

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Novák visits Hungarian EUFOR Althea mission near Sarajevo

MTV/Noémi Bruzák

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU summit in Brussels

Stats office releases December foreign trade figures

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: QATAR CRUCIAL FOR HAMAS HOSTAGES

Qatar has played a crucial role in securing the release of the hostages taken by Hamas, the foreign minister said, noting that the three Hungarian citizens who have been released could not have gone free without the help of the Gulf country.

"I have now asked my friend Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi, the state minister for foreign affairs, for Qatar's help in freeing the last Hungarian citizen being held hostage," Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook on Wednesday. "My friend Soltan has assured me that Qatar will carry on with its efforts in the interest of a ceasefire and in securing the release of the hostages". "We greatly appreciate Qatar's efforts, as it is clear that the Gaza conflict is giving rise to more and more conflicts and crises in the region, which must be avoided," he said. "We must pay especially close attention to ensuring that there is no new front between Hezbollah and Israel and that the Red Sea is safe for shipping again," Szijjártó added. The conflict in the Middle East has been a matter of deep global concern, the minister said, adding that the longer the conflict went on, the greater the threat of escalation would be. The international community must now focus on preventing the conflict from spreading beyond the region and on doing everything possible to free hostages held by Hamas, Szijjártó said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: POLITICAL AGREEMENT STRUCK ON BUYING QATARI LNG

Hungary has struck a political agreement on buying Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG), Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Doha on Wednesday, adding that the long-term contract for the post-2026 period would boost the country's energy security. Hungary needs an increasing number of energy sources, though the idea was not to replace existing suppliers, a ministry statement quoted Szijjártó as saying after the minister met his Qatari counterpart and the ministers of energy and finance. Qatar will expand its LNG exports considerably from 2026, he said, noting that a previous political agreement had paved the way for inter-company talks on transit. Various options are available, such as via the LNG terminals in Türkiye, Greece or Poland, he said, adding that investments to expand capacity along the south-eastern European direction would be required as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó welcomed the steady development of bilateral economic ties and a new exports record. He said last year Hungary's economy had run smoothly without European Union funds and investment and export records had been set, something which Qatar valued, adding that Hungary was seen as reliable and attractive investment destination. Infrastructure

investments and financial cooperation could be expected in the coming period, he added. Addressing the war in the Middle East, the minister said global action was required to prevent escalation. He said clashes between Israel and Hezbollah, as well as attacks on commercial ships and American military bases in the region, were "negative developments". Szijjártó said that countries that were sufficiently influential that acted responsibly may play a stabilising role, and "Qatar, in particular, is such a country". He also hailed Doha's role in freeing some of the hostages taken by Hamas, three of whom were Hungarian citizens. Another Hungarian citizen is being held hostage, he said, adding that he had asked his Qatari counterpart to help in the soonest possible repatriation. Hopefully talks on new prisoner exchanges would be successful sooner or later, he said, "if possible sooner".

LÁZÁR: 'HISTORIC' THREE-YEAR WAGE AGREEMENT SIGNED WITH RAIL, BUS TRADE UNIONS

A "historic" three-year wage agreement was signed on Tuesday with trade unions of the MÁV-VOLÁN group of railway and national bus companies, the minister of construction and transport said. János Lázár said on Facebook on Wednesday afternoon that all nine trade unions of MÁV-VOLÁN employees have approved the deal before midnight after Solidarity,

the trade union for bus employees, which had organised a strike for Volánbusz workers, also signed the agreement. He said earlier in the day that Volánbusz employees will get at least 28.4% higher wages in three years, of which 17%, at least 70,000 forints, will be paid this year. Bus drivers will get an over 20% wage increase this year and a legal guarantee for above-inflation wage increase in the future, he added. Lázár said the nine signatures were what was needed "to ensure that all of the group's employees receive the increased wages from January".

HUNGARY'S MAJOR GENERAL STICZ TAKES OVER COMMAND OF EUFOR ALTHEA MISSION

Major General László Sticz of the Hungarian general staff took command of European Union's EUFOR Althea mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in an official ceremony in Sarajevo on Wednesday. President Katalin Novák addressed the Hungarian troops serving in the mission after the ceremony, calling on them to be role models and being a soldier was synonymous with "decency, honour and patriotism". She said the ongoing wars had highlighted the importance of "being able to defend ourselves as a country, a nation and in an alliance". She underscored the importance of military upgrades, bolstering defence capabilities and bolstering the prestige of the Hungarian Armed Forces. Novák said the Althea mission having a

Hungarian commander was a matter of great pride for Hungary. Hungary, she said, was “surrounded by powder kegs”, noting the ongoing war in Ukraine and the Yugoslav Wars in the past. The president noted that the defence ministry’s recruitment campaign was also aimed at bolstering the Armed Forces by encouraging more and more people to join the military either as volunteers or reservists.

Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky told the media that the importance of the Althea mission lay in the fact that it contributed directly to the security of the Hungarian people. Hungary’s security, he added, was also dependent on the stability of the Western Balkan countries. “It is clear that in the era of dangers, in addition to the war to the east, we must also keep an eye on illegal migration routes,” he said, adding the Althea mission guaranteed peace and stability in the Western Balkans after the Yugoslav Wars.

Sticz told the media that the tasks of the mission have to be coordinated with the state and military leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. EUFOR’s mission, he added, was to support the work of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s authorities with all means and military power.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY REJECTS GOVT OFFICE’S CALL TO ABOLISH FREIGHT TRAFFIC FEE

Budapest’s City Assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution

expressing its disagreement with a call by the Budapest government office to abolish the freight traffic fee, arguing that the city council had the right to implement the regulation. According to the resolution, the Budapest government office turned to the city council last November after reviewing a 2011 decree on Budapest’s freight traffic. It found the clauses on the freight traffic fee, the reimbursement for the road use contribution, and registration costs to be unlawful. The proposal put forward by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony was approved with 17 votes in favour, 9 against and one abstention. Before the vote, a Democratic Coalition (DK) representative vowed to prevent Budapest from turning into a highway for lorries and vote against the central government proposal to withdraw the decree. Sándor Szaniszló told a press conference that the central government’s demand would result in the roads of Budapest being inundated with lorries.

BUDAPEST FIDESZ GROUP WELCOMES AUDIT OF CHAIN BRIDGE RENOVATION

The Budapest group of Fidesz welcomes an audit of the renovation of the city’s landmark Chain Bridge, to be carried out by the government control office (KEHI). Zsolt Wintermantel, the head of the Fidesz-led group, told the press

during a Wednesday meeting of the Budapest city assembly that he hoped the audit would reveal “the entire chain of who received money through companies involved in the mass production of fake invoices”. He said it was unacceptable that nobody had explained why a new public procurement tender had been invited for the project, resulting in less work undertaken for 5 billion forints (EUR 13m), a higher cost than that contained in the original public procurement tender. The company which won the tender with the backing of the city mayor had made “large financial transfers to firms connected with the mass production of fake invoices”, he added. Wintermantel said it was welcome that a civil organisation, in this case Transparency International, was involved in checking the related public procurements, but he criticised the fact that the organisation had charged 5 million forints for this work and yet “it did not achieve anything”. He added there may have been “external pressure” to pay the organisation. At the same time, he said he was willing to believe that Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, was not personally culpable for any wrongdoing. In response to a question concerning whether a committee would be set up by the city to investigate the case, he said Karácsony tended to be “silent when it comes to every unpleasant issue”, so it was unlikely that such a committee would be set up.

PRISON OPERATOR DENIES PRESS REPORTS CLAIMING 'DEMEANING CONDITIONS' FOR ITALIAN INMATE

Hungary's prison service directorate BVOP has firmly rejected media reports claiming "inhumane conditions" in a Budapest prison where an Italian woman is kept for alleged participation in organised armed attacks in Budapest last year. "We firmly reject unfounded statements made by a former inmate giving account of rats and bedbugs, poor food, insufficient hygienic conditions and inadequate medical care," BVOP department head Mihály Kovács said, adding that Italian and Hungarian press reports citing the inmate were "a lie". "Such unfounded accusations seriously hurt the reputation of BVOP and its staff," he said. Hungarian prisons strictly observe the regulations and respect human dignity, Kovács said, adding that inmates were ensured the right to lodge a complaint or file a report. "The Italian citizen has so done at the

office of the fundamental rights ombudsman which, concluding an investigation, has not find BVOP being at fault," he said. The woman is one of three defendants kept in prison on charges of participation in violent attacks by the Antifa movement in February 2023.

OVER 7,700 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 3,972 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 3,754 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 40 people, ORFK said on Wednesday.

HUNGARY DEC INDUSTRIAL PRODUCER PRICES DOWN 7.2%

Factory gate prices in Hungary dropped by an annual 7.2% in

December, falling for the fifth month in a row after rising for years, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Wednesday. Prices for domestic sale fell by 3.6%, while export prices declined by 8.9%. Month on month, industrial producer prices dropped by 0.7% as prices for domestic sale fell by 0.6% and export prices slipped by 0.8%. Domestic prices of the manufacturing sector, which have a 65% weight in the PPI, dropped by 3.1% year on year. Domestic energy prices, which account for 30% of PPI, fell by 5.6%. Export prices of the manufacturing sector, which have a 90% weight in the PPI, fell by 3.2%, while energy sector export prices, with only a 9.8% weight, plunged by 50.6%. In the full year, factory gate prices climbed by 7.8% as prices for domestic sale rose by 25.4% and export prices edged down by 0.7%.