

PHOTO OF THE DAY



One of four new ships put in service at Lake Balaton

MTI/Tamás Vasvári

UPCOMING EVENTS

Easter celebrations

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

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO OPEN DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN TANZANIA

Hungary will open a diplomatic mission in Tanzania with a view to developing cooperation between the two countries, and will work to strengthen ties between the EU and east Africa during its presidency in the second half of 2024, the foreign minister said in Dar es-Salaam on Thursday.

Péter Szijjártó told a press conference after talks with his Tanzanian counterpart, January Yusuf Makamba, that Africa's stability was key to Europe's security. He said Tanzania was "one of the pillars of stability in its region", as it played an important role in combating terrorism and in providing for refugees. The security consequences of the migration crisis "are well known by now", Szijjártó said: "Europe has seen parallel societies emerge and the terror threat increase." Migration pressure would be even greater without "countries conducting responsible policies such as Tanzania". The threat remained, he said, as Africa's population is set to grow by 750 million in the next 20 years. Unless the situation can be improved by developing education and health care, and by creating jobs, Europe will have to face a dire situation, he said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY SUPPORTS AFRICAN COUNTRIES WITH DEEDS, WORDS

Hungary “is supporting African countries with deeds as well as words”, and had invested some 500 million forints (EUR 1.3m) in projects in Tanzania over the past three years, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, after meeting his Tanzanian counterpart in Dar es-Salaam. A government grant programme offering scholarships to 30 Tanzanian students every year is now in its 6th year, he added. The two countries are also running wide-ranging cooperation between its universities and an exchange programme in diplomatic training, he added. The ministers also signed a framework agreement “allowing certain Hungarian water management companies using cutting-edge technology to contribute to developing Tanzania’s safe drinking water supply”, Szijjártó said, according to a ministry statement. He said last year’s record 7.5 million dollar trade volume between the two countries was a “good starting point ... but there’s room for improvement.” To further improve cooperation, Hungary is planning to open a diplomatic mission in Dar es-Salaam soon, he said. The last time a Hungarian foreign minister visited Tanzania was 37 years ago, “at a time when the world was divided into two large blocks and maintaining relations was much

harder... Unfortunately, international politics seems to be going the same way now, and history is repeating itself.”

Touching on the currently raging wars, Szijjártó said “some reactions of the international community are tantamount to failure”, as they had adopted measures posing serious challenges to many countries worldwide, rather than brokering peace. He said Hungary was sharply opposing policies leading to new blocks forming in the world, and had a vested interest in connectivity, networks, international cooperation based on mutual respect, and a unified and fair world trade. Hungary and Tanzania have similar views on a number of matters, he added. “Both countries are extremely sensitive when it comes to matters of sovereignty, are proud of their heritage and culture, resistant to external intervention, and do not allow the mainstream to rule over their internal affairs.” “We both believe that democracy hinges on the will of the people and the democracy remains democracy, independently from the political persuasion of those in power,” he added. The democratic qualities of a regime were often questioned in Europe as soon as liberal forces failed to come to power, he said. “Tanzania is a good example of how the pressure of the international liberal mainstream does not limit itself to Europe.” Regarding the situation in Ukraine, Szijjártó said that as a neighbouring country, Hungary was experiencing the consequences of the war first-hand, adding, at

the same time, that its negative effects would be felt worldwide, regardless of geographical distance. He said Hungary and Tanzania were taking a stand for peace together in international organisations, hoping that the sooner the conflict could be solved through diplomatic means, the fewer people would die and the challenges worldwide would diminish.

SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION OFFICE REJECTS ‘ACCUSATIONS’ OF VENICE COMMISSION

The sovereignty protection office on Thursday rejected the Venice Commission’s report on Hungary’s sovereignty protection law, calling the report “biased, riddled with errors and politically motivated”. The advisory body to the Council of Europe visited Hungary on February 15-16. In a statement on the findings issued on March 18, it said that the legal basis of the office as the protector of constitutional identity was questionable. While the delegation met the sovereignty protection office’s head, “it is not on public record what other players or factors had a bearing on the Commission’s stance, besides Hungarian state organisations and opposition politicians,” the office said in a statement. The Venice Commission’s report “was drafted to be used by various organisations of the European Union, for instance in infringement procedures against Hungary, and as a basis for political

attacks against the country," the office said. The report's "gravest factual error" was that it said the office had the right to conduct investigations, the sovereignty protection office said. The Commission also voiced concerns about what they said was a lack of legal remedy against the sovereignty protection office, it said. However, as the office was not an authority, such remedy was unnecessary, it said. The report is biased as it questions legal practices such as the procedure of presidential election in Hungary, against which it had raised no concerns earlier, the sovereignty protection office's statement said. "The report also shows that the Commission is debating Hungary's right to freely set up its institutions". "In calling for scrapping the sovereignty protection law, the Venice Commission is clearly seeking to strip Hungary of the tools to protect its national autonomy and to stand up against foreign attempts of influence," the statement said.

