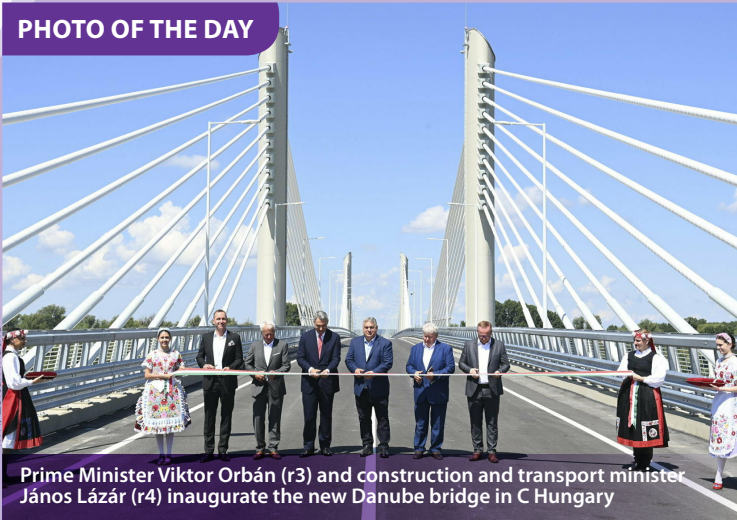


PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (r3) and construction and transport minister János Lázár (r4) inaugurate the new Danube bridge in C Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

PM Orbán's interview with public radio

Stats office releases April figures on industrial output

Events related to the wars in the Middle East, Ukraine

TOP STORY

HUNGARY TO ATTEND UKRAINE PEACE SUMMIT

Hungary will attend the Ukraine peace summit starting on June 15 in Switzerland at foreign ministerial level, Péter Szijjártó has said.

Speaking in St. Petersburg, the foreign minister added that the government regretted, however, that the summit would not be attended by both warring sides. Szijjártó said Hungary's participation at the peace conference was driven by the country's "absolute position on the side of peace", and it attended all events where peace was on the agenda. At the same time, he expressed his regret that the conference would be held without the participation of Russia. Hungary, he said, believed that a real result could only be expected if both sides were sat at the negotiating table. "This will not be the case this time," he said, adding, however, that Hungary respected Switzerland's efforts and would attend the conference at the foreign ministerial level. Speaking later at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, he said: "We urge and pray for an immediate ceasefire... We believe that under peaceful circumstances we might be able to develop much quicker and much more smoothly, and life will again be calmer and more peaceful in Europe if we can put peace in the forefront of international politics."

SZIJJÁRTÓ WELCOMES BRAZIL-CHINA STATEMENT ON UKRAINE WAR

Hungary welcomes the statement signed by Brazil and China on how to resolve the war in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in St Petersburg, adding that the statement promoted peace in the country, which was in Hungary's interest. Speaking to journalists on the sidelines of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, Szijjártó said the statement signed by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Celso Amorim, the Brazilian president's chief adviser on foreign policy, was a step forward because it addressed ways to promote peace. "Therefore we welcome, appreciate and value this common statement," he said. Hungary's government, he added, agreed that the solution could not be found on the battlefield and could only be brought about through negotiations. Szijjártó said the government was concerned by the statements by some European leaders on the possible use of nuclear weapons. "We do hope that no one is going to think about it seriously."

"We also agree with the approach that nuclear energy facilities need to be protected," Szijjártó said. Cooperation in nuclear energy is not subject to European Union sanctions and Hungary's government will reject any restrictions in the sector, he said. Hungary's energy needs, he added, could only be met with nuclear energy

in the mix, noting that its Paks plant runs on Russian fuel, "which is thus key to a safe energy supply", he said. "It is not only that we do not support sanctions; we are interested in further improving our nuclear cooperation with Russia," he said.

