

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Waterlogged farmlands in NE Hungary

MTVA/Attila Balázs

UPCOMING EVENTS

Orbán attends Delors's funeral service in Paris

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

Stats office releases November unemployment data

TOP STORY

NOVÁK: PEOPLE 'VOTE FOR FAMILY, RAISING CHILDREN'

People "support the family and raising children", the office of President Katalin Novák said citing answers to one of ten questions Novák posted on social media platform X on Thursday.

Following a meeting with X owner Elon Musk last September, with demographic problems high on its agenda, Novák launched her Humanity Tuesdays survey, posing a question each week in an effort to focus attention on those problems. According to the presidential office's statement, the most popular question in the survey was read by 42 million people, while 62% of those that answered thought that people raising children "cannot suffer an economic disadvantage". Fully 70.7% of respondents said they had plans to start a family, while 87% urged making jobs family-friendly. Eighty-six percent also supported Novák's position that women should be helped have a family and a career at the same time. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said they would like to have three or more children, "which means that more children are desired than are actually born," the statement said. Over 86% of the respondents said they agreed with a remark by Novák, who said "overpopulation is not the problem ... the family does not cause but will resolve climate change."

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ORBÁN TO ATTEND FUNERAL SERVICE OF JACQUES DELORS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will attend the funeral service of former European Commission President Jacques Delors in Paris on Friday, the PM's press chief said. Orbán was invited by French President Emmanuel Macron. Macron will also preside over a national tribute ceremony to Delors on Friday morning, Bertalan Havasi said. Delors, who died aged 98 on December 27, led the EC between 1985 and 1995. He played a key role in creating the euro, and shaping the common market, the Schengen Area, the Erasmus programmes and the Common Agricultural Policy.

FINMIN: 2024 THE YEAR OF BOOSTING GROWTH

The year ahead will be the year of boosting Hungary's economic growth, the finance minister said on Thursday, adding that the state budget remained stable. Mihály Varga told a press conference that the government's main goal was to keep reducing the deficit and the public debt, adding that "we're on the right track." While 2023 had been a better year for the central budget than 2022, it was not as good as what the government expects from this year, the minister said. A total of 650 billion forints (EUR 1.7bn) was used to pre-finance European Union projects

from last year's budget, he added. The budget "withstood difficulties without significant external assistance" last year, Varga said, noting that even with increased spending on pensions and defence, the cash flow-based budget deficit fell to 4,593 billion forints. He said Hungary was one of only 16 EU countries last year to reduce its public debt-to-GDP ratio. The minister also noted that the EU has transferred 470 billion forints in funding to Hungary over the last 10 days, adding that Hungary has reserves of over 1,200 billion forints. Meanwhile, Varga said Hungary issued 2.5 billion US dollars of forex bonds on Wednesday. Offers for the 12-year bonds came to 5.6 billion dollars, "showing investor confidence in the Hungarian economy remains strong", he added. Varga noted that all of the big three rating agencies have Hungary's sovereign rating in the investment grade category. Whereas 10 years ago, half of Hungary's debt was held by foreigners, today this has been lowered to a quarter, he added. In response to a question, he said the government put GDP growth at 3.6% for this year and had a deficit target of 2.9% of GDP.

DEFMIN: SOLDIERS' WAGES TO INCREASE FURTHER IN 2024

Hungarian soldiers' wages will increase further in 2024, the minister of defence said on Thursday. The ministry cited Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky as saying that wages are increasing by an

average 11% from January 2024 but it may vary depending on the category of staff. The government decided in 2022 to increase wages for soldiers in two steps: from September 2022 and from January 2024, he said. The tasks of the Hungarian Army increased considerably last year, with the Russia-Ukraine and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, and the migratory wave affecting Europe making it necessary to heighten the state of alert, he added. "These factors, and the Hungarian Army's international roles make it necessary to further enhance the appreciation of soldiers," he said. The first phase of increase was an average of 26.4% in September 2022.

