

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Gold medallist air pistol shooters Miriam Jákó (l), Sára Ráhel Fábián and Veronika Major (r) at the European Championship in Győr, N Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU education ministers meet in Brussels

PM to address diplomatic forum in Türkiye

Events related to the wars in Middle East, Ukraine

Stats office publishes foreign trade figures for Dec

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'NO' TO EU TROOPS IN UKRAINE

Any plan or remark about the potential deployment of European troops in Ukraine "goes directly against" the decisions made by NATO in connection with the war between Russia and Ukraine, the foreign minister has said.

Asked at a press conference to comment on recent remarks by French President Emmanuel Macron on the possibility of Western troops being sent to Ukraine, Péter Szijjártó said Hungary would not send troops to Ukraine "under any circumstances" and was also sticking to its decision against delivering weapons. Szijjártó welcomed the clear declaration by several European leaders not to send troops to Ukraine. He noted that two years ago, NATO declared that it was not party to the war, and that everything possible needed to be done to avoid a direct confrontation with Russia. "This decision is one that is still in effect and was taken with the agreement of every member state," the minister said. "And not only have we not overruled this decision, but we have not even debated the possibility of modifying it."

He said the EU's security had deteriorated under Ursula Von der Leyen's EC presidency, "so it would be preferable if ... she didn't make remarks or decisions that further worsen the European situation..." Szijjártó said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, CHAD AGREE ON BROAD COOPERATION TO BOOST REGIONAL STABILITY

Hungary is launching a comprehensive cooperation scheme with Chad with a view to boosting the security and stability of the Sahel, developing the economy and managing the root causes of migration, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a joint press conference held with counterpart Mahamat Saleh Annadif. The world has entered "an era of dangers", with many of the crises linked to terrorism, which is connected to mass illegal migration waves, Szijjártó said. Terrorism and migration, he added, formed a "vicious circle", arguing that the former was a root cause of the latter, and migration waves could be infiltrated by potential terrorists. "That's why one of the constant grave threats faced by the European Union is that mass illegal migration waves will become even more severe," Szijjártó said.

He said terrorism posed an even greater threat in Africa, while the continent's rapid population growth posed serious economic challenges. He noted that Africa's population was projected to grow by 750 million over the next 20 years. "This means that the main question from a European point of view is whether we Europeans can give Africa the help it needs to successfully confront the increasingly serious terrorist threat, and whether African countries are able to develop

their economies to such an extent that they can keep this rapidly growing population on the continent," the minister said.

Szjijártó said the Sahel was among Africa's most troubled regions, and a source of the migration waves to Europe. "And we must also see that if Brussels doesn't change its pro-migration policy, it will mean big trouble for both the Sahel and Europe," he added.

He hailed Chad's "exceptional stability", noting that the Sahel country was prepared to intensify cooperation with the EU and was making major efforts against terrorism. Hungary and Chad have therefore decided to launch a comprehensive cooperation programme aimed at promoting the Sahel region's stability and curbing migration waves, Szijjártó said. The aim, he added, was to improve the security situation in Chad and the Sahel, and to contribute to economic growth so as to be able to manage the root causes of migration as effectively as possible.

Hungary will open a diplomatic mission in N'Djamena with a charge d'affaires taking up the post in mid-March, the minister said, noting the operation of a regional development and humanitarian aid centre which was opened in the capital city of Chad in January.

Hungary has already provided 500 million forints (EUR 1.3m) of assistance to help develop Chad's refugee care system and has dispatched medical teams and sent medicines in aid to help improve the country's health-

care services, he said, noting the contribution of additional funding worth 600 million forints to agriculture development programmes. Talks are ongoing on launching a 150 million dollar tied-aid programme to promote Hungarian water management companies' participation in the modernisation of Chad's water management industry.

Speaking about international affairs, Szijjártó asserted that Hungary and Chad were both among countries advocating peace and regularly called for a peaceful settlement of armed conflicts at international forums.

As regards the war in Ukraine, the minister said that Hungary would initiate re-allocating the 18 million dollars-worth of its contribution to the European Peace Facility to setting up an education centre in Chad for the training of local military officers and also serving the aim to develop the capabilities of that country's defence forces.

