

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Memorial plaque honouring late Slovakia ethnic Hungarian politician Miklós Duray inaugurated in Komárno (Révkomárom)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on Nov industrial output

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

GOVT 'WON'T GIVE IN TO BLACKMAIL'

Hungary's foreign minister has said the government will carry on representing Hungarian interests in 2024 "and won't give in to blackmail".

Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook that 2024 would be a crucial year, and "we know the pressure will be enormous". Szijjártó called 2024 "the Super Bowl of politics". "Never before have 78 countries held elections in the span of one year, directly impacting nearly 4 billion people worldwide," he added.

Hungarian citizens will vote in the European parliamentary elections, and hundreds of millions will go to vote in the US, Russia, India, Mexico and the UK, he said. "From our point of view, the US and EU elections are particularly important, as they raise the hope of replacing war, weapon deliveries and senseless human sacrifice with brokering peace," he said. Hungary will fight "to open Brussels's eyes" to give the EU an opportunity to correct its errors in leadership, he said, adding that "the international liberal mainstream has always exerted enormous pressure on us, but we have always prevailed..."

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GOVT OFFICIAL: EP ELECTIONS TO BE 'EYE- OPENER FOR BRUSSELS'

The European parliamentary elections this year will need to "open up the eyes of Brussels" where currently "it's the blind leading the blind", Balázs Orbán, the prime minister's political director, told MTI. "The Brussels elite has long turned a blind eye to the real, everyday problems of European people," he said. They failed to see the influx of illegal migrant masses, the need to protect children against "liberal indoctrination and the gender ideology", the ramifications of the sanctions against Russia, the "forced green transition" leading to increased utility prices, as well as Europe's dwindling competitiveness, he added. Regarding migration, the official said the number of illegal entries along the community's external borders reached 355,300 in 2023, up 17% from the previous year and the highest figure since 2015. The number of entry attempts along Hungary's southern border neared 171,000, he said. The political director added that 217,070 illegal migrants had been ordered to leave the bloc in the first half of last year, but "only one fifth of them were actually expelled, all the rest remaining in Europe as illegal immigrants."

"Illegal migration must be stopped at the border, and problems must be resolved where they occur rather than imported to Europe," Orbán said. "Rather than adopting a functional

Hungarian model, Brussels forced upon the community a migration pact which does not contribute to resolving the problem but constitutes the problem itself ... aimed at creating migrant ghettos and introducing mandatory quotas," the director said.

FIDESZ MEP: EU PURSUES 'BASELESS SLANDER' AGAINST HUNGARY

The European Union is pursuing "baseless slander" against Hungary in the new year, a Fidesz MEP said on Facebook. Responding to Finnish MEP Petri Sarvamaa's call on the EP to launch another rule-of-law procedure against Hungary and to suspend the country's voting rights, Balázs Hidvéghi said the EP had no right to initiate such a procedure. "Meanwhile, by disbursing 10 billion euros, the European Commission admitted in December that the rule of law was operational in Hungary," Hidvéghi said, adding that a campaign of "baseless slander" was ongoing against Hungary. "This will not change as long as EU institutions are packed with people like Sarvamaa. That's why we must take political control this June," he said, referring to the EP elections.

MINISTRY: SUPERMARKETS MUST INDICATE IF FOOD PACKAGING SHRINKS

A new government measure will oblige food retailers with sales revenue of more than 1 billion

forints (EUR 2.6m) to provide labelling that indicates shrinkflation, the economy ministry said on Monday. In a statement, the ministry said the government was doing everything it could to protect families and was combatting consumer deception amid difficult economic circumstances. In parallel with stagnant or rising prices of some produce, the size of packaging has been shrinking in many countries, the statement said, with consumers getting less for their money.

The benchmark for the reduction in weight or volume will be packaging of a given product between January 1, 2020 and July 1, 2023, and retailers must provide information for 2 months of the reduced size of the product, the ministry said. Producers and suppliers in Hungary will have to inform retailers of any reductions to the size of packaging. The consumer protection authority will take action in the case of non-compliance. Consumers can also access a public database on the national food chain safety authority's (NEBIH) website. The measure is scheduled to be implemented the first half of February, the statement said.

The ministry also said that whereas 2023 was the year in which inflation was tamed, steps were being taken to restart growth, and the target in 2024 was for the economy to grow by 4%. Measures aim to boost confidence and consumption, maintain an investment rate above 25% and further increase labour market activity, it added.

RETAIL SALES FALL 5.4% YY IN NOV

Retail sales in Hungary fell by an annual 5.4% in November, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Monday. Retail sales dropped at the same rate when adjusted for calendar year effects. Adjusted food sales edged down by 0.6%, non-food sales dropped by 3.9% and vehicle fuel sales by 21.4%. Month on month, retail sales grew by a seasonally and calendar-year-adjusted 0.8%. Between January and November 2023, retail sales fell by an adjusted 8.7%.

