

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

The newly inaugurated bridge between Hungary and Slovakia on the River Ipoly

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ INAUGURATES HUNGARY-SLOVAKIA BRIDGE

Hungary continues to be committed to opening as many border crossings with Slovakia as possible, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Friday.

Szijjártó spoke at the inauguration of a new bridge spanning the River Ipoly between Drégelypalánk, in northern Hungary, and Slovakia's Ipelske Predmostie (Ipolyhídvég). The new bridge costing 2.9 billion forints (EUR 7.6m) was, the minister said, "a milestone" in Hungary's national strategy programme. Following an agreement signed by the two countries in 2014, the number of border crossings between Hungary and Slovakia has doubled, Szijjártó said, calling these developments "a success story achieved by Hungary and Slovakia". Hungary, he said, was ready to continue building further bridges, roads, and railway lines connecting it to Slovakia. The government, he added, was looking forward to an upcoming official visit by Slovak PM Robert Fico next Tuesday, which would offer an opportunity for further talks on the subject. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Slovakia was Hungary's third largest trading partner, with bilateral trade turnover exceeding a record 17 billion euros in 2022.

The new bridge replaces a 15th century that was destroyed in the second world war.

FIDESZ: POLAND GOVT 'TRAMPLING ON RULE OF LAW'

Poland's government headed by Donald Tusk "is trampling on the rule of law while the European Commission looks away," MEPs of Hungary's ruling Fidesz said on Friday. "The application of double standards by Brussels is shocking," they said. MEPs of Fidesz and its Christian Democrat ally have inquired to the Commission in writing about the Polish government's recent measures, the statement said. "It is easy to imagine ... what would have happened had all this taken place in Budapest under Viktor Orbán's premiership," it added. According to Fidesz, the EC "has fiercely held Hungary to account concerning the rule of law in recent years while now they are shrouded in silence ... that silence indicates the Commission is applying double standards in terms of issues around the rule of law." The MEPs have asked the Commission for its position on whether "a forceful takeover of the public media, bypassing national laws, is compatible with the rule of law", and whether such an act could be committed without violating the freedom and pluralism of the media.

They also wanted to know "how the Commission wants to ensure that the rule of law is measured by the same standards in each member state, irrespective of their governments and their political affiliation."

SZÁNTHÓ: HUNGARY TO HOST CPAC IN APRIL

Hungary will host another Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in April, Miklós Szánthó, the head of the Center for Fundamental Rights (Alapjogokért Központ), said in a video on Facebook on Friday. The conference will be held on April 25 and 26 with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as keynote speaker. Referring to last year's CPAC event in Hungary, Szánthó said "while the globalist left were wailing louder than ever, conservatives of the world were celebrating with us", and the conference aimed at intensifying international cooperation to "defeat the reckless left". Szánthó said Europe and the US would see "life-changing" elections, adding that "we're facing perils never seen before". Globalist progressives, he said, had become "a sect that seeks to shake the foundations of our civilisation, flooding us with migration and the madness of the gender ideology," while progressives were deaf to "such ideals as the nation, sovereignty, child protection and peace". "2024 will be our year," he added. "With allies coming from ... across the world, the right will achieve a successful revolution: we will de-woke, then drain the swamp to retake Brussels and Washington!"

OFFICIAL: EUROPE'S SECURITY STARTS IN SAHEL

Europe's security starts in the Sahel, foreign ministry state secretary Tristan Azbej said on Thursday. Azbej noted on Facebook that he had visited the African country in the company of László Eduárd Máthé, ministerial commissioner in charge of foreign policy coordination of Hungarian government activities in the Sub-Saharan region. They visited Niger to hold talks regarding efforts to thwart illegal migration and terrorism, and collect information about the humanitarian situation in the region. Máthé said on Facebook and on X that "the only path to stability and security is the one that starts with talks."

An entry on the English language website About Hungary says that "in recent times migration risks in the Sahel region and pressure on Europe from illegal immigration have continued to increase". "Given the central role of Niger in monitoring migration routes, Hungary has initiated a dialogue with the relevant Nigerian authorities in order to gain an understanding of the position and thinking of the current government of Niger," it said. "This is necessary because Hungary aims to contribute to reducing migration pressure on Europe," it added. "In its projected relations with the Nigerian leadership, Hungary is following what has become established practice in the Western

alliance system," it said. "The threat of terrorism has recently emerged as a growing risk in the region, causing a deterioration in the local population's living conditions," it added. "Hungary seeks to understand how it can work with affected partners on this issue, based on the principle of assistance on the ground," the website said.