NAGY: STATE, FRENCH CO- INVESTOR ACQUIRE LISZT INTL AIRPORT

The purchase agreement on the Hungarian state and an associated investor acquiring Liszt Ferenc International Airport has been signed, Márton Nagy, the national economy minister, said on Thursday. "We've got it back: the airport is once again in Hungarian hands," he said. The purchase involving state-owned Corvinus Zrt acquiring an 80% stake was made in partnership with French-owned Vinci Airports, which acquired 20%, the minister said. The purchase price was 3.1 billion euros. An agreement was reached with a consortium of lenders on extending 1.44 billion euros of loans taken out by Budapest Airport's former owners, AviAlliance, owned by Canada's Public Sector Pension Investment Board.

ORBÁN URGES VOTERS TO CHOOSE PEACE 'IN THE NAME OF NATIONAL UNITY'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has urged voters to choose peace in this Sunday's elections "in the name

of national unity". Speaking at the inauguration of the new Tomori Pál Bridge on the Danube linking Paks and Kalocsa, in central Hungary, the prime minister said the bridge was not just a structure linking the two banks of the river, but "a gigantic exclamation mark made of steel and concrete". "It reminds us Hungarians of the danger posed by division, especially in a time of war," he said. "If we don't stick together, we'll become the playground of foreign powers, our country will be condemned to senseless destruction, and we'll write ourselves out of history for a long time because our fate will be taken out of our hands," Orbán said. "This warning is a timely one again when Europe is in a state of preparation for war." The prime minister called for national unity, saying that "on June 9, we're only allowed to vote for peace, in the name of national unity." Orbán urged those at the ceremony to back the candidates of the allied ruling Fidesz and Christian Democrat parties in Sunday's elections and to "give it their all" in the final days of the campaign.

He said the construction of the new Kalocsa-Paks Bridge was part of a "complex, well thought-out long-term national development plan". The prime minister said his government had become a "professional" when it came to the inauguration of bridges in recent years, noting that a total of 19 bridges have been built since 2010 compared with the five built under the previous Socialist-led

government. He said the government intended to carry out as many investment projects as possible in the southern half of the country, adding that this required roads and bridges. Orbán said he was convinced that the southern parts of Hungary would grow in importance in the future, and the trade turnover between Serbia and Hungary would turn this part of the country into a “gateway to the West”. As part of this plan, the M6 motorway has been extended to the southern border, linking the Croatian-Slavonian areas with Hungary, he said. The next step will be to divert traffic from Serbia, logistics hubs, investments and a significant number of production units to this region with a view to connecting the Paks and Kalocsa areas to a fast-growing region, he said.

The prime minister noted that two of Hungary’s most important strategic investment projects, namely the new nuclear power plant in Paks and a section of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line, are being carried out in this region. He added that the next bridge will be built at Mohács, in the south. Orbán said the Kalocsa-Paks Bridge would benefit not just locals, but the entire country. He said Hungarians wanted to be able to “connect with their own people and the outside world”, but Kalocsa and Paks had not been connected until now. The Sárköz region had so far been far removed from the country’s motorways, but the government considered it a

duty to connect the internal areas to the country’s bloodstream, he added. Orbán said that in 2010, the western part Hungary had been significantly more developed than the east, accounting for the lion’s share of the country’s industrial output and economic growth. This, he said, was “not only unfair, but also harmful” when it came to the country’s development, adding that the government had decided to build the “industrial triangle” of Miskolc, Nyíregyháza and Debrecen to free up the region’s economic potential. The major developments are ongoing and their completion is in sight, the prime minister said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: ENDANGERING HUNGARY’S ENERGY SUPPLY TANTAMOUNT TO ATTACK ON SOVEREIGNTY

The government considers all measures that could jeopardise the security of Hungary’s energy supply as “attacks on our national sovereignty”, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. The minister noted that Hungary was among the European states whose energy supply was hit the hardest by the fallout of the war in Ukraine. In the long term, this has also had the effect that “the issue of energy supply has become a hostage of political and ideological debates,” he added. Szijjártó said that “regardless of all the pressure” Hungary still refused

to consider energy “a political or ideological issue”. “For us energy supply is a practical question,” he said, adding that the government would not give up well-functioning partnerships, and “based on the physical reality and based on the infrastructure”, Hungary would not be able to import enough energy without Russian oil and gas.

