on Jan 1, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said in an interview on Sunday.

The government has published decrees with the wage details for social consultation, though this would first depend on technical approval by the European Commission, Gulyás said in the interview to commercial media outlet atv.hu. He said the government wanted teachers' salaries to reach 80% of average pay, so another 20.8% increase was planned for 2025. According to a ministry statement issued on Friday, teachers' wages were slated to rise by 32.2% on average from January 1. Interns' monthly remuneration were up from 400,000 forints (EUR 1,050) to 528,800 forints, while pay grade I teachers will get at least 538,000 forints and pay grade II teachers no less than 555,000 forints per month. Teachers in the master pay grade will get at least 630,000 forints a month and research teachers 750,000 forints.

Regarding Ukraine's EU bid, he said the Slovaks and Austrians, like Hungary, did not back the country's proposed membership of the bloc. He also said that the payment of Hungary's EU funds was not linked to Ukraine's EU bid or changes to the EU budget framework.

GULYÁS: HUNGARY FULFILLED EU REQUESTS ON JUDICIARY LAST YEAR

In connection with EU conditions related to the country's judiciary, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said Hungary's parliament had passed related legislation in the spring. The EC should have confirmed this within 60 days and handed over the money owed to the country, he said, adding the commission "repeatedly broke their promises and delayed" handing over 10 billion euros until the day before the EU summit in December.

As regards financing for Ukraine, he said: "Giving or promising money to Ukraine with a four-year timescale is unreasonable and anti-democratic." Such financing should not be a part of the EU budget and it should not extend to beyond a single year, he said. "And whatever the case, it should certainly not come from a joint EU loan," he added.

On the topic of the EU migration pact, he said Hungary would refuse to accept migrants against the will of the people. Whereas Brussels was "pro-migration", he said, many EU member states emphasised the importance of protecting the external border, knowing that "quite a few terrorists" had managed to enter the bloc in 2015 due to a lack of inspections and lax border controls.

Regarding planned government restructuring, Gulyás said regional public administration will be transferred to the new public administration and regional development ministry from the Prime Minister's Office, and powers related to local governments will be handed over from the interior ministry. He added that regional public administration and local governments were closely linked to regional development and the new arrangement would enhance the efficacy of decision-making.

Asked about ties between Hungary and the US, Gulyás said the current American administration was focused on the "ideological differences between the two governments" instead of seeking opportunities to cooperate. He added it was of telling symbolism that America had a double taxation treaty with Russia but not with Hungary.

On the topic of the 2024 EP elections, he said it would be satisfactory to have 21 MEPs "representing Hungarian interests". In the current cycle, however, "eight [Hungarian MEPs] ... worked to condemn and penalise Hungary financially," he added. Regarding the local elections also slated for 2024, Gulyás said he believed Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony was "beatable", and confirmed that Fidesz would put forward its mayoral candidate by March at the latest.

NOVÁK: HUNGARY LOOKING FORWARD TO 2024 'WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION, HOPE'

"We are on the cusp of 2024 looking forward with great anticipation and hope, confident that we see to our tasks with renewed energy and vitality," President Katalin Novák said in her New Year's speech broadcast on public media on Monday.

"Let's move together and make 2024 a year of movement," the president said. "Let's follow the example of our professional athletes and move about, not just cheer them on." Recalling the memorable events of 2023, Novák noted Pope Francis's visit to Budapest, the Nobel prizes won by Katalin Karikó and Ferenc Krausz, Budapest's hosting the World Athletics Championships and the national eleven's qualification for the European soccer championships.

Novák said she had paid official visits to thirty countries during the year. "It was good to see the president of Hungary being received respectfully in all countries," she said. "They know that we are a talented nation with strong self-awareness and a special way of thinking..." "Even if they don't always understand us, they pay us attention," she said. "I'm working to turn that attention into understanding and cooperation." Meanwhile, the president said

despite the wars in Ukraine and Israel, and “amid political and economic uncertainty in the world and worries and everyday struggles at home, we’re still living in peace.”

