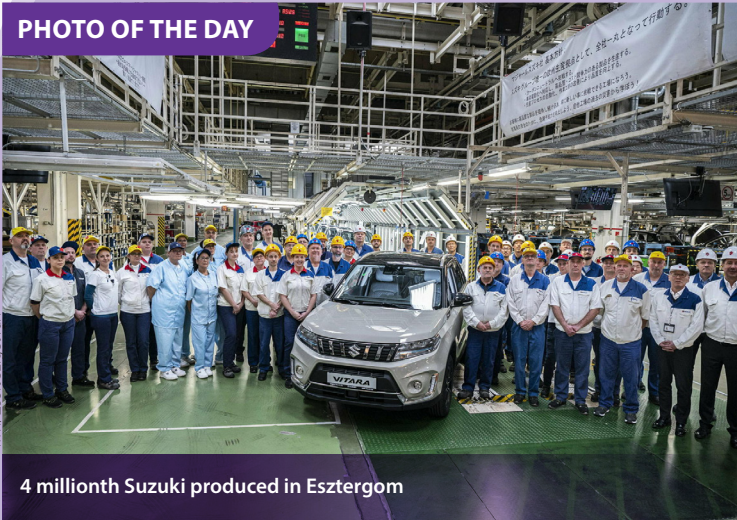


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Szinetvári

4 millionth Suzuki produced in Esztergom

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office prelim report on consumer prices in Jan 2024

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East

TOP STORY

UN 'MUST MULTIPLY' COUNTER-TERRORISM RESOURCES

The United Nations must multiply its resources spent on counter-terrorism, the foreign minister said in New York.

Péter Szijjártó told public media that the UN had handled counter-terrorism action as a "stepchild" for a long time. "The role it was able to fulfil depended on the voluntary donations of member states," he added. "For years we've been fighting for this situation to change", and financing counter-terrorism is now part of the UN's central budget, he said. The UN's counter-terrorism efforts are currently managed from two locations: New York and Budapest, since the second largest unit of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism operates in Budapest, he said. "Hungary therefore plays an important role in global counter-terrorism efforts," he added. In addition to peacekeeping, counter-terrorism efforts must be among the most important tasks of the UN, considering that the world faces "the most severe threat of terror ever", he said. The terrorism had already been at a very high level in Africa, the Middle East, South-East Asia and even in Europe as a result of the development of parallel societies emerging from migration waves to western Europe, he added.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: TERRORISM AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION 'VICIOUS CIRCLE'

Terrorism and illegal migration formed a "vicious circle", Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in New York, insisting that when terrorism became increasingly severe in any one part of the world, migration sprang from that location and terrorist organisations abused illegal migration, hiding their terrorists in the uncontrolled waves of migrants. "If Europe gets hit by migration waves, it will increase chances of terrorists getting in," he added, expressing hope that by keeping the waves of illegal migration under control, the threat of terrorism could be reduced.

Commenting on his talks with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday, he said the UN must play a leading role in counter-terrorism efforts and in peacekeeping. Several international organisations, he said, had failed in respect of the war in Ukraine, only making the situation worse with weapons transports and pro-war propaganda. He said the UN must step forward in this area, given that it was set up precisely to help communication between warring states.

Szjijártó said currently neither side was open to mediation, and the continuation of the war must be expected in Ukraine, despite the fact that "there is no solution on the battlefield". European strategy "has

been a complete failure", he said. Those European politicians who say the developments in the battlefield would bring the situation closer to peace "cheated" the European people, he said. "They have either lied or assessed the situation completely falsely," he added.

The foreign minister called freeing the hostages "the most important task" in the Middle East, adding that he agreed with the UN Secretary-General that Qatar should be given all possible support. He noted that Qatar's mediation efforts had yielded results and the freeing of the first three Hungarian hostages were also thanks to that country.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said modern-day anti-Semitism had spread "at a shocking rate" in western Europe and the United States in the recent months, with dozens of violent demonstrations held against Israel and with the harassment of Jewish communities and their members. "Those must be stopped," he said. The minister called modern-day anti-Semitism a consequence of illegal migration in western Europe, saying that "aggressive migrants" had brought it with them as parallel societies had emerged. With a zero tolerance in place against anti-Semitism and a ban on pro-terrorist demonstrations, he said Hungary was the safest country for Jewish communities.

