

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Vivien Cher Benko

PM Viktor Orbán meets Wang Xiaohong, China's minister of public security

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Events related to the wars
in Ukraine, Middle East**

TOP STORY

'NOT WORTH TRYING TO PRESSURE HUNGARY'

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has said a US congressional delegation scheduled to visit Hungary this weekend should not try to put pressure on the country, underlining that Hungary "is a sovereign country".

Answering a question at a press conference in connection with a planned visit by a bipartisan delegation of US senators to Hungary, Szijjártó said the government welcomed the senators just as it did every foreign visitor. "We're glad that they're coming, because they'll be able to see with their own eyes that everything they read about Hungary in the liberal American media is a blatant lie," he said. "If they're coming with the purpose of telling us how we ought to live or what decisions we ought to make, I wouldn't recommend that because that would definitely be -- as they say -- an incomplete mission, so it wouldn't be worth it," he added. Szijjártó said he was not aware of the senators having any plans to meet anyone from Hungary's government sector, noting that their counterparts were the Hungarian members of parliament. "Our position on the ratification of Sweden's NATO membership is clear," Szijjártó said. "We await the Swedish prime minister's visit to Hungary. I think that if he was able to visit Türkiye during the ratification process, then he can also pay us a visit."

ORBÁN MEETS CHINESE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC SECURITY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met Wang Xiaohong, China's minister of public security, in his office in Budapest. Orbán said ties between Hungary and China were based on respect, "an otherwise dwindling commodity in international diplomacy". Further cooperation will be based on the long-standing friendship between the two countries, he added. Wang highlighted the bilateral ties between the two countries, adding that Orbán is a regular participant at forums of the Belt and Road Initiative. Orbán and Wang also highlighted the importance of security and stability as a baseline for the development of economic and trade ties, Havasi said.

Meanwhile, a China-Hungary law enforcement summit was held in Budapest on Friday, with Sándor Pintér, the interior minister, holding talks with Wang Xiaohong. Wang, a State Councillor of the People's Republic of China, is making his first official visit abroad after the Chinese New Year to Hungary, the ministry noted in a statement. Pintér told his Chinese partner that bilateral cooperation was made possible "by the guarantee of security and stability, which are essential for further developing comprehensive strategic cooperation", the

statement said. Wang's visit heralded "an important step in furthering relations" between China's public security ministry and Hungary's interior ministry, it added. Agreements on enhancing cooperation in law enforcement and joint patrols were signed. Also, Wang was briefed about the structure and capabilities of Hungary's counter-terrorism force and he viewed construction of the China-backed Budapest-Belgrade railway line.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: SPEEDING UP GEORGIA'S EU ACCESSION A KEY GOAL OF HUNGARY PRESIDENCY

Hungary's government will do everything possible during the Hungarian European Union presidency to get accession talks with Georgia up and running so that the country can join the bloc as soon as possible, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Friday. Georgia is an important partner when it comes to overcoming the challenges faced by Europe, Szijjártó told a joint press conference with Georgian counterpart Ilia Darchiashvili in Budapest, according to a ministry statement. Szijjártó said Georgia understood and supported neighbourhood policy based on peace and stability and could also be a key player in ensuring the success of Europe's future energy diversification. He also highlighted the country's commitment to European integration. One of the reasons for Darchiashvili's

visit, he noted, was for Hungary and Georgia to look ahead to Hungary's presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of the year, "which comes at a time when the bloc is in particularly poor shape". "Our goal is to strengthen the European Union and break the spiral that is leaving the EU in worse and worse shape," he said. Szijjártó said the best way to do this was to enlarge the bloc, arguing that the EU needed new momentum, freshness and dynamism, which could be provided by countries still fighting for membership. "Georgia is one such country," he said, noting that the economic growth seen in the country recently would be certain to contribute to improving the EU's competitiveness. Szijjártó said Hungary had firmly backed the EU's decision to grant Georgia candidate country status last December. "This was the right decision, and it partly made up for the earlier unfair decision to deny Georgia candidate country status when it was granted to Ukraine," he said. During its EU presidency, Hungary will help Georgia ensure that the accession process is completed swiftly, he said, adding that this could benefit not just Georgia but the EU as well.

Szijjártó noted that 16 Hungarian experts were part of the EU's monitoring mission in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, aimed at preventing the renewal of an armed conflict, adding that the government will maintain this contribution to the mission. As regards energy security, Szijjártó said the Caucasus region could be a

key contributor to Europe's energy supply, given the region's potential in sustainable energy production. He said an agreement between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary and Romania to import green energy to Europe, derived mainly from wind power, will enter into effect on Monday. "This would be a joint project of historic importance, as there isn't a 1,200km underwater cable anywhere else in the world," Szijjártó said. A joint venture of four countries' energy companies is being set up, and the tender for the feasibility study has also been concluded, he said. Meanwhile, Szijjártó welcomed trade turnover between Hungary and Georgia reaching a record high in 2022, noting it has grown 3.5-fold since 2010. Also, the two countries have concluded negotiations on an investment protection agreement which will be signed once it is approved by the European Commission, Szijjártó said.

