

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Balázs Mohai

Budapest zoo's spring season gets under way

UPCOMING EVENTS

Public workers stage nationwide strike

Stats office releases Jan construction figures

Unions assoc VDSZ on Hankook strike, other wage talks in Hungary

Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference presser on spring session

National Election Committee meets

TOP STORY

HUNGARIAN FIRMS INVESTING IN ANGOLA

Several Hungarian companies will have the opportunity to undertake investment projects in Angola, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said.

Business cooperation between Hungary and Angola will mainly focus on agriculture, security technology and energy, Péter Szijjártó told MTI by phone from Luanda. "Africa is the continent of the future," he said. "The Hungarian government has launched its strategy of 'opening to the south' in order to help as many Hungarian firms as possible to successfully access the African economic area." Hungary's Eximbank has set up a fund of 40 million euros to help Hungarian companies set up production, and research and development capabilities in Angola, while the bank will also provide loans amounting to 135 million euros to promote bilateral trade, Szijjártó said. Africa's Portuguese-speaking countries, he said, were a "natural destination" for Hungary's investment strategy. "Angola is the most important [among these] since mutual sympathy between the two countries is a legacy of Angolans who, in previous times, graduated from Hungarian universities," the minister said. Szijjártó also announced that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is scheduled to pay an official visit to Angola in late March.

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CONFERENCE MARKS 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF HUNGARY NATO ACCESSION

House Speaker László Kövér, Defence Minister Tibor Benkő, NATO dignitaries and other officials attended a conference in the Hungarian Parliament, marking the 20th anniversary of the country's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In his opening address, Kövér said that NATO was indispensable in preserving the balance in the international arena and should be preserved as a dynamic alliance to successfully face challenges ahead. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic joined NATO on March 12, 1999. Kövér noted that the alliance and its member states faced security challenges such as illegal migration and terrorism. "If we want to guarantee our security, there is no alternative," he said, adding that Hungary was intent on preserving its ability to enforce its interests within NATO. Kövér also said that keeping NATO's support high among voters and within parliament was an important aspect of that work. Support for NATO has remained robust among Hungarians in the 20 years since accession. Hungary makes considerable contributions to the alliance's operations and is not just a beneficiary of the security provided under its umbrella, he said.

Defence Minister Tibor Benkő said that in "today's unstable world", the

risk of armed conflicts had grown. Hungary is surrounded by "unstable territories" from the east and south, and security in the Western Balkans was still "fragile", he said. All this suggests that NATO is essential in preserving the region's security, he said. Hungary currently spends 1.4% of its GDP on defence and it expects to reach the 2% goal set by NATO by 2024, he said. Modernisation centres on the air force, army, special operations, logistics and cyber security, he said. Levente Magyar, a foreign ministry state secretary, said NATO was among the most successful alliances in world history, "an achievement to be preserved". Hungary aims to outperform its obligations in NATO, he said. Its membership was the first time Hungary was able to "take its fate into its own hands", after a long history of having to fend for itself or participate in alliances it had been forced into, Magyar said.

David B. Cornstein, the US Ambassador to Hungary, said Hungary had been a reliable ally for 20 years. Close to 1,000 Hungarian soldiers are serving side by side with allied troops in NATO, EU, and multilateral peacekeeping missions, Cornstein noted. It is actively modernising its military and purchasing NATO-compatible equipment, and is on track to meet its NATO commitment to spend 2% of its GDP on defence, he said. Patrick Turner, NATO's assistant secretary general for defence policy and planning, said the greatest

challenges of NATO were the "threat from Russia" and the Islamic State terrorist organisation in Iraq and Syria. He praised Hungary's contribution to the alliance's missions in Iraq and Kosovo. NATO is committed to expanding and to accepting as members Montenegro and North Macedonia soon, he said.

ORBÁN, MORAWIECKI CELEBRATE HUNGARY- POLAND FRIENDSHIP IN JOINT VIDEO MESSAGE

Ahead of Hungary's March 15 national holiday commemorating the Hungarian 1848 revolution, the Hungarian and Polish prime ministers celebrated the friendship of the two nations in a joint video message posted on Viktor Orbán's Facebook page. Mateusz Morawiecki will be guest of honour at Friday's celebrations. Orbán said March 15 was a celebration of Hungarian freedom and "the heroes who, if needed, laid down their lives for Hungarian freedom". Noting that several hundred Poles had fought on Hungary's side in the mid-19th century, Orbán added that Poles had always joined Hungarians in fighting for freedom. Morawiecki said Hungary-Poland friendship was centuries old. He added that this friendship pointed more and more into the future. "We are glad to have such loyal and tested friends in the Hungarians," he said, adding that the future would be better for Hungary and Poland as a result.

OPPOSITION MAYORAL CANDIDATES TO STEP DOWN IF THEY LOSE PRESELECTION

Gergely Karácsony, the Budapest mayoral candidate representing four opposition parties, and Róbert Puzsér, the green opposition LMP party's candidate, have vowed to step aside in favour of the other in a primary to be held in the summer ahead of the autumn local elections. Karácsony, the co-leader of the Párbeszéd party, was voted by Democratic Coalition (DK), Párbeszéd, Socialist and Solidarity Movement supporters as their candidate in a primary held in February. At a discussion organised by news site Válasz Online, Puzsér pledged to drop out of the race if he lost the preselection vote, but said that he would only support Karácsony if he implemented his "Walking Budapest" programme. Karácsony agreed to support Puzsér should the LMP candidate win, and said that their programmes "were not that different".