Novák called 2023 “a year of encounters”, and she thanked people she had encountered to help her “go about with open eyes, ears, and an open heart”. Referring to specific people and naming them, she thanked doctors and nurses, Hungarian disaster management staff who rescued children from beneath the rubble after the earthquakes in Türkiye, people working in Hungarian children’s homes, teachers, as well as charity members working with the homeless. The president also recalled December 2003, when Hungary awaited its entry to the European Union. “We now see the benefits and the difficulties, and will not for a moment forget that they pledged membership with full rights.” She added that earlier in the week, “the postman from Brussels delivered some of our money together with the payment notices.” At the end of her address, the president wished everyone “a new year full of hope”.

HUNGARY, SERBIA, BULGARIA PRESIDENTS SIGN DECLARATION FOR FAMILIES

The presidents of Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria published a New Year’s declaration raising their voices for

the importance of families. In the declaration published in Hungarian and English on the website of the Sándor Palace on Monday, Katalin Novák, Aleksandar Vučić and Rumen Radev said they saw families as “the foundation of our society, the source of our values, and the strength of our nations”.

The members of the Network of Family-Friendly Presidents said families were the source of “the culture of responsibility” that would contribute to sustainability and to curbing the threat of climate change. “We believe that families deserve protection, assistance and recognition from states and societies. Therefore, we strongly support policies that promote the well-being of families, and strengthen family cohesion, provide a supportive environment to family foundation, enable women to strive both as mothers and professionals ... We encourage our citizens, in this New Year to continue to nurture the family as the most important institution in our societies, and reach out to those in need,” the declaration said.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY CONTINUES WORK AS NATIONAL ECONOMY MINISTRY

The economic development ministry has been renamed national economy ministry and given additional competencies

from January 1, the ministry said on Monday. The reshuffle aims to increase the effectiveness of the ministry and foster a “new and innovative approach” to support the government’s primary goal for 2024 of restoring economic growth, the statement said. Trade, tourism and the development of space industry will also fall under the national economy ministry’s purview, it said.

In 2023, government measures pushed inflation into the single digits, the ministry said. The GDP returned to a growth path in the third quarter, real wages started growing in September, inflation fell to 7.9% in November and is expected to have been around 6% in December, the statement said. Trust in Hungary’s economy is unbroken, and the twin deficits have been eliminated, it said. In 2024, the government aims to restore consumption, keep investments above 25% and increase labour activity among 15-64-year-olds to 85% from 78%, it said.

VARGA: HUNGARIANS CAN HELP SET EU COURSE IN 2024

Next year’s European Parliament elections will give Hungarians and Europeans the chance to tell Brussels what direction they want the continent to go in, the head of parliament’s European affairs committee said on Sunday. “We cannot be idle; change is needed,” Judit Varga said in a video message.

"We can confidently say that the year we're leaving behind wasn't an easy one," Varga said, noting the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, the "sanctions-fuelled inflation". "It has also become clear that the bureaucrats in Brussels are incapable of handling global challenges in the era of dangers," Varga said. "The flawed sanctions and war policy has caused the European Union to tilt towards a recession."

Meanwhile, Varga said that despite the "pro-terror demonstrations" in western European cities, Brussels continued to push for the approval of its migration package, which she said would be tantamount to an invitation to illegal immigrants. She said that in 2024 the ruling alliance of Fidesz and the Christian Democrats would work to put Hungary "back on the path of development" and preserve the country's sovereignty.

GOVT OFFICIAL: OVER A MILLION NATL CONSULTATION SURVEYS COMPLETED

More than one million people have participated so far in the government's National Consultation public survey, Csaba Dömötör, state secretary of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office, said on Friday. Dömötör told MTI that 1.014 million people had returned the questionnaire on protecting Hungary's sovereignty. He said

this showed that many wanted to express their opinions on the issues of Ukraine's financing and European Union membership, noting that the financing issue will be back on the EU's agenda at a summit early next year. Hungary is under "a lot of pressure" to approve further tens of billions of euros in funding for Ukraine, the state secretary said. Dömötör noted that in the survey Hungarians can also express their views on the EU's new migration package as well as "demands and proposals from Brussels that would restrict the Hungarian economy's room for manoeuvre". The deadline for filling out the survey is Jan 10, he added. He said 86% of the questionnaires have been sent back by mail.

DEFMIN: 4,000 SOLDIERS ENTER HUNGARIAN ARMY IN 2023

There were around 4,000 new army recruits this year, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, the defence minister, said in a statement on Saturday.