Voluntary reserve soldiers and officer candidates are also eligible for the current increase of average 11%, the statement added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES OVER JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, expressed his condolences to Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa over the earthquake that hit Japan on New Year's Day. In the letter also sent to MTI, Szijjártó said he was "deeply saddened" to learn of the devastating earthquake that hit Japan. "Let me express my deepest condolence and sincere sympathy to you and the people of Japan in these tragic moments. We trust that your reconstruction efforts will be successful and life can soon

return to normal," Szijjártó said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families at this difficult time," Szijjártó added. By Thursday, the number of the victims rose to 78 and 50 people are still missing in Ishikawa prefecture, central Japan, after a magnitude 7.6 earthquake hit on New Year's Day.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY ATTRACTS MORE THAN EUR 13 BN IN INVESTMENTS IN 2023

Hungary drew record investments of more than 13 billion euros in 2023, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Thursday.

The global economy faced "very serious crises" last year, Szijjártó said in a video message, noting that global investments fell by 12.5% from 2021 to 2022 and were down another 30% in the first half of 2023. This, he said, showed that global investments still fell short of pre-pandemic levels. Hungary, however, has been seeing record investments in these years, the minister said, noting that the economy drew 6.5 billion euros in FDI in 2022 and more than 13 billion last year, supported by 2 billion euros in government grants. The investments created a record 19,000 jobs, he said. China was the biggest foreign investor in Hungary last year, with the second largest group of investors being Hungarian businesses, Szijjártó said. This, he added, meant that Hungary now had a strong business sector that

could compete with foreign investors. Szijjártó said Hungary's investment records clearly made the country a winner of the "new era of the global economy", pointing out that it had attracted many investments from the electric vehicle industry, which he said would define the new era. He noted that the world's biggest electric vehicle producer was set to build the sixth e-vehicle manufacturing plant in Hungary. Hungary will also have the second-biggest EV battery manufacturing capacity in the world, making it a global leader and the "European champion" of the green auto industry, Szijjártó said.

HUNGARY TRADE SURPLUS EUR 1.7 BN IN NOVEMBER

Hungary posted a trade surplus of 1.7 billion euros in November, up from 1.0 billion in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of the data on Thursday. Exports fell by 3.8% year on year, while imports dropped by 25%. In volume terms, exports were up 1.0%, while imports were down 5.0% month-on-month. Hungary's trade balance improved by 3.2 billion euros.

GUEST NIGHTS UP 7.5% Y/Y IN NOV

Guest nights at commercial and private accommodations in Hungary rose by an annual 7.5% to 2.5 million in November from the

same period a year earlier, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Thursday show. The number of guest nights spent by domestic travellers rose by 5.9% to 1.2 million, while guest nights spent by foreign visitors rose by 8.9% to 1.3 million. In January-November, guest nights spent by domestic travellers fell by an annual 5.8%, while foreigners' guest nights rose by 12%, KSH said.

NEARLY 16,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 6,010 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 9,713 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 75 people, ORFK said on Thursday.

RENOIR EXHIBITION AT MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS EXTENDED UNTIL JAN 21

The Painter and His Models, an exhibition of Renoir's works in Budapest's Museum of Fine Arts, has been extended by two weeks until January 21, the museum said on Thursday. In response to great demand, the exhibition will also be open on Mondays, and the museum will open an hour earlier, at 9am, on weekends, the statement

said. Originally, the exhibition was going to close on January 7 but the museum has managed to agree about extending it with the international institutions that had lent some works. The nearly 70 paintings on display including such masterpieces as The Swing, Dance at Bougival and Claude Renoir in Clown Costume, have been arranged in chronological order and by theme to illustrate the

artist's development, the museum said, adding that the exhibition is the first such show in Hungary dedicated to the impressionist artist alone. This is also the first time all three versions of Gabrielle are on display together, the first of which has been owned by the Budapest museum since 2019. The exhibition has been mounted in cooperation with Musée d'Orsay and Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.

RECORD HIGHS MEASURED IN SW HUNGARY

The HungaroMet weather service measured 16.4 degrees Celsius in Bába, in southwest Hungary, the highest ever recorded in the country on January 4. The highest temperature recorded earlier was 15.7 C in Drávaszabolcs, in southwest Hungary, in 2022, the service said.