

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/György Varga

Frozen bench on the shore of Lake Balaton

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATO-Ukraine Council meets in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

HUNGARY CONDEMNS ICJ CASE AGAINST ISRAEL

Hungary condemns the “legal attack” launched against Israel in the International Court of Justice, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after a phone call with his new Israeli counterpart on Tuesday.

In a Facebook post, Szijjártó noted that he and Foreign Minister Israel Katz had met four years ago when Katz had been in charge of transport. “Today I congratulated him on the phone on taking office, and we reviewed the situation in the Middle East,” Szijjártó said. “I told my counterpart that Hungary condemns the legal attack launched against Israel in the International Court of Justice in The Hague: accusing a country that has suffered a terrorist attack of committing genocide is obviously nonsense.” He reaffirmed Hungary’s support for Israel’s right to self-defence. Hungary believes the success of Israel’s current counter-terrorism operations is in the entire world’s interest so that a repeat of the “brutal terrorist attack” suffered by the country can be prevented, Szijjártó said. He said he and Katz were in agreement that Hamas needed to release all of its hostages as soon as possible. He added that Hungary and Israel were doing everything they could to secure the release of the dual Israeli-Hungarian citizen still being held hostage.

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HUNGARY MEP SAYS CHANGE NEEDED IN BRUSSELS

"Brussels needs change, so Hungary will have to take over its political leadership in June," Balázs Hidvéghi, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, said on Tuesday.

"People from the Soros network are pursuing their surreptitious attacks on Hungary," Hidvéghi said in a video sent to MTI, referring to a Finnish MEP's recent proposal to launch a new rule-of-law procedure against Hungary and suspend the country's voting rights. Hidvéghi insisted that the European Commission had "issued a written certificate" of Hungary's rule of law being adequate when it released 10 billion euros in EU funding to the country.

FINMIN: GOVT TO CONTINUE REDUCING DEFICIT, PUBLIC DEBT

The government's "most important goal" this year is to kick start economic growth while reducing the budget deficit and public debt further, the finance ministry said on Tuesday. In a preliminary reading of data, the ministry said that Hungary's cash-flow-based budget deficit was 4,593.4 billion forints (EUR 12.1bn) at the end of December. The central budget deficit was 4,293.3 billion forints at the end of the month and the social security funds were 412.3 billion forints in the red, it added. The ministry noted the impact on the

budget of one-off transactions like the purchase of Vodafone Hungary and stakes in Magyar Posta insurance businesses. The ministry noted that expenditures related to the regulated utilities price scheme for households had come to 1,373.5 billion forints for the full year, close to double the 699.2 billion forints in 2022. Expenditures on compensation for suburban and long-distance public transport totalled 744.2 billion forints, 155.4 billion forints more than in 2022.

Spending on European Union-funded programmes came to 2,812.2 billion forints for the full year, while transfers from Brussels were just 2,229.2 billion forints. Hungary's government has been pre-financing EU-supported investments for years, a practice that impacts the cash-flow deficit, but not the accrual-based deficit calculated according to EU accounting rules. The ministry said revenue from taxes and contributions was up 15.2% from the base period.

NAVRACSICS: EU FUNDS SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO HUNGARY DEVELOPMENT POLICY

European Union funds represent a significant contribution to Hungary's development policy, the minister of public administration and regional development said on Tuesday. EU funds represent a significant part of development resources, including operative programmes, cohesion funds and monies from the recovery

plan for Europe, he told a press conference. Regional development policy sets priorities that will make the utilisation of EU funds even more effective in the future, he said. Navracsics said that with the ministry of public administration and regional development having started its work, he plans to visit all counties of Hungary to gather experiences and Zalaegerszeg was the first stop of this tour.

RÉTVÁRI: NUMBER OF PEOPLE COMING FROM W EUROPE TO SETTLE IN HUNGARY ON RISE SINCE 2015

Because of the migration pressure, the number of people coming from western Europe to settle in Hungary has gone up between 20% and 40% over the past several years, the interior ministry's parliamentary state secretary said at a farewell ceremony for a police contingent in Budapest on Tuesday. Since 2015, the number of those coming to Hungary from Belgium has increased by 47%, from Italy by 45%, from the Netherlands by 43%, from Spain by 40%, from Switzerland 28%, from Austria 25%, from Britain by 22% and from Germany and France 20%, respectively, Bence Rétvári said. Their motivation was to find security and safe conditions in public domains, he said.

Rétvári addressed the ceremony for the next contingent of Hungarian police officers dispatched to serve in Serbia in partnership with their

local and Austrian colleagues, noting that “their task is becoming more difficult and more important as they are protecting the EU, and Hungary, against the increasing pressure posed by migration”. The state secretary noted that he had visited the Hungarian contingent in Serbia last year and had met officers serving on their 8th mission there. “Last year, close to 400 Hungarian officers served on the missions,” Rétvári said.