The minister said Hungary had not received “any offer from anyone who would deliver the same volume of gas or oil according to the same schedule on the same level of reliability at the same price”. “And as long as there’s no such offer, no one has the moral right to put pressure on us to cut our relationships and change to other sources,” he said. Szijjártó pointed out that all projects that would have allowed such a switch-over have been cancelled or postponed, citing the cancellation of Western companies’ plans to start extracting natural gas from offshore fields in Romania. Meanwhile, Croatia, instead of expanding the capacity of its gas pipeline, has increased transit fees fivefold, he said.

He emphasised that the matter of the composition of the energy mix was one of national sovereignty, and the Hungarian government’s decisions on energy matters were determined solely by its aim to guarantee the country’s secure energy supply. He noted that Hungary needs 8 million tonnes of crude a year, 90% of which is covered from imports, and 70-80% of this comes from Russia.

For natural gas, Hungary's annual demand is 8.5 billion cubic metres, 80% of which comes from imports, including 70-80% from Russia. "And the stability of this delivery is a core national interest of ours," Szijjártó said. "Therefore we reject all international proposals, actions and decisions which would limit or restrict or worsen the security and the stability of these deliveries." He said this was why the government did not support the European Union's energy sanctions and rejected all customs duties on energy resources.

EU AFFAIRS MINISTER: HUNGARY TO PREPARE NEW COMPETITIVENESS PACT DURING EU PRESIDENCY

Hungary will prepare a new pact on European competitiveness during its upcoming EU presidency in the second half of 2024, the EU affairs minister said in Parliament on Thursday. Speaking at the 14th Infoparliament conference focusing on new info-technologies impacting society, János Bóka expressed hope that the informal European Political Community Summit planned to be held in Hungary in November would approve "at the highest political level" the pact and "set the direction for the EU for its next five-year institutional cycle". Strengthening the EU's competitiveness will be a main priority for the Hungarian presidency, Bóka said, adding that the July-

December schedule included 1,500-1,600 working group meetings and 230 presidency events. "The detailed schedule will be released on June 18." "After the EP elections we would like to open a new phase of cooperation," the minister said.

NATIONAL ECONOMY MINISTER HOLDS TALKS IN SLOVAKIA

Márton Nagy, the national economy minister, held talks in Slovakia on Thursday with several members of the Slovak government, and he expressed his sympathies and well wishes in connection with the assassination attempt against Prime Minister Robert Fico, his ministry said. Slovakia was Hungary's second most important trading partner in 2023, and Slovak FDI in Hungary came to more than 200 million euros in 2022, the national economy ministry said in a statement. Slovakia is the eighth most important investment destination for Hungarian businesses, with investments in the country exceeding 1.5 billion euros. Hungarian exports to Slovakia have risen by 93% and bilateral trade turnover is up 127% since 2010, it added.

At his talks with Erik Tomas, Slovakia's minister for labour, family and social affairs, Nagy said the Hungarian government aims to increase the labour activity rate in the 20-64 age group from the current 81% to 85% by mobilising the domestic labour

market reserves of around 300,000 people. Nagy also outlined Hungary's law on guest workers and the related legislative environment, emphasising that in Hungary the Hungarian workforce came first.

At his talks with Denisa Saková, the deputy prime minister, and Richard Raši, the minister of investment, regional development and informatisation, Nagy underlined the importance of continued FDI inflows. He said foreign and domestic businesses and sectors should be better connected to address the problem of dual economies and strengthen economic growth. One way of achieving this, he said, was to improve the export capacities of small and medium-sized companies and strengthen their role in supply chains.

Meanwhile, Nagy said electric vehicles were the future of Europe and so the European Union should introduce an incentive scheme for car purchases aimed at both manufacturers and customers. He also advocated providing support for the trade of used electric cars by developing new standards. A draft of the action plan will be presented to EU member states as a white paper at the meeting of the Competitiveness Council on July 8-9 under the Hungarian EU presidency, the statement said.