HU-RIZONT PROGRAMME TO STRENGTHEN INTL RESEARCH COOPERATION

A programme dubbed HU-rizont is being launched with a budget of 8 billion forints (EUR 20.1m) this year to strengthen international research cooperation, the state secretary for innovation and higher education said on Friday. Balázs Hankó said at the Educatio exhibition and fair that the government programme would also finance the research expenses incurred by foreign universities working in partnership with Hungarian universities. "If they try to lock us up, we will open up to the world, which is why we have announced the Pannonia Programme for international exchange, for which applications can already be submitted in January, and we are launching the HU-rizont programme to promote international research cooperation," he added.

KSH: CONSUMER PRICE STATS PREPARED IN LINE WITH EU DIRECTIVES

The Central Statistical Office (KSH) calculates inflation in a transparent

way, in line with European directives for statistics, the KSH said on Friday. KSH department head Tímea Cseh and consumer prices expert Imre Gajzágó told a joint press conference that in recent times the office had been on the end of "several unfounded attacks" in connection with the methodology of the consumer price index. They added that these involved "false claims" and were undeserved. The current methodology for the calculation of the consumer price index has been in force since August 2022, the time of the amendment of the government decree on gas and electricity retail prices, KSH said. The office introduced the new methodology in order to ensure that statistics "provide a precise and realistic image even in a changing legal environment".

The KSH said that the European Union statistics office Eurostat maintained continual coordination with the statistical offices of member states, and the methodology used by KSH was in line with the directives used in Europe, as also described in the Eurostat HICP Methodological Manual.

The quality of KSH statistics is ensured by the use of professionally well-founded international standards that are "not adjusted to any political or economic expectations", the statement said. This, it added, was also confirmed by a recent Peer Review Report by independent Eurostat experts highlighting that the statistics issued by KSH were objective, reliable and met high standards.

HUNGARY DEC INFLATION 5.5%, 17.6% IN 2023

Annual inflation in Hungary was 5.5% in December, while it averaged 17.6% in 2023, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Month on month, inflation fell by 0.3%. Food prices increased by 4.8%, while household energy prices went down by 13.9%. Services prices were up 12.4%, while consumer durables fell by 1.0%. The full year annual reading for food prices was a rise of 25.9%, while household energy went up by 22.1%.

Economic development minister Márton Nagy said in a statement that the government had, two months ahead of schedule, fulfilled its promise to cut inflation, and the 5.5% annual inflation reported in December was better than the relevant figures in the Czech Republic (6.9%), Poland (6.1%) and Romania (6.6%). The month-on-month decrease of 0.3% was also significant in December, with a drop in the prices of food, household energy and vehicle fuel, he added.

Nagy said the government would now focus "on the main task of 2024" of restoring economic growth. In order to achieve GDP growth of around 4%, he said progress must be made in three areas: increasing public consumption, domestic production and investment, and the activity rate of the labour market must grow from the current 78% to 85% for 15-

64 year-olds, he added. Given 5.5% inflation and the central bank base rate in December set at 10.75%, the real interest rate, he noted, is still above 5%, "which continues to impact negatively on economic performance".

HUNGARY NOV INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT DOWN 5.8%

Hungarian industrial output in November fell by an annual 5.8%, while working day-adjusted output was 5.6% lower, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second estimate on Friday. Based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data, industrial output was 2.3% lower than in October 2023. In the January-November period, output dropped by 4.8% year on year. Output of the automotive industry, Hungary's biggest manufacturing sector, slipped by an annual 1.7% in November. The detailed data show output of the electrical equipment segment, which made up 11% of manufacturing output, dropped by 12.2%.

NEARLY 12,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 4,902 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 6,825 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 120 people, ORFK said on Friday.

METEOROLOGICAL SERVICE: 2023 HOTTEST, 8TH WETTEST YEAR RECORDED

The year 2023 was the hottest and the 8th wettest year in Hungary since records started in 1901, the HungaroMet meteorological service said on Friday. The median temperature in 2023 was 12.23 degrees Celsius, 1.5 degrees higher than the average 10.75 C. between 1991-2020, and

0.2 degrees higher than 2019, the hottest year up to then, HungaroMet said. The average precipitation last year came to 767.1mm, 124% higher than the average between 1991 and 2020, the service said. The rainiest year ever recorded remains 2010, with a national average of 980.9mm, HungaroMet said.

AIR QUALITY 'DANGEROUS' IN SEVERAL PARTS OF HUNGARY

Air quality is now "dangerous" in many parts of Hungary, according to the national public health centre (NNGYK). Air quality is qualified as "dangerous" in the Sajó valley, in Putnok, Kazincbarcika, Sajószentpéter and Miskolc, as well as in Nyíregyháza and Kaposvár, the centre said on Friday. In Pécs, Szeged, Győr, Tatabánya and Hernádszurdok the air is classified as "unhealthy", while in Sopron, Ajka, Várpalota, Székesfehérvár, Dunaújváros, Százhalombatta, Budapest, Kecskemét, Salgótarján and Debrecen air quality was recorded as "acceptable".