ECONMIN CALLS FOR TARGETED FUNDING FOR EVS

Targeted European Union funding for EVs would be key to securing the bloc's green transition, the minister of national economy told a conference of the Hungarian Business Leaders Forum in Budapest on Friday. Márton Nagy said "the time for generic incentives is over". Since the EU will only allow the sale of electric or hydrogen-fuelled vehicles from 2035, the transition must be subsidised, he said. The number of

EVs reached 14 million in 2023, 58% of which were sold in China, Nagy said. Nearly 30% of new cars sold in China in 2022 were electric, while the same ratio came to 21% in Europe and 8% in the US, he added. State support for EVs globally have reached 30-40 billion dollars, with China topping that list, followed by Europe, he said. While leading car manufacturers are working to break the Chinese hegemony by setting up facilities in Germany, Italy and France, the spread of EVs has been hampered by high prices, expensive insurance, high repair costs and fast depreciation, Nagy said. German companies' green transition is being hindered by global competition, red tape, high energy prices and financial difficulties, he added.

Meanwhile, Hungary's battery exports were the highest as a proportion of GDP, while vehicle exports were the fourth highest in the EU, he said. The country is on track to become one of the largest battery manufacturers in the world, with more than 80% of new investments part of the "EV ecosystem", he said.

At the same time, Nagy said the falling competitiveness of German car manufacturing industry presented a "serious danger" to Hungary's vehicle and battery manufacturing sector. Hungary's car manufacturing and battery exports slowed in the last quarter of 2023 due to a fall in German EV manufacturing, he added. An EU level support scheme for e-car purchases would give a competitive edge to European manufacturing, he

said. When it takes over the rotating EU presidency in July, Hungary will propose such a scheme, he said, adding that the proposal would need to be unanimously adopted by member states.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: NESTLÉ TO EXPAND W HUNGARY FACILITY IN HUF 55 BN INVESTMENT

Swiss-owned Nestlé Hungária is investing 55 billion forints (EUR 141.3m) to expand its pet food facility in Buk, in western Hungary, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said on Friday, adding that the investment will create 130 jobs. The new unit will contain two manufacturing lines, enabling the plant to double its production to 500,000 tonnes of Purina feed a year from 2025. Fully 85% of the product will be exported, Péter Szijjártó said. Meanwhile, the government is supporting the investment by financing infrastructure development in the region, revamping roads and water-pipe networks in the area, he added. The project is part of Nestlé Hungária's five-year development period between 2020 and 2025, when the company plans to invest a total of 300 billion forints, creating 600 jobs in the process, Szijjártó added.

Noting that Nestlé operates 344 plants in 77 countries in the world, Szijjártó praised the company's readiness to train its employees in using cutting-edge technology. Hungary's government has supported

such training programmes with a 193 million forint grant, he said. Since the plant purchases more than half of the raw materials used in production from local suppliers, local SMEs will also benefit from the investment, he added. It will also contribute to Hungary's robust food industry "which has hit record after record despite all [recent] crises", Szijjártó said. The sector's production value went to 6,500 billion forints in 2023 from 3,800 billion in 2020, he said. In the past decade, the government has supported 72 large investments worth a total of 1,000 billion forints in the sector, he said.

DEFMIN: SPORT'S ABOUT FRIENDSHIP, BELONGING

Sport is all about friendship and belonging, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, the defence minister, said on Friday, marking the anniversary of the founding of the International Military Sports Council

(CISM). CISM was established on February 18, 1948 by Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands with the aim of fostering peace and international cooperation and promoting sport and a healthy lifestyle, with the motto Friendship through Sport. The minister, speaking before a commemorative run held at the BHSE sports centre, said this idea also took hold in Hungary, adding that soldiers best showed friendship and a sense of belonging through playing sports together. Soldiers of CISM member countries as well as military administrators and members of army sports associations since 2006 have marked the anniversary of the sports council by running together. Hungary's armed forces joined the run in 2015, and now Szalay-Bobrovniczky and fellow senior ministry and army officials joined Hungarian Olympic medallists in completing the run.

BUSÓ FESTIVITIES DRAW TENS OF THOUSANDS TO MOHÁCS

The Busó festivities in Mohács, in south-western Hungary, a six-day carnival to mark the end of winter, drew tens of thousands of visitors this year, the Hungarian Tourism Agency said on Friday. Visitors to the festival, which took place on February 8-13 this year, spent around 1,000 guest nights at tourism accommodations there. Occupancy rates at the weekend were over 90%. Most visitors were Hungarians, but foreign tourists, mainly from Slovakia and Germany, also came to Mohács during the carnival. The Busó festivities, named for the busós, frightening-looking costumed people wearing wooden masks and big woolly cloaks, was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.