At his talks with Ladislav Kamenický, the finance minister, Nagy urged fiscal discipline across the whole of Europe, which he said was necessary for harmonising support for fiscal balance

and economic growth in the interest of boosting competitiveness Europe-wide. On the topic of taxes on excess corporate profits, Nagy said these taxes had fulfilled their role by helping to protect families and businesses. He added that there was "sense" in discussing how long such taxes should remain in effect.

GOVT TO INFORM PUBLIC BY E-MAIL ABOUT POSITION ON NATO PLANS

The government will inform the public by e-mail about its position on NATO's plans, the Government Information Centre (KTK) said. NATO's parliamentary assembly has issued a declaration urging member states to allow the use of Western weapons against military targets in Russia's territory, the centre said. European Union member states are sending ammunition, tanks and missile systems to Ukraine while several member states are planning to reintroduce or expand the scope of compulsory military service, it said. "They want Hungary to support these plans," KTK said, "but the government's position remains clear: we do not want to send weapons and soldiers, and we do not want Hungarian youth to participate in this war." KTK reaffirmed that the government called for a ceasefire and the start of peace talks at all forums. The information will be e-mailed to those who earlier gave an authorisation to receive such material, KTK said.

GOVT OFFICIAL: TOTAL OF HUF 88 BN PROVIDED TO BUDAPEST FOR HEALTH SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS

The government has provided in recent years increased support worth 88 billion forints (EUR 224m) to Budapest and its district councils for the development of the capital city's health-care system and improving the quality of services, the state secretary in charge of health said. Inaugurating a child health-care centre in the central 11th district of Újbuda, Bence Rétvári said funds from the Healthy Budapest Scheme had been allocated to the modernisation of 11 national institutions, 13 hospitals and 32 specialised clinics with 34 billion forints provided for the purchase of top-notch equipment. Under the scheme, more than 2.7 billion forints had been earmarked in additional funding to reduce the waiting lists for CT and MRI scans, he said. Rétvári said that while the government had provided resources for health-care developments "at a pace requested by Budapest", "the same cannot be said about the other side", the municipality of Budapest. He said Budapest was in a constant delay in using the resources which had prompted the government to extend the deadline for using the resources provided in 2020 and 2021 until the end of this year. Speaking about the new child healthcare centre, Rétvári

noted that the government had supported the project with over 4 billion forints.

PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE REJECTS DK COMPLAINT CONCERNING PRESIDENT SULYOK

The regional investigative prosecutor's office of Szeged, in southern Hungary, has thrown out a criminal complaint filed by the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) in connection with alleged abuse of office, fraud, and other purported crimes involving President Tamás Sulyok. The central investigative chief prosecutor's office (KNYF) said in a statement on Thursday that Klára Dobrev, MEP and shadow prime minister of DK, had accused Sulyok of illegally taking his salary as a constitutional judge between 2014 and 2019, having failed to report a conflict of interest, thus "committing fraud and abuse of office".

The prosecutor's office, however, ascertained that Sulyok had informed the chamber of lawyers of Szeged that he would suspend his activities as a lawyer after being nominated for the Constitutional Court post. At the chamber's enquiry in 2019, Sulyok again stated that he was not active as a lawyer, the cases he had earlier worked on being taken care of by a deputy, the office said in its statement. The prosecutors established that Sulyok had not worked as a lawyer during his tenure at the top court, so had not committed fraud or abuse of office

and received his salary lawfully, the statement said.

Concerning farmland agreements Dobrev referred to in her complaint, the prosecutor's office said "possible activities concerning those agreements cannot be subject to an investigation due to the expiry of the statute of limitations", but the office added that they would "examine if it is necessary or possible to take a civil action".

RETAIL SALES UP 3.7% IN APRIL

Retail sales in Hungary rose by an annual 3.7% in April, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Retail sales were up by an annual 3.2% when adjusted for calendar-year effects. Adjusted food sales rose by 3.6%, non-food sales increased by 4.3%, and vehicle fuel sales were up by 2.0%. Month on month, retail sales edged down by 0.9% when adjusted for seasonal and calendar year effects. Between January and April, retail sales rose by an adjusted 2.4% from the same period a year earlier.