Interest in the military is strong and growing, the statement said, noting the success of online and offline media recruitment campaigns and school presentations in 2023. The army recruitment website was visited more than 500,000 times and recruiters received more than 42,000 calls, it said, adding that from August to mid-September

alone 1,500 new soldiers joined the Hungarian army. The 4,000 new recruits include reservists, contract soldiers, and non-commissioned officers. Also, more than 200 young people began studying military courses at the National Public Service University's faculty of military science and defence officer training. The "Iron Man" recruitment campaign is entering its second phase, and 149 people have already applied to train on PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers, the minister said. Every soldier who proves to be fit for service and who applies for enlistment on Feb 12 in the artillery division of the 1st Armored Brigade will have a starting salary of a monthly 737,000 (EUR 1,920) before tax, the statement said.

BAKONDI: EU'S 'FAILED SOLUTION' ON MIGRATION 'COMPROMISES SECURITY'

With its recent decision on migration policy, the European Union "is again forcing through a solution which has already failed in western Europe and would seriously compromise security", György Bakondi, the prime minister's chief security advisor, told public television late on Saturday. Bakondi called it "strange" that a qualified majority had passed the decision rather than a unanimous vote and that "all the arguments that we presented went unheard".

"They would introduce a distribution by quota ... Brussels would determine how many migrants Hungary should accommodate; failing this, the country would be required to pay [a fee in compensation] per capita in line with the quotas," Bakondi said. Also, in an emergency, refusal to accommodate migrants and paying compensation instead would not be an option, he said. He said that given the link between organised crime, terrorism and illegal migration, "the Hungarian government cannot accept" the associated security risk.

KARÁCSONY: 2023 BROUGHT 'CELEBRATION, ORDEAL' FOR BUDAPEST

For Budapest, 2023 was a celebration and an ordeal at the same time, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said on Monday in a New Year's video. Karácsony said the challenges included the war in neighbouring Ukraine, the energy crisis, inflation, a flood and "the anti-Budapest policy of the government". At the same time, metro line 3 and the Chain Bridge have been renovated while the capital celebrated its 150th birthday.

"If 2023 was the year of survival, then 2024 must be the year of preparation for an uncertain, unpredictable future full of many doubts and perhaps sometimes fears," the mayor said. Karácsony said that just like in Europe, resilience must also be a key word for Budapest and the city's strength and freedom should be increased so it could defend itself and adapt

when necessary. He said Budapest's strength came from its community. "It is the capital of solidarity, fairness and acceptance, even if there are those who want the inhabitants of the rest of the country's settlements to hate it for this very reason," he added.

BUDAPEST MAYOR'S OFFICE: LOWER EMBANKMENT TO REOPEN FOR TRAFFIC FROM SUNDAY AFTER FLOOD

The lower embankment of the River Danube will be reopened for traffic on both sides from Sunday, following the recent flooding of the river, the Budapest Metropolitan Office said. Meanwhile, the Mátyás Huszár embankment of the River Tisza in Szeged, in southern Hungary, will be closed at 6.30pm on Sunday due to flooding caused by the river's rising water level, the city council has said. The Tisza's water level in Szeged reached 542cm on Sunday morning and could rise by a further 10-20cm over the next two days, reaching the embankment, the city council said in a statement.

BUDAPEST TRANSPORT CENTRE: CURRENT TARIFFS, BUDAPEST PASSES REMAIN VALID FOR SUBURBAN SERVICES

The Budapest transport centre BKK on Friday signed agreements with suburban railways operators

MÁV-HÉV and with national coach operator Volán which ensures that the current system of tariffs will remain in force, BKK said. BKK said in a statement that agreements signed in 2016 by the Budapest Metropolitan Council and the Ministry of Transport about the operation of "blue" bus services in suburban areas will expire on Sunday. This posed a risk that the current system of tariffs would be discontinued but the agreement now signed with MÁV-HÉV and Volánbusz will enable the preservation of the current services, also keeping the current tariffs in force, it added. As a result, Budapest passes will remain valid on suburban services and BKK will continue to fulfil transport supervision and passenger information supply tasks on suburban railways HÉV services and "blue" buses of Volánbusz in suburban areas.

MORE THAN 5,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 2,997 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 2,228 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 31 people, ORFK said on Monday.