

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamás Kovács

House Speaker László Kövér meets Xiao Jie, vice chairman of the standing committee of China's People's Congress

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU leaders begin two-day summit in Brussels

Leaders' Nuclear Summit in Brussels

Cbank presser on competitiveness report

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Middle East

TOP STORY

HUNGARY TO RESUME EU-MALAYSIA FREE TRADE TALKS

During its European Union presidency in the second half of 2024, Hungary plans to restart free trade negotiations between the bloc and Malaysia, the foreign minister said.

Speaking after talks with his Malaysian counterpart, Mohamad Hasan, Péter Szijjártó said on Wednesday that improving the foreign trade ties of the EU was of paramount importance. Regarding the negotiations with Malaysia, which started some 10 years ago but were later abandoned, Szijjártó said: "Unfortunately, the EU wants to mix issues not pertaining to the economy and trade into those talks," which he said may result in the EU becoming isolated. "We do not want to see that happening." Meanwhile, the political cooperation agreement between the EU and Malaysia is yet to be ratified by 16 member states, he said. The Hungarian presidency will endeavour to convince those states to take that step, he added. The two countries will also convene the first meeting of the Hungarian-Malaysian joint committee, Szijjártó said. Trade between the two countries has topped 830 million dollars, and will need further incentives, he added. Like Hungary, Malaysia was working to become a regional forerunner of e-vehicle transition, Szijjártó said.

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.

All rights reserved. Enquiries should be made to the English Help Desk at +361 441 9340
For MTI's real time coverage please visit <http://english.mti.hu>, <http://econews.hu>



SZIJJÁRTÓ: COOPERATION WITH SINGAPORE BENEFICIAL FOR HUNGARY, EU

Cooperation with Singapore is beneficial for Hungary and the EU, with bilateral trade between the two countries likely hitting a record this year, and Singaporean companies showing increasing interest in investing in Hungary, the foreign minister said early on Wednesday. The foreign ministry said in a statement that Péter Szijjártó met Mohamad Maliki bin Osman, the head of the Singaporean Prime Minister's Office, and Grace Fu, the minister-in-charge for trade relations, on his visit to the city state. Szijjártó told journalists after the meetings that bilateral trade between Singapore and Hungary had exceeded one billion dollars last year. This year also looked "promising", with 24 Hungarian companies approved to export pork and poultry there, he said.

Singaporean companies were showing increasing interest in investment in Hungary, Szijjártó said. One planned by household appliance manufacturer Dyson is expected to be announced within a week, he added. "Singapore is the region's most competitive country, one of the most open economies in the world and Hungary's most important trade partner in south-east Asia, with most of the investments from the region coming to Hungary from Singapore."

The closest possible cooperation with Singapore would also be in

the European Union's interest, and Hungary will make an effort to negotiate a digital trade agreement when it takes over the EU's rotating presidency in July, he said. Although the EU and Singapore signed an investment protection agreement years ago, only 16 states including Hungary have ratified it so far, Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary would use its presidency to encourage the other 11 countries to take that step, he added. During the visit, the ministers extended an agreement on Hungary offering government grants to 30 Singaporean students to study in the country, he said.

Hungary and Singapore also see the most important aspects of world politics and economy similarly, and often diverge from the international mainstream in their position, Szijjártó said. Similarly to Hungary, Singapore is "very protective of its sovereignty, and has adopted a law to protect it... Singapore is also being attacked in politics, as is Hungary, for protecting its sovereignty," he said. "We agreed that every country has a right to protect their national interests and to protect their sovereignty," the minister said.

Touching on the war in Ukraine, Szijjártó said Singapore and Hungary had similar views on the conflict, as both were calling for peace and saw it as a task of the international community to "talk to those with whom they don't necessarily agree with". "Neither Ukraine nor Russia can win the war, so there is definitely a

need of negotiations. The question is only when they will take place... We are calling for the talks to start as soon as possible because that is how we can save the most lives and pre-empt further destruction," he said.

ORBÁN TO HOLD TALKS IN BRUSSELS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has travelled to Brussels to attend a summit of the European Union Nuclear Alliance on Thursday, the PM's press chief said. After the Leaders' Nuclear Summit, Orbán will attend the European Council's two-day meeting which will focus on the war in Ukraine, security and defence, the Middle East crisis, EU enlargement, migration and the situation of European agriculture.

BÓKA CALLS FOR 'CLEAR EU STANCE' ON RUSSIA- UKRAINE CONFLICT

Hungary is calling on the European Union to set clear political guidelines on its approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the minister in charge of European Union affairs said on Tuesday. The EU must ensure its reactions to the developments of the war are predictable for the bloc as well as Ukraine, János Bóka told the Hungarian press after a meeting of EU affairs ministers in Brussels. The EU's policy on Ukraine had started developing in a way that could create strategic uncertainty instead of setting a clear political framework,

he added. The EU must also clarify the areas in which it will support Ukraine, he said. "We don't think we can responsibly take on commitments the boundaries of which are not clear to member states."

