

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Orthodox Christmas Eve at the Saint George Serbian Orthodox Church in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

Stats Office releases Nov retail trade data

TOP STORY

ORBÁN 'HUNGARY GRATEFUL TO DELORS'

Viktor Orbán has said Hungary was grateful to Jacques Delors "for what he did for" Hungary.

After attending the funeral service of the former European Commission president in Paris on Friday at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron, the prime minister noted that Delors paid a visit to communist Hungary in 1989. Orbán told French television TF1 in an interview that Hungary had been preparing for the democratic transition and "I was active working in the anti-communist opposition movement." Delors "had the courage to come and visit the country before the first free elections," the prime minister noted. "Therefore we in Hungary remember him as a European leader who fought -- or at least tried to do something -- for the freedom and sovereignty of central European countries under Soviet occupation," Orbán said.

HUNGARY 'URGES PEACE' IN MIDDLE EAST

Hungary urges peace and in the Middle East and calls for the avoidance of any escalation of the conflict there, the foreign minister has said. "We condemn all forms of terrorism and the killing of innocent people. That is why we condemn the terrorist attack carried out in the city of Kerman, in Iran, which has claimed countless lives, and we offer our condolences to the relatives of the victims," Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. He expressed hope that the attack would not escalate into further violence in the region, saying that such a development would have unforeseeable consequences.

BÓKA: HUNGARY-SWEDEN DIALOGUE KEY TO NATO RATIFICATION

The date of ratification of Sweden's NATO membership depends on how quickly and effectively confidence can be built between Hungary and Sweden, János Bóka, the minister for EU affairs, told Finnish newspaper Ilta-Sanomat.

"Political dialogue between Hungary and Sweden is key" to the ratification, Bóka told the paper, adding that this would reassure Hungarian lawmakers "who have doubts and concerns". In his first foreign interview of the year, Bóka also talked about the war in Ukraine. He said on his Facebook page on

Saturday that it was very difficult to plan for the next three or four years due to the uncertain situation in Ukraine. Hungary's position was that it would be more reassuring to reckon with shorter financial cycles, he said.

"It would also be better if Ukraine could be supported from outside the EU multiannual financial framework. Hungary also wants to see how the financial support given to Ukraine has been used so far and with what results," Bóka said. Bóka reiterated that the Hungary's government's top priority regarding Ukraine was to achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible. "Only this would make it possible to find a lasting solution to the conflict through negotiations," the minister said.

DEFENCE SERVICE LAUNCHES MEDIA CAMPAIGN AGAINST GRATUITIES IN HEALTH CARE

The National Defence Service (NVSZ) has launched a media campaign to eliminate gratuity payments from Hungarian health care, the services' officials said. Under a law taking effect on January 1 in 2021, giving and accepting gratuities is a crime, but the practice has not yet disappeared from the Hungarian health-care system, the spokeswoman for NVSZ told a press conference. Not having the powers of an authority, NVSZ only reported and initiated an investigation into 19 cases last year alone, Judit Pap

said, adding that both a doctor and a patient faced penalties. She noted cases in which an investigation was launched against a cardiologist for 67 instances and another investigation launched against an oncologist for taking a gratuity from a patient for an otherwise free chemotherapy treatment.

According to NVSZ's press material, the service has initiated investigations against 250 health-care workers in 105 cases since 2021. The project has been financed with 473 million forints (EUR 1.2m) from domestic sources and with EU support, NVSZ said.

LÁNCZI: SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION OFFICE TO START OPERATING ON FEB 1

Hungary's Sovereignty Protection Office will start operating on Feb 1, Tamás Lánczi, appointed to head the new body, said in a video posted on Facebook.

Lánczi said it was important to note that the organisation was not an authority but an office, and as such, it would not mount investigations or issue sanctions.

The main task of the new body will be to conduct inquiries, to research and identify the risks "threatening Hungary's sovereignty and, if possible, do everything to eliminate these dangers, he said. The first job of the new office will be to prepare for the next two elections, due to be held in June, he added, noting that European

parliamentary elections and municipal elections will be held in early summer. After the 2022 parliamentary elections, it was revealed what attempts to influence the elections had been made, he added. "The first task of the office will be to prevent this from happening again", he said.

DK FILES COMPLAINT OVER AUCTIONING OF CHINESE VENTILATORS

The opposition Democratic Coalition has filed a complaint to the police, alleging that Chinese ventilators procured by the government and then auctioned off had resulted in damages to the state of more than 300 billion forints. DK discovered that not a single ventilator has been used or sold since 2020, after having successfully sued for the relevant data to be publicised, Zoltán Varga, a party MP, told an online press briefing. Varga said that in his capacity as head of parliament's welfare committee, he had visited the warehouse where ventilators had been kept for the past four years. He insisted that "the elite" close to the ruling Fidesz party had got rich thanks to the state procurement of "overpriced Chinese ventilators, while tens of thousands of Hungarian people lost their lives" during the Covid pandemic. Viktor Orbán's government ripped off Hungarian taxpayers twice by paying over the odds for the machines and then paying for their storage before auctioning them off, he insisted.

MINISTRY: HUNGARY GAS, ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION CONTINUES TO FALL

Hungary's gas and electricity consumption continued to fall last year, the energy ministry said. Gas consumption came to 8.5 billion cubic metres, down by 10.9% from 2022 and 23% less than in 2021. Electricity consumption declined by 4.7% in 2023 from the previous year. Households accounted for more than 3 billion cubic metres of the country's gas consumption and business consumers for close to 5.5 cubic metres. Hungarian families continue to pay the lowest prices in Europe for household energy, the ministry said, adding that just 10% of households paid the higher, non-regulated price for gas, while 20% paid the higher price for electricity. The ministry noted that gas volume in storage facilities was still over 86%, or 57% of annual consumption, adding that this storage level was more than double the European Union average.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARIANS SUPPORTING TRANSCARPATHIAN KIN

Hungarians stand behind the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia, in western Ukraine, a government official said on Saturday in Sátoraljaújhely, in north-eastern Hungary, where he welcomed

families at a camp organised by the Rákóczi Association. Government bodies, municipalities, aid groups and churches in and outside Hungary have stood together to help Transcarpathian Hungarians, Miklós Panyi, state secretary at the Prime Minister's Office for policy and strategic affairs, said. The government is providing educational support, wage subsidies, financing for churches and civil organisations, as well as subsidies for the humanitarian activities of aid groups, he noted. He pledged the government's continued support for Transcarpathian Hungarians across the board. Fully 200 parents and children have arrived at the Sátoraljaújhely camp from western Ukraine to take a break from the everyday burdens of the war.

ALMOST 50,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY AT WEEKEND

Fully 5,521 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Friday, while 19,568 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 109 people. Meanwhile, on Saturday 5,521 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border, while 19,568 came to the country via Romania. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 109 people, ORFK said on Sunday.