Szjijártó said that it had transpired from his meetings with US Republican politicians that they had extensive information about developments in

Europe and in Hungary in particular, and they followed the activities of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his government "with great sympathy". "They are keeping their fingers crossed" for the prime minister in his efforts to enforce Hungary's national interests, protect Christian-conservative values and protect families while fighting illegal migration, he said.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, he said: "If someone tries to argue in favour of ending the war in Ukraine, they are immediately called Putin's friend, a Russian spy or a Kremlin propagandist."

The foreign minister attributed Hungary's success in the recent past to the "honest and clear political strategy" the country had pursued. Hungary, he added, had the political stability for this, based on the Hungarian people's support of the government's political strategy.

Speaking about the Hungarian opposition, Szijjártó insisted it was "led by the US ambassador to Budapest, which is a strange situation, a qualified case of [foreign] interference in a country's internal affairs."

ORBÁN: 'NO MERCY FOR PAEDOPHILES'

"There shall be no mercy for paedophiles," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Thursday, adding that he had filed a constitutional amendment to prevent a pardon from being granted to perpetrators

of crimes committed against minors. Orbán said on Facebook that he had submitted the amendment proposal on behalf of the government, adding that it was his personal belief that there must be no mercy for paedophiles. He said a debate on the powers of the presidential pardon had arisen, adding that “what’s needed now is not to be lawyerly but to establish clarity with an unequivocal decision”. He said he had five children and six grandchildren, adding that if anybody touched them, his first thought would be that “they must be cut in half, they must be cut into pieces”.

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has written a letter to Pope Francis regarding President Katalin Novák’s pardon to a former deputy head of a children’s home in Bicske, near Budapest. Ahead of the Pope’s visit last April, Novák granted presidential pardon to, among others, the former deputy director of a children’s home in Bicske convicted of being an accomplice in paedophile crimes. DK group leader Olga Kálmán told an online press conference that the letter was delivered to Michael W. Banach, the apostolic nuncio to Hungary. Kálmán said DK hoped the Pope would “find a way to express our common belief that citing a servant of Jesus cannot pave the way for cooperation with sin and sinners”. She said DK strove to protect children and would not allow “paedophile-stroking Katalin Novák and the Orbán government to set free further paedophile criminals”.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: LIBERAL MAINSTREAM TO BLAME FOR EU’S ‘FAILINGS’

The European Union’s failure to handle the main challenges of recent times was due to the pervasive presence of the liberal mainstream, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in New York. Speaking at an event of the New York Young Republicans Club, Szijjártó said Europe was facing “a package of challenges consisting of three major parts”. The EU’s strategy had failed on handling the war in Ukraine, illegal migration and economic challenges, he said. “The major reason for failing to address any of these challenges is the liberal mainstream.” The liberal mainstream was making “rational, thorough, respect-based debate” impossible, Szijjártó said. He said anyone in Europe suggesting that promoting peace in Ukraine would be better than weapon deliveries was branded a Russian spy, Putin’s friend or a Kremlin propagandist, he said. “Or if you say that the only way foreigners can enter your country is the legal way ... then you are [this] close to being a fascist.” Szijjártó said the EU had manoeuvred itself into a crisis because the liberal mainstream was attempting “to construct an absolute hegemony of opinion”.

Liberal forces saw themselves as the only progressive and democratic ideology in politics, and branded those unwilling to align with liberal values

autocratic and anti-democratic, he said.

At the same time, “the liberal mainstream is the most intolerant ideology that has been ruling over Europe” in the past decades, he said. “They do not tolerate any alternative opinions, they are not ready to respect the rights of non-liberals.” Hungary’s government had been using the phrase “illiberal democracy” to signal that a political regime can remain a democracy as well as conservative, Christian and patriotic, he said. Patriotic, Christian Democrat parties are seen as populists as the liberal mainstream is “ruling NGOs and civil organisations”, he said. While most governments in Europe are governing in coalition with a slim majority, they are easy to put under pressure, he said. “I am one of the very few in the European Union ... who feels that I can say what I feel”, thanks to the stable political system in Hungary, he said.