Regarding the conflict between Hamas and Israel, Bóka said Hungary condemned the attacks by the terrorist organisation and demanded the immediate release of the hostages. Hungary recognised Israel's right to self-defence, he said. Security risks to Israel must be eliminated before talks can start on the future of negotiations on the Middle East, and on avoiding escalation, he added. Humanitarian ceasefires must help aid efforts and the release of hostages, he added. "We see it as important that aid reaches those truly in need of help and that Hamas and other terrorist organisations can't abuse the efforts."

Touching on the matter of European agriculture, Bóka said Hungary saw the issue as of primary importance. The Common Agricultural Policy must take into account the "the repercussions of opening the market to Ukraine, which is now felt in almost all member states," he added. The European summit starting on Thursday will discuss issues on migration, including the protection of the external borders and cooperation with third countries. Hungary is hoping for further deals similar to that signed with Egypt and "we would like the European Council to discuss and make decisions on the cooperation with Türkiye," he added.

BUDAPEST SEEKING TO EASE HOUSING SHORTAGE

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony announced the establishment of a city agency to match renters with home owners at a press conference on Wednesday. Karácsony said the city was working to "exploit hidden reserves", adding that Budapest had a lot of vacant, unrented units, creating "waste and shortage" on the housing market at the same time. The mayor also said it was "very important" to increase the ratio of municipally owned rental units in the city. The new Metropolitan Home Agency will ensure that rent and utilities bills are paid, taking on "practically all" of the risk related to renting out flats in the city, said Vera Kovács, the agency's head. Owners of flats between 20sqm and 100sqm, in good condition, are being invited to join the scheme. Soon, owners of flats in need of repair or renovation will also be allowed to register for the programme.

SOCIALISTS CALL ON GOVT TO ADDRESS 'PLIGHT' OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Socialists are calling on the government to start talks on wage hikes at state-run universities, similarly to those that have been transferred to foundations under the government's university restructuring scheme in recent years, the head of

the opposition party's board said on Wednesday. "The atmosphere is tense in several of Hungary's prominent universities where teachers and other employees have launched a petition for higher wages," István Hiller, a former education minister, told an online press conference.

Wages had been hiked at universities that agreed to participate in the structural reform but not at outliers, Hiller said. The wage tension had been exacerbated by primary and secondary school teachers' wage hikes last year, which resulted in "some students earning more a year after graduation than their university lecturers," he said.

Hiller also called for a review of the restructuring, which he said "has failed to yield benefits". "Operation has become more complicated, red tape has grown but not the general quality [of education]... Although the state is no longer an owner of these universities, it continues to finance them." He called for the state to maintain research universities outside Budapest too. The party is also calling on the government to take steps for Hungarian higher education and research to "re-enter EU circulation", he said. Researchers "have fallen prey to a debate between the government and the EU", and had been excluded from cooperation with other EU institutions, he added. He said the government should "stop discriminating against universities that chose to remain autonomous".

JOBBIK CALLS FOR EVICTION MORATORIUM ON SITE OF RÁKOSRENDEZŐ INVESTMENT

The opposition Jobbik - Conservatives have called for halting the 30-day eviction notice issued to residents living on the site of an investment project in Rákosrendező, in Budapest. The 5 billion euro rehabilitation project planned by UAE developer Eagle Hills would bring about the eviction from some 25 flats in the area, lawmaker Daniel Z Kárpát said, and called for a moratorium until residents can be offered flats "equivalent or of higher quality" than their present apartments. "The procedure may be lawful but it is unacceptable that the interests of foreign investors should precede those of the Hungarian residents", he said.

COMPETITION OFFICE FINES COPYCAT WEBSITE OPERATOR HUF 345 M

Hungary's Competition Office (GVH) has fined Deutsche Lotto-

und Sportwetten Limited, registered in Malta, 345 million forints (EUR 873,000) for operating a Hungarian language lottery website intended to replicate one run by state-owned lottery company Szerencsejáték. GVH said it had taken into account the traffic generated by the Lottoland website, as well as the operator's decision to waive its right of appeal, when determining the size of the fine. Szerencsejáték earlier sued the Lottoland operator for trademark infringement and won.

HUNGARY TO SHOWCASE GERMAN EDITIONS OF RECENT TITLES AT OWN STAND AT LEIPZIG BOOK FAIR

Hungary will present the German edition of titles published over the past years and four programmes at its own stand at the prestigious Leipzig Book Fair running between March 21 and 24, the Petőfi Cultural Agency (PKU) said on Wednesday. On Thursday morning,

a discussion will be hosted by PKU on Vojvodina Hungarian writer László Végel's 2015 novel *Balkan Beauty* at the stand, the agency said in a statement. The event will be moderated by Annamarie Türk of Wieser Verlag, the book's German publisher, with Christina Kunze, the book's translator, acting as an interpreter, the agency said. The Hungarian stand's programme will continue in the afternoon with the presentation of the anthology *Die Rückerobung des Reservats* by Panni Puskás and Norbert Vass published in partnership Klak Verlag and Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin. At the event, Regina Gisbertz will recite parts from the book in the presence of the two Hungarian authors. Later in the afternoon, Zoltán Lesi's anthology on Hungarian emigration entitled *An unseren Grenzen haben wir Angst* (We are afraid on the borders) will be presented. On Friday evening, a round-table discussion will be held with poets Kinga Tóth and Franziska Dehkordy, the agency said.