VARGA: GOVT RESPECTS CBANK INDEPENDENCE

The government's goal is to strengthen the National Bank of Hungary's transparency and ensure its frugal operation while respecting the central bank's independence, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said on Facebook on Thursday. To achieve this, the Finance Ministry, in consultation with the European Central Bank, is considering extending the powers of the central bank's supervisory board over activities

external to the bank's core tasks. The proposal confirmed by the ECB would extend the supervisory board's powers to cover other central bank activities, such as approving economic decisions above a certain value threshold as well as tightening the obligation to provide information and reports, Varga said.

Meanwhile, the prime minister also underlined the importance of the central bank's independence, saying it was "sacred and inviolable", according to a statement by the PM's press chief. The government has not yet discussed the amendment to the law regarding the powers of the bank's supervisory board, the statement added.

DEPT SPEAKER OF PARLT: VISEGRAD GROUP 'ALIVE IN PARLT COOPERATION'

Deputy Speaker of Parliament Csaba Hende attended a meeting of the parliamentary heads of the Visegrad countries and Ukraine in Prague on Thursday, and said the event had shown that "the Visegrad cooperation is alive in its parliamentary form". The meeting of the heads of government of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia earlier in the week highlighted the common ground on issues such as the fight against illegal migration, a joint stance against EU tax harmonisation to preserve the region's competitiveness, and the protection of nations' sovereign right to determine their energy mix, Hende said. They are also working together to create regional energy

independence and to protect the European markets from poor quality agricultural produce, he said. After the meeting, Hende had bilateral talks with Ruslan Stefanchuk, the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY TO IMPLEMENT STRICTEST IMMIGRATION LAW IN EU FROM MARCH

Hungary will start implementing the strictest immigration law in the European Union on March 1, a state secretary of the interior ministry said on Thursday, adding that the new law aimed to "close all loopholes" and prevent migrants from arriving in Hungary, even as guest workers.

Bence Rétvári noted that the law which came into force on Jan 1 but allowed a two-month grace period for implementation, replaces a 16-year-old law and unifies regulations.

The law was prompted by growing migration pressure, as hundreds of thousands of people have been trying to enter the EU since the crisis of 2015, Rétvári said. "But Hungary has made it clear it will protect Hungarians' interests and the EU's external borders." The new law declares that companies can only take on third-country employees if Hungarians are unavailable for the job in question, he said, adding that government offices will determine whether Hungarians can be found for jobs accordingly.

As a result, the number of third-country arrivals may never exceed the

number of vacancies, Rétvári said. The law also contains a list of posts that may not be filled by third-country workers, he added. Guest workers must leave the country within six days of losing their jobs, and employers must assist their departure or risk being fined, Retvari said.

Further, guest workers will not be allowed to bring their families into the country, he said. Staying in Hungary "is not a fundamental right" for any third-country citizen, Retvari added. Residency permits are issued for fixed terms only, and under no circumstances are they prolonged automatically, he said. One person may have only one justification for residence in the country, and those violating regulations will be expelled with immediate effect, he said.

Rétvári also slammed the opposition for not supporting the government legislation in parliament, saying left-wing parties "are obliged to be pro-migration to fit their financiers' expectations." Rétvári insisted that the left wing had been pro-migration ever since "attacking the construction of the fence on the southern border and voting in favour" of the EU migration pact in the European Parliament.

GOVT: ONLINE ADS ABROAD AIM TO HIGHLIGHT DANGERS OF MIGRATION

The government's online advertisements targeted at foreign markets aim to draw attention to the massive migration pressures at Hungary's southern borders,

the Government Information Centre said on Thursday. "The migrants storming our borders are not unfortunate people but terrorists ... who have been violently attacking our border guards," the centre said in a statement. "Everyone in Europe needs to know this."

Last year 173,000 migrants tried to enter Hungary, and there have been more and more armed attacks against border guards, it said, adding that the ads contained video evidence of some of the attacks. Decision-makers in Brussels need to be reminded that Hungary has received no financial help whatsoever for protecting the EU's external border, the statement said, adding that the EU migration package currently being finalised would only worsen the situation by introducing the mandatory distribution of migrants while overriding the strict migration procedures enforced in Hungary, it added.