GOVT EXTENDS NATIONAL CONSULTATION DEADLINE BY A WEEK

The government is extending the deadline for responding to the National Consultation public survey by a week, to Jan 17, the Government Information Centre (KTK) said on Tuesday. Many questionnaires are still being returned, the centre said in a statement, adding that so far 1,222,000 responses have been made. The statement said Hungarians were being given the chance to express their opinion on several issues that fundamentally affected the country's sovereignty, such as the EU's migration package. “It will carry much weight at the negotiating tables in Brussels if we are many in standing up for our position...” it added.

DK CALLS FOR BAN ON 'UNLAWFUL IMPORT' OF GUEST WORKERS

The opposition Democratic Coalition on Tuesday called for an immediate

ban of the “unlawful import” of guest workers from outside the European Union. DK's Ferenc Varga, who sits in parliament as an independent, told a press conference that the law on guest workers which entered force this year was “a scam”. In a recent interview, Sándor Czomba, the economy ministry state secretary in charge of employment policy, “admitted that 120,000 guest workers were imported from outside the EU”, the DK politician said, noting that the law stipulates that the number of guest workers must not exceed the number of unfilled jobs at the end of the previous year. Central Statistical Office (KSH) figures show that in the third quarter of last year almost 80,000 jobs went unfilled, Varga said, insisting this meant that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán “and his people have unlawfully roped in 40,000 guest workers”. He vowed to submit a written question to the government regarding how many guest workers would be imported to Hungary this year and why Hungarians were not given the jobs available.

Ruling Fidesz in response said that the DK party led by Ferenc Gyurcsány and the “dollar left” tried again “to mislead” Hungarians with their statements. Besides allowing illegal migrants and terrorism into Hungary, “they are now stoking up fear in Hungarians by talking about the import of illegal guest workers in the country,” Fidesz said in a statement. It cited recent legislation which has tightened the protection of the employment of Hungarians, by setting

a quota on the number of third country guest workers who can be employed in Hungary. “Their number in 2023 was 62,000 and this was never exceeded, as is required by law,” the party said, calling on DK “to stop misleading the public”.

NEARLY 10,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 4,626 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 5,006 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 60 people, ORFK said on Tuesday.

HUNGARY NOV INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT DOWN 5.8%

Hungarian industrial output dropped by an annual 5.8% in November, after falling by 3.2% in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Tuesday. Adjusted for the number of working days, output in November fell by 5.6%. Declines were seen in most manufacturing sector branches, with the exception of the coke production, crude oil processing and the manufacturing of chemical materials and products segments, KSH said. Month on month, output was 2.3% lower, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data. In the Jan-Nov period, output dropped by 4.8% year on year.

Commenting on the data release, the national economy ministry said the war in Ukraine and the European Union's sanctions had caused serious damage to Hungary's economy, but as a result of government measures and the improved international environment industrial production was expected to return to a growth path in the next few months. That prediction was supported by strong sentiment in the domestic and European processing industries and purchasing manager indices, the ministry said in a statement. Recovering domestic demand and rising real wages, as well as an earlier-than-scheduled hike in the minimum wage and lower inflation would also have a positive effect, the ministry added. Lower energy and raw material prices would also help energy-intensive sectors, the statement said. The government is working to ensure that GDP "again grows apace,

by 4%" the ministry said, adding that it was necessary to increase domestic consumption through "the gradual removal of precautionary measures" while promoting labour market activities by boosting confidence and reactivating domestic production and investments. In 2024, the government will extend its Széchenyi Card programme, increase the budget for the Baross Gábor Reindustrialisation Loan Programme to 1,200 billion forints, and increase the budget of the food supplier development programme by nearly 600%, the statement said.

CONDE NAST TRAVELER: BUDAPEST AMONG WORLD'S BEST DESTINATIONS

Top international travel magazine Conde Nast Traveler has put Budapest

among 24 of its best global travel destinations, the Hungarian Tourism Agency (MTÜ) said on Tuesday. The report published at the end of the year was compiled with the help of journalists living in different parts of the world.

Apart from Budapest, only three European destinations made it to the top of the rankings: Cyclades in Greece, Kosovo and the Yorkshire region of the United Kingdom. It cites the city's unique architectural styles and thermal baths, as well as tourist attractions such as Chain Bridge, the House of Hungarian Music and the National Athletic Centre. Last year, Budapest was also among Time magazine's list of recommended destinations. Also, the UN World Tourism Organization selected the Tokaj region as priority settlement.