Szijjártó said Hungary’s media landscape was varied, and around half of the outlets were supportive of the government. According to current European standards, that is a “media dictatorship in Europe ... because liberals do not have a 99.9% share.” Regarding the war in Ukraine, Szijjártó said the European strategy and sanctions had failed to achieve their goals. Hungary is urging peace talks, especially since there is a sizeable Hungarian community living in Ukraine, he said. Hungary is also maintaining its stance on illegal migration: “we stick to our sovereign



right to tell whom we allow into the country and with whom we are ready to live together." No external force can dictate Hungarians' decisions on that issue, he said. In 2022, Hungary detained 275,000 illegal migrants, and 200,000 in 2023. The government will keep its strategy in place, and maintain rigorous border checks and the fence, he said. Szijjártó said that the different approach in western Europe had resulted in anti-Israel protests and parallel societies.

Europe was losing its competitiveness and its share in global GDP has slipped to third place behind China, he said. Meanwhile, Hungary had survived the crises and "is now extremely successful", he said. The Fidesz-Christian Democrat government has won four consecutive terms, creating a stable political foundation to that success, he said. Foreign investors had channelled "tens of millions of dollars" into Hungary in 2022, hoping to forge a united opposition, he said. "The attack against the government was coordinated from the United States, from the network of [American financier] George Soros, and from organisations not too far from your current government." Szijjártó said Hungary's vision for the future could be summed up as "no war, no migration, no gender". "We want peace in Ukraine ... we are not ready to receive any illegal migrants ... and society is based on family: mother, father, child." The solution to peace and the improving ties between the US and Hungary would be the return

of former President Donald Trump to power, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: AVOIDING ESCALATION IN UKRAINE, MIDDLE EAST CRUCIAL

The most important international task right now is to avoid an escalation in the war in Ukraine and the Middle East, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, warning that if either of those conflicts spread to other countries, it could easily lead to a third world war. Several international organisations had failed when it came to peace-making in recent years, Szijjártó, who is on a visit to New York, said in a post on Facebook. He argued that the European Union and other organisations had proven ineffective in moving the war in Ukraine towards peace over the last two years. Instead of peace, there are weapons deliveries, which prolong the conflict and lead to more casualties, he added.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said the global fight against terror had taken "a big hit" last October when Hamas launched thousands of rockets into Israel. He said the success of Israel's counter-terrorism operations was a global interest, underlining the importance of protecting civilians and freeing the hostages.

"The United Nations is just about the last hope for preventing escalation in Ukraine and the Middle East," Szijjártó said. "I have assured Secretary-General Guterres that Hungary will provide all support to the UN in order to establish

peace." He said Hungary had paid the last instalment of its member state contribution for this year at the end of January, making it one of the countries that ensures the effective functioning of the organisation.

The minister said that this was "not true for everyone", noting there was a "rich and powerful country" that owed the UN budget hundreds of millions of dollars, thus threatening the effectiveness of its operations. Szijjártó said the UN was a key organisation, as it provided a platform for communication even between nations that are at war with each other.

HUNGARY SUPPORTS WTO REFORM, SAYS FIDESZ MEP

Hungary supports reforming the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and proposals that would promote a level playing field in international trade, Enikő Győri, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, said in an EP plenary debate in Strasbourg. Győri addressed the debate, after which a resolution urging WTO's upcoming biennial Ministerial Conference on Feb 26-29 to adopt a comprehensive package on institutional reform was passed. "WTO is a symbol of open, rules-based trade," she said, adding that representatives of 164 countries came together year after year to develop global trade further, "even if there are difficulties at times". "We must build on this cooperation as this serves the interests of Europe," she said.

Győri said: "Yes to connections and no to protectionism". EU legislative proposals, she said, must all accord with WTO rules while respecting the powers of EU member states. Also, new legislation must be backed by broad impact studies, she added. Hungary supports the conclusion of a WTO global investment facilitation agreement, she said, arguing that this would help to eliminate political and ideological obstacles to the free flow of investments. The Hungarian MEP also urged the European Commission to pursue "pro-active, smarter and more business-friendly trade policy", adding that the commission had a "poor record" in taking up the opportunities that free trade had to offer.