KNYF: 'NO DOCUMENTS DISAPPEARED IN SO-CALLED VÖLNER-SCHADL CASE'

All the documents pertaining to the so-called Völner-Schadl case are available, as well as evidence not included in the indictment, and "none have disappeared", the head of the Central Investigation Prosecutor's Office (KNYF) said on Thursday. At a press conference, Pál Fürcht rejected accusations against the office that "facts" had been removed from the indictment. The indictment

contains all data the prosecutor's office had deemed provable, the charges against the accused and the evidence supporting the facts, he added. Proof not supporting the charges had also been filed, "all data can be followed up on," he said. The case concerns an investigation involving Pál Völner, a former state secretary of the justice ministry, and György Schadl, the former head of the Hungarian Chamber of Bailiffs.

Prosecutors allege that Schadl had regularly bribed Völner until July 2021 and used his influence to secure the appointment of bailiffs of his choosing in exchange for kickbacks. Charges of corruption, property crimes and money laundering have been filed against a total of 22 people in the case. According to the indictment, Schadl paid Völner a total of at least 83 million forints (EUR 217,000) in bribes between May 2018 and July 2021, who then exercised his influence as state secretary and deputy minister in Schadl's interest.

Fürcht said that former Justice Minister Judit Varga was heard as a witness by the Metropolitan Investigation Prosecutor's Office on Wednesday, declining to disclose details on an ongoing investigation. He said that several separate investigations had been launched on connected matters, and were under way at other investigation authorities. He said he would not comment on the evidence submitted in the ongoing investigation but the authorities would provide information once the investigations are completed.

FINMIN: 'FACTS DISPROVE' BUDAPEST MAYOR'S CLAIMS

Financial reports of the past five years "clearly disprove" claims by the mayor of Budapest that the city was not paying taxes because "the government is bleeding out the city", the finance minister said on Thursday. Mihály Varga posted a chart on Facebook showing 1,107 billion forints (EUR 2.8bn) in business tax payments and central budget allocations to the municipal budget in 2019-2023 as against 160 billion paid by the city to state coffers in solidarity tax during that period. "The mayor has not paid taxes since last June ... Budapest has rejected to pay 46 billion forints in solidarity tax until March," Varga said. Out of that amount, 28 billion forints had already been collected by the Treasury while the mayor was seeking to postpone the payment of the remaining 18 billion, the minister said. The solidarity tax is a contribution by wealthier local councils to support poorer localities, Varga said. The city's leftist leadership would be harming them, had the government not supplemented their funding, he added.

HUNGARY GROSS WAGES UP 14.6% YR/YR IN JAN

The gross average wage of full-time employees in Hungary amounted to 605,100 forints (EUR 1,532) in January, increasing by an annual 14.6%, while

net pay including supplementary payments came to 416,600 forints, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Thursday. Net wages were up by 14.5% year on year, while real wages rose by an annual 10.4%.

Real wages rose by 10.4%, calculating with January CPI of 3.8%. The gross median wage increased by 16.9% to 493,700 forints.

Hungary's statutory monthly minimum wage was raised by 15% for unskilled labourers and by 10% for skilled workers from December 1. Excluding the 65,600 Hungarians working full time in fostered work programmes, the average gross monthly wage was 615,100 forints. Commenting on the data, national economy ministry said the real wage increase was thanks to government measures pushing inflation back to 5.5% by the end of 2023 and 3.8% in January. Since a turnaround last September, real wages have been growing constantly and increasingly swiftly, the ministry said. Meanwhile, the number of jobholders has grown by 1 million compared with 2010, and the number of registered jobseekers is at a historic low, the statement added.

GUEST NIGHTS UP BY 18.9% IN FEB

Guest nights at commercial and private accommodations in Hungary rose by an annual 18.9% to 2,194,000 in February, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Thursday. The number of guest nights spent by domestic travellers increased by 13.6% to 1,021,000, and guest nights spent by foreign visitors climbed 23.9% to 1,173,000. In January-February, the number of guest nights rose by 14.6% year-on-year. The number spent by domestic travellers increased by 11.2% and the number spent by foreign tourists by 17.9%.

The capital was the most popular destination in February, accounting for 942,000 guest nights. Lake Balaton was runner-up, with 255,000 guest nights. Revenue of commercial accommodations, which include hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, camp sites, resorts and hostels, rose by 21% to 35.7 billion forints (EUR 9m). Commenting on the fresh data, the national economy ministry said the tourism sector was making a "meaningful contribution" to restarting

economic growth. Revenue of tourism accommodations, including private accommodations, rose by 15% close to 48 billion forints, it said.

KSH: DECLINE IN BIRTHS OUTPACES DECLINE IN DEATHS IN FEB

The number of births fell by 5.7% in February compared with the same month in the previous year, while deaths went down by 3%, according to preliminary data published by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Thursday. Meanwhile, the number of marriages went up by 22% with 2,363 couples tying the knot in the same period. Fully 6,197 children were born in February, while there were 10,664 deaths. The natural population loss was 4,467 people compared with 4,416 in February 2023. Fully 83,928 children were born between February 2024 and March 2023, 6.6% fewer than in the same period of last year. Altogether 128,066 people died between February 2024 and March 2023, 4.2% fewer than in the same period of last year. There were 8.2 live births and 14.5 deaths per thousand inhabitants in the first two months.