LÁZÁR: NEW SYSTEM OF TRANSPORT FEES 'GREATEST UTILITY FEE CUT EVER'

March 1 will be the start of a new era in Hungary's transport system, with the introduction of new transport fees, representing the "greatest utility fee cut ever", the minister of construction and transport said on Thursday. János Lázár told a press conference that the new system of transport fees were to make the lives of over 4 million people simpler and better. The introduction of the new system of fees represents

the greatest revamp of the MÁV-Volán group in the past 35 years, he said. There are some 4.5 million commuters, and "starting from March 1, everybody can reach their destination at lower fees, in a simpler and fairer system", he added. Since the introduction of county and country passes, more than 5.25 million such passes have been sold, with 9 out of every 10 passes sold being county and country passes, he said.

He also said that the new passes had not resulted in lower revenues, with both MÁV and Volán closing record-breaking years in 2023. With MÁV registering 130 million journeys in 2022 and 180 million in 2023, and Volán 530 million journeys in 2022 and 570 million in 2023, revenues grew from 122 billion (EUR 310m) in 2022 to 128 billion in 2023, he added.

The number of journeys increased as a result of the introduction of cheaper county and country passes, while a jump in the sale of cheaper tickets resulted in higher revenues on the whole, he said.

Lázár said that 700,000 children aged 6-14 would be able to travel for free and 1 million young people aged 14-25 would travel at half price. Free travel will remain to be in force for people aged above 65, which will also apply to an additional 300,000 people under 65 who are eligible for pension-type services, he added. Fully 200,000 families with three or more children, or a total of 1 million people, will be eligible for free long-distance travel from March 1.

Gergely Karácsony, the city's mayor, said the agreement would benefit those living both in the capital and its agglomeration. He told a press conference that though he had been critical of several of the government's recent policies concerning Budapest, the agreement on the reciprocal use of city and nationwide passes would define a transport policy and integrated public transport that would be in Hungary's interest for decades. He thanked the government for its "partner-like approach" and the transport companies involved for their cooperation. Karácsony noted that the agreement will introduce a more passenger-friendly pass system from March 1. He noted that under the agreement, income from the Budapest, Pest County and nationwide passes and fare supplements will be divided in proportion to how the services are provided. "What this means percentage-wise will have to be calculated by the sides by the end of March, taking 2023 as the base year," Karácsony added.

He said another reason why the deal would benefit Budapest was that it was set to put an end to "an era of political bargaining" on how much is allocated to public transport in the state budget. Meanwhile, Karácsony said reducing traffic on Budapest's roads was critical to the city and the country's "green future". It was therefore in the city's fundamental interest, he argued, to offer a cheaper and simpler public transport system to those commuting between the capital and its agglomeration.

JOBBIK: PENALISE COMPANIES FIRING HUNGARIANS FROM JOBS FILLED BY GUEST WORKERS

Companies that fire Hungarians and employ guest workers in the same job should pay back government grants with interest, according to a bill proposed by the opposition Jobbik party. The repayments should be used to fund the training, housing and family support of Hungarians, Jobbik lawmaker Dániel Z Kárpát told a press conference on Thursday. "Guest workers could be sent home altogether from certain sectors if inactive Hungarians can be reintegrated into the labour market, and if Hungarians working abroad can be persuaded to come home," he said. Rather than "streamlining the arrival of guest workers", the government should work on ensuring the livelihood of Hungarians in their homeland, he added.

KSH: DECLINE IN BIRTHS IN JAN OUTPACES DECLINE IN DEATHS

The number of births fell by 12% in January compared with the same month in the previous year, while deaths dropped by 1.1%, according to preliminary data published by the Central Statistical Office (KSH). Meanwhile, the number of marriages went up by 37% in the same period. Fully 6,650 children were born in

January, while there were 11,723 deaths. The natural population loss was 5,073 people compared with 4,305 in January 2023. Fully 84,298 children were born between January 2024 and February 2023, 5.7% fewer than in the same period of last year. Altogether 127,066 people died between January 2024 and February 2023, 5.9% fewer than in the same period of last year. There were 8.2 live births and 14.4 deaths per thousand inhabitants, the former 1.1 lower than in January 2023, while the death rate was 0.1 of a percentage point lower.