ORBÁN CONGRATULATES AZERI PRESIDENT ON RE- ELECTION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Ilham Aliyev, the re-elected president of Azerbaijan, on Wednesday evening, the PM's press chief said. Orbán congratulated Aliyev on his "huge and indisputable" election victory, Bertalan Havasi told MTI. Speaking to Aliyev by phone, the prime minister said he was looking forward to further strengthening cooperation between Hungary and Azerbaijan, as well as between Azerbaijan and the European Union during Hungary's upcoming EU presidency in the second half of this year.

HIDVÉGI: BRUSSELS 'PUSHING LGBTIQ+ MADNESS TO POINT OF ABSURDITY'

Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi on Thursday posted a video on social media slamming the European Parliament for adopting "a most extreme and absurd document concerning LGBTIQ+ ideology", insisting that the resolution would require "gender ideology" in all areas, from humanitarian aid in Africa to agricultural affairs. He said the "EU elite" was "totally divorced from reality", and "change is needed in Brussels". The resolution, he said, stated that LGBTIQ+ rights should get priority treatment in all European Union policies, and this applied to "everything from industrial and agricultural policy to space research". Also, the EU wanted to ensure that LGBTIQ+ rights were properly enforced in a given place before granting humanitarian aid, the Fidesz MEP said.

Hidvéghi said the situation would be "laughable were it not such a serious matter". EU member states, meanwhile, would be stripped of their right to decide on issues connected with family values, how children are raised and child protection, he said. "Brussels must return to the world of common sense and normalcy..." he added.

LMP: EP VOTE ON GMO CROPS 'POTENTIALLY DETRIMENTAL TO HUNGARY, EUROPE'

The European Parliament has approved a proposal on allowing the trade of "a new type of uncontrolled, gene-modified produce", opposition LMP said, adding that the vote's results could be "extremely detrimental to Hungary and Europe". LMP lawmaker László Lóránt Keresztes, the head of parliament's sustainable development committee, told an online press conference that the crops in question would be exempt from strict EU regulations on food safety and environmental security. Producers would have no liability, he said.

He noted that the proposal had been voted down in November, prompting vigorous lobbying from large corporations. Under a 2018 ruling of the EU court, all GMO produce must be strictly regulated, he added. He called on the government to cooperate with political and professional groups opposing the proposal, and to "do everything they can" to keep Hungary GMO-free. If the proposal is adopted, member states would have to forgo safe, GMO-free food, and seed grains would be controlled by agricultural giants, he warned.

CHRISTDEM MEP: ATTACKS AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA AMOUNTING TO RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

The attacks on Christians in Nigeria around Christmas and other religious festivals in the country amount to religious persecution, MEP György Hölvényi of the junior ruling Christian Democrats told a European parliamentary debate in Strasbourg. "Ambushes, brutal murders and attacks on churches timed to coincide with Pentecost and Christmas Eve cannot be interpreted any other way. This is the persecutions of Christians," Hölvényi said. He warned that "some European decision-makers' ideology has made them blind to human suffering when it comes to Christians". Without Western support, those communities were becoming ever more vulnerable, he said. Jihadists killed 5,000 people in Nigeria last year alone, some 4,000 of them Christians, he said. The Nigerian government seemed unable to stem the violence, he said. "We Europeans cannot turn a blind eye to violence against Christians ... this is a matter of human rights. It is time that silence be replaced by action," he said.

KARÁCSONY: PLANNING FOR BUDAPEST RING ROAD RENOVATION SET TO START THIS YEAR

Planning for the revamp of a major section of Budapest's Ring Road linking

Petofi Bridge and Margaret Bridge is set to begin this year, with the first stage of the renovation works expected to get under way next year, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said on Thursday. The renovation of the section between Nyugati Square and Mester Street is expected to be completed by the end of the next city administration term, Karácsony said in response to a question at a press conference. The mayor spoke after a cabinet meeting in Budapest's 7th district, where the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th districts signed an agreement on the project. The project will be financed from 4 billion forints (EUR 10.3m) in European Union funds, as well as city council and district resources, Karácsony said. In addition to renovating the physical space, the project is aimed at creating a uniform image for the city, he said, adding that this will be linked with a business development scheme. The mayor said the study preceding the project had already been carried out in the form of a "broad social dialogue".