Commenting on the data, the national economy ministry said consumption is in the recovery phase as a result of government measures to bring down inflation. Looking ahead, economic growth will resume this year, reaching 2.5% this year and 4.1% in 2025, supported by expanding consumption and the further strengthening of retail sales, the ministry added in a statement.

WATER MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE: DANUBE FLOOD TO PEAK IN NW HUNGARY

The flood water level of the river Danube is currently at its peak near Nagybjacs, in north-western Hungary, and it is expected to peak in Budapest early on Saturday, the national water management directorate OVF said. A floodgate has been closed at the river mouth of the Moson-Danube in order to reduce pressure on the affected stretch and guarantee the safety of Győr, the statement said. Some 317 people have been involved in flood prevention in the Szigetköz area, it added. Passing boats have been alerted to stay as far as possible from the riverbank in order to minimise the effect of the waves they generate. The water level is expected to peak in Budapest around 10-20 cm below the level of the lower embankment. No considerable rain was reported in the German and Austrian water catchment areas of the river Danube in the past 24 hours.

BAÁN'S MANDATE RENEWED AT HELM OF FINE ARTS MUSEUM

János Csák, the culture and innovation minister, has renewed László Baán's mandate at the helm of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest for another five-year term. Baán,

whose mandate had been set to expire in November, will "continue his excellent job done in the past 20 years" until December 2029, Csak told a press conference held in the museum. Baán told the gathering that the museum's results achieved so far were the achievement of "an excellent team". Baán was a government commissioner for a new collection of public buildings located in the City Park and continues to oversee the associated Liget Project.

MEMBERS OF CRIME RING SENTENCED FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING

A court in Gyula, in south-east Hungary, has handed down prison sentences to 16 people for trafficking women to Germany, whom they then forced to work as prostitutes, the court said in a statement on Thursday. In a non-binding ruling, the court sentenced the first and second degree defendant to 15 years in a high-security prison, and handed down prison sentences ranging from 3 years to 14.5 years to the others. One defendant was sentenced to 5 years in a juvenile correctional facility. Several of the defendants set up the crime ring in 2013, when they started forcing vulnerable women to work as street prostitutes in Germany. Some of the women had to pay a daily sum to them, others were stripped of all their income, the court said. The group operated as a criminal organisation since at least 2018, the statement said.

PROSECUTION BRINGS CHARGES AGAINST 13 HUNGARIAN, ROMANIAN MEMBERS OF INTL PEOPLE SMUGGLING RING

People smuggling charges have been brought against 13 Hungarian and Romanian nationals who as members of an international organised ring were allegedly involved in arranging for the illegal transport of more than 350 foreign nationals to western Europe, the chief public prosecutor's office said on Thursday. One instance claimed the life of an Indian national, it added. According to the indictment, the ring led by a Romanian man arranged for the transport of foreigners first by plane to Serbia and smuggled them later on in vans through Hungary and Austria to final destinations in

western Europe, the office said in a statement. The fatality occurred in Aug 2022 in Budapest's 9th district when the Indian man was one of the 20 illegal migrants jammed in a van that had no ventilation. Most of the suspects are in custody over charges of people smuggling and torturing humans and face prison terms or a fine and expulsion from Hungary. The Romanian ring leader is facing a legal procedure by the Romanian authorities, according to the statement.

POLICE TAKE DOWN FRAUDULENT CALL CENTRE NETWORK OPERATED FROM UKRAINE TARGETING HUNGARIANS

Ukrainian and Hungarian police in a joint operation have cracked down on a call centre network

specialised in online fraud operated from Ukraine and targeting Hungarians, police announced on Tuesday. Based on an investigation by Hungarian police, Ukrainian authorities were first contacted in March, and police action against two call centres was taken on June 3, head of the rapid response police unit of the national bureau of investigation, Áron Jeney, told a press conference, noting that 30 Hungarian victims have been identified whose losses total 360 million forints (EUR 920,000). The fraudulent call centres were operated by a man, 29, with two accomplices. So far, 41 people have been apprehended, 19 have been arrested, and foreign currency totalling more than 20 million forints in value, and 12 high-value vehicles have been seized.