INVESTMENT VOLUME FALLS 3.0% IN Q4

Investment volume in Hungary shrank by an annual 3.0% in the fourth quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Quarter on quarter, volume rose by a seasonally adjusted 1.5%. KSH said most branches of the national economy had contributed to the decline, with investments in manufacturing and real estate deteriorating overall performance, but public administration and the energy industry contributing to it. In the full year of 2023, investment volume fell by 8.5% from the previous year. Commenting on the data, the national economy ministry said the quarter-on-quarter increase in investment volume was a promising sign suggesting a gradual pick-up in investment activity. The ministry reiterated that the goal was to restore economic growth in 2024 and to maintain it around 4%. To achieve that, the government wants

to restore consumption, boost labour market activity and maintain the ratio of investments above 25%, the ministry said.

JAN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCER PRICES DOWN 6.8%

Factory gate prices in Hungary dropped by an annual 6.8% in January, falling for the sixth month in a row after rising for years, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Prices for domestic sale fell by 7.6%, while export prices declined by 6.3%. Month on month, industrial producer prices edged up by 0.3% as prices for domestic sale fell by 1.1% and export prices rose by 1.0%.

FINE ARTS MUSEUM TO SHOW HUNGARIAN- AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC LEGACY, MESOPOTAMIA, MUNKÁCSY

The Museum of Fine Arts this year is presenting exhibitions on the Hungarian-American photographic legacy, the heritage of Mesopotamia, and a retrospective marking the 180th birth anniversary of painter Mihály Munkácsy, the museum's director said on Thursday. László Baán told a press conference that the museum attracted a record-breaking 800,000-plus visitors last year, partly thanks to the El Greco and Csontvary exhibitions.

This year's programme will include a show The Hungarian American Photographic Legacy in cooperation with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The show will present the works of

some 30 photographers, including André Kertész, László Moholy-Nagy, Martin Munkácsi and Robert Capa, as well as lesser-known photographers of Hungarian origin who worked in the US, he said.

An exhibition opening in October presenting the heritage of Mesopotamia will display over 150 objects on loan from seven European collections, including Berlin's Vorderasiatisches Museum, Paris's Musée du Louvre and Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, Baán said. Starting from November, an exhibition of more than fifty works by Munkácsi, as well as archive photographs, documents and objects will explore the painter's life work and success, he said.

DEMETER: NEW COORDINATED MUSEUM CENTRE WILL HAVE TO PRESENT CULTURAL UNITY

The new Széchenyi Ferenc Public Collection Centre comprising six cultural institutions will have to present the unity of Hungarian national cultural identity, Szilárd Demeter, the director of the Petőfi

Museum of Literature (PIM), said. The coordinated operations of the National Museum, the National Széchenyi Library, PIM, the Hungarian Natural Science Museum, the Museum of Applied Arts and the Hungarian Museum of Commerce and Hospitality will have to ensure that these institutions are able to offer a public service that can present a unified national cultural identity, Demeter, who will take over as director of the National Museum on March 6, told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio. Demeter said he disagreed with the idea that writers, visual artists and musicians should operate separately, arguing that culture was whole when it was unified. "The Hungarian National Museum isn't just an institution with dusty objects, but a knowledge centre, and presenting the diversity, unity and complexity of this knowledge is a good task," he said.

SWISS CRIMINAL ARRESTED IN DEBRECEN

Hungarian authorities have arrested a Swiss national convicted for blackmail, robbery, theft and drug trafficking,

in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, police.hu said. The 29-year-old man sentenced to over five and a half years in prison was detained in a raid in a luxury apartment block in the city on Feb. 20, the site said. The man wanted on an international and European list was handed a 2-year prison term by the Zurich regional court in 2019 and an additional 44-month term in 2020, said the site, adding that he was facing extradition.

DAWN HEAT RECORDS BROKEN ON WEDNESDAY

Unusually mild weather continued on Wednesday, with dawn heat records broken in the country and in the capital, HungaroMet said on its website. A dawn temperature of 11.1 degrees Celsius was measured in Tatabánya, in northern Hungary, beating the previous record of 10.5 C measured at meteorological stations in Keszthely and Zalaegerszeg in 1994, the site said on Thursday. In Budapest, 9.7 C was measured in the south-western Lágymányos area, breaking the previous record of 8.9 C measured at Országút station in 1912.