He said in response to questions that the city council will use its own resources to repave the road, adding that the districts will be responsible for repairing their own pavement sections. Karácsony said the city would not be starting the planning from scratch, as a comprehensive plan to renovate the Ring Road had already been approved back in 2021.

He said the project will increase the size of green areas, protect the existing tree line, add better protected bicycle lanes, improve the quality of the

pavement and add more crosswalks. Plans also include the launch of a credit scheme for microbusinesses with a view to attracting socially productive businesses to the Ring Road, Karácsony said.

Tamás Soproni, the mayor of the 6th district, said it was important to refurbish the facade of the buildings along the Ring Road that were damaged in the second world war and the 1956 revolution. He said it would also be important to open up to cultural institutions and civil society, adding that the districts should incentivise proprietors on the Ring Road to also attract businesses "other than pubs" to the area. Meanwhile, asked about cooperation among the opposition parties in this year's local elections, Karácsony said the parties included in Budapest's leadership remained committed to staying united. "We may not contest the elections on a joint list, but certainly as one political community," he said, adding that certain disagreements regarding the mayoral candidates still had to be settled.

BUDGET POSTS SURPLUS IN JAN

Hungary's cash flow-based budget, excluding local councils, posted a surplus of 54.4 billion forints (EUR 140.3m) at the end of January, the finance ministry said on Thursday, citing preliminary data. The central budget had a deficit of 37.4 billion forints. Separate state funds were

41.6 billion in the black and the social insurance funds had a 50.2 billion forint surplus. The ministry noted that expenditures related to the household utility price caps came to 181.3 billion forints by the end of January, 8.3 billion more than last year. European Union transfers reached 226.0 billion forints, over 191 billion more than last January. Spending on pensions reached 475.6 billion forints and on health care 196.9 billion forints. The ministry noted that the budget had ensured resources for a 6 percent pension rise as well as the continuation of the household utility price caps and family subsidies. "The government aims to strengthen growth this year, while continuing to reduce budget deficit and state debt levels," it added.

NUMBER OF GREEN VEHICLES UP FIVE FOLD SINCE 2020

The number of vehicles registered with green number plates rose to over 88,000 in January from 17,000 in 2020, or a five-fold increase, the energy

ministry said on Thursday. The increase in the fully electric segment was even higher, 6.5-fold increase during the period, the ministry said on Facebook, adding that the number of these types is expected to exceed 50,000 at the end of this month. Around 3,000 pure electric green trucks, 500 motorcycles and over 200 run on Hungary's roads. Fifty-six percent of vehicles with green plates are fully electric and 60 percent of them were put on the roads in the countryside, the ministry said. The government's goal is to promote green energy in the Hungarian transport sector which currently produces one-fifth of all of the country's greenhouse gas emissions. It has earmarked 30 billion forints (EUR 77m) to subsidise the purchase of eco-friendly vehicles by businesses, it said.

FORMER SWIMMING FED CHIEF GYÁRFÁS, PORTIK SENTENCED TO PRISON IN 90S MURDER CASE

A Budapest court on Thursday sentenced Tamás Gyárfás, the

former head of Hungary's swimming federation, to seven years in a maximum security prison and Tamás Portik, the one-time head of an oil company involved in illicit deals in the nineties, to life in prison for their involvement in the murder of Hungarian media mogul János Fenyő in 1998. Gyárfás, a media businessman, was found guilty of complicity to commit murder, while Portik was convicted of instigating the murder. The Budapest Municipal Court banned both defendants for ten years from participating in public affairs.

Judge Péter Póta said the earliest Gyárfás could be released on parole was after serving four-fifths of his sentence. Portik could be eligible for parole in 20 years' time at the earliest, he added. According to the verdict, Gyárfás commissioned Portik and Péter Tasnádi, current convicts in connection with other cases, to kill Fenyő, his business rival. Portik hired Slovak criminal Jozef Roháč to carry out the murder, who then killed Fenyő on February 11, 1998.