Commenting on the data, the national economy ministry said the November data were the most promising since retail sales had hit bottom in April 2023. The volume of retail sales in January-November was up by nearly 1,300 billion forints (EUR 3.4bn) year on year, the statement said. The sales of mixed retail stores, which account for 77% of food sales, was up at 2022 levels in November, it said. The government aims to restore growth in 2024, the statement said. Part of that work is to strengthen the public's trust in the economy, thus raising consumption, which may contribute to achieving the target growth of 4%, the statement said.

TROUBLED STEELMAKER RESTARTS ROLLING MILLS

Liberty Dunaújváros, Hungary's biggest steelmaker which is in the process of turning around its business,

has restarted its rolling mills, including its hot dip galvanised line. This is the first stage of a 100 day programme to increase operating efficiency in preparation for an expected market upturn, Liberty Steel Group, which acquired the business in October, said on Monday. During the restructuring process, Liberty Dunaújváros is retaining its staff and paying salaries as normal. Retraining courses in the first half of the year will prepare employees to man a 150 tonne electric arc furnace on order from China's CISDI Engineering Company, which is expected to cut carbon emissions by around 80% and allow for flexibility in charge materials.

HUNGARY SUBSIDISES PATENT FEES FOR SMES, UNIS

Hungary is providing SMEs, universities, research institutes and private individuals with a 75% subsidy for patent fees from Jan 1, the Hungarian National Intellectual Property Office (SZTNH) said. The subsidies apply to the filing fee and search fee, the research report fee, the fee for grant and the annual maintenance fee. The SZTNH noted that its representatives had participated in drafting a proposal by the European Patent Office (EPO) backed by a majority on the Administrative Council that would reduce patent fees from small businesses by 30% from April 1, 2024. The discount will apply to

microbusinesses with fewer than ten people on payroll and annual revenue or total assets of under 2 billion euros.

OVER 15,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 5,466 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 9,599 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 125 people, ORFK said on Monday.

THEODOR HERZL SQUARE IN FRONT OF SYNAGOGUE TEMPORARILY RENAMED OCTOBER 7 SQUARE

Theodor Herzl Square in front of the Dohány Street Synagogue has been renamed October 7 Square for two weeks in memory of the victims of the attack by Hamas terrorists. The commemoration on Sunday and the renaming of the square were jointly organised by the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz), the Budapest Jewish Religious Community (BZSH) and the Budapest municipal administration.

Israeli ambassador to Hungary Yacov Hadas-Handelsman expressed in a speech gratitude for the symbolic renaming of the square and for Hungarian solidarity. He said the square's renaming was "symbolic" as Herzl, who dreamt up the formation

of the state of Israel, was born here, and the perpetrators of the October 7 terrorist attack had wanted to destroy his dream.

Mazsihisz president Andor Grósz said October 7 was for Israel what September 11 meant for the United States, adding that both attacks were committed by fanatical Islamists. Mayor of Budapest Gergely Karácsony said there was "no place in Budapest" for demonstrations that legitimised or relativised violence, and this is something that the government and the opposition agreed on. "We share the pain of the Israeli people," he said. National Chief Rabbi Róbert Frölich highlighted the suffering of the remaining hostages.

ARCHITECT JÓZSEF FINTA DIES AGED 89

Architect József Finta, who was awarded the Kossuth, Ybl Miklós, Steindl Imre and Prima Primissima prizes, also a member of the Hungarian Art Academy and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, died at the age of 89 on Monday. According to information published

on the website of Finta Studio, Finta was an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects. He was also awarded the Order of Merit of Hungary, Middle Cross, and the Gold Medal of the President of Hungary. Finta was most famous for his landmark Hotels in Budapest, including the Duna Intercontinental, Forum, Novotel, Kempinski. He also designed the Budapest Congress Centre.

HUNGARIAN-LED INTL RESEARCH TEAM MAKES DISCOVERY IN YOUNG STAR'S PLANET-FORMING ZONE

An international research team led by József Varga of Budapest's Konkoly Thege Astronomy Institute has discovered a three-ringed structure in the planet-formation disk of a young Sun-like star that is similar to the zone where rocky planets formed in our Solar System. The team discovered the rings around the star HD 144432, around 500 light years away, using the European Southern Observatory's (ESO) Very Large Telescope

Interferometer (VLTI), the HUN-REN Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences said in a statement.

The research centre said the structure around HD 144432 was the most complex ring system around the inner region of a star's planet-forming disk discovered so far. They said that when compared to the Solar System, the star's most inner ring aligned with the orbit of Mercury, the middle one with that of Mars, and the outer ring corresponded roughly to the orbit of Jupiter. They said the ring structure around HD 144432 potentially signified the presence of planets with masses comparable to Jupiter.

The team also said the composition of the ring system contained the most common building blocks of Earth-like rocky planets, such as magnesium, silicon and oxygen. This is also the first tangible evidence scientists have found for the presence of iron in the disks around young stars, they added. The research team added that the iron-rich and carbon-poor dust around HD 144432 indicated that planet-forming disks with such a chemical composition were fairly common in the galaxy.