PM TO RECOMMEND MIHÁLY PATAI FOR NBH DEP GOV

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will recommend Mihály Patai to replace National Bank of Hungary (NBH) deputy governor Ferenc Gerhardt, the PM's press chief told MTI. Gerhardt's six-year term ends on April 21. Patai is the chairman of the Hungarian

Banking Association and the chairman-CEO of UniCredit Bank Hungary, one of Hungary's biggest commercial lenders. Orbán will recommend Patai for the post to President János Áder, who appoints the central bank governor and deputy governors. Orbán has already asked Speaker of Parliament László Kövér to organise a parliamentary committee hearing for Patai, the PM's press chief said.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR MOVES TO SUSPEND JOBBIK MP IMMUNITY OVER SUSPICION OF ELECTION FRAUD

Public prosecutor Péter Polt proposed that the speaker of parliament suspend Jobbik MP Gergely Farkas's immunity in connection with an investigation of election fraud, the prosecutor's office said. In the 2018 general election campaign, Farkas is suspected of having offered to "reimburse the costs" of around 600,000 forints (EUR 1,900) to an opponent, a candidate of the green opposition LMP party, if that candidate dropped out of the race. The prosecutor's office will hear Farkas as a suspect in the case, the office said in a statement.

JOBBIK PRESENTS LIST FOR EP ELECTIONS

Deputy leader Márton Gyöngyösi will top the list of conservative opposition Jobbik for the European parliamentary elections, a party spokesman said.

Entered second on the list will be Zoltán Balczó, a current MEP of the party, György Szilágyi said. Another party spokesman, Péter Jakab, is third on the list, followed by deputy leaders Tibor Bana and Dániel Z Kárpát.

Gyöngyösi said that "there will be much at stake in the May election. Will Hungarians allow [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán to drive Hungary out of the European Union and establish a dictatorial rule based on wage-slavery here?" Jobbik, however, will be an advocate of a just and secure Europe and a free Hungary with fair wages and opportunities for Hungarians to thrive, he said. The party's policy will be to represent the interests of Hungarians in the EU, "unlike Orbán and his ruling Fidesz party", which Gyöngyösi said were solely driven by self-interests.

Jobbik's EP election programme focuses on the global challenge of migration, he said, adding that the party would re-establish the Border Guard to protect Hungary and the EU. It also includes closing the wage gap with western Europe to prevent an exodus of Hungarians and advocating autonomy for minorities on an EU level, Gyöngyösi said. He said their fourth main goal was to fight against fake news, calling it "unacceptable" that in a country such as Hungary "the government and the state are primary sources of such news".

Fidesz called the list "the anti-Semitic list of an anti-Semitic party". In a statement, it said all of Jobbik's top MEP candidates had made anti-Semitic remarks at some point in their careers.

“And the pro-migration European and Hungarian left has come together with these anti-Semites, because they are all willing to do everything for power,” Fidesz said.

GULYÁS HANDS OVER STATE AWARDS

The head of the Prime Minister’s Office handed out state awards ahead of the March 15 national holiday commemorating Hungary’s 1848 revolution. “Hungary will forge ahead if many pursue their work conscientiously,” Gergely Gulyás said at the Várkert Bazár in Budapest. Recalling the 1848 War of Independence, he said the Hungarians being commemorated “still shape our lives to this day”. Whereas the revolution may have failed militarily, the demands underpinning it were nevertheless partly fulfilled under the ensuing Compromise of 1867, and “Hungary can live in freedom and peace today”. Gulyás awarded the Hungarian Order of Merit and the Hungarian Cross of Merit on behalf of President János Áder, as well as the Ybl Miklós Prize, Mócsényi Mihály Prize, the Batthyány Lajos Prize, the Magyar Zoltán Prize, and Forster Gyula Prize for Heritage Protection among others.

SOCIALIST MP SLAMS WEBER FOR BUDAPEST VISIT

European People’s Party group leader Manfred Weber “should have had more

on his agenda” for his Budapest visit on Tuesday, Socialist MP Tamás Harangozó told a press conference, and insisted that “Hungary has greater problems than the government’s billboard campaign”. The Socialist deputy group leader said that “little is known” about Weber’s talks in Budapest, and added that “the billboards with images of Soros and Juncker have disappeared but only along Weber’s route”. This in itself demonstrates the government’s “North Korean methods” and “to what extent they consider Weber and the EPP useful idiots”, he said, adding that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had not apologised for the derogatory campaign “nor will he do so”.

Referring to a proposal tendered by an EPP MEP and adopted by the European Parliament on Tuesday, under which Russia should no longer be considered as a strategic partner for the EU, Harangozó said the proposal was supported by deputies of Orbán’s Fidesz party “thus condemning him and his government”. According to the EPP “Europe should be protected from the Putin plan rather than from a Soros plan”, Harangozó insisted. “Orbán and Fidesz are misleading people; they do not seek authorisation at the upcoming European elections to protect Europe’s Christian democracy and to reform Europe but to serve their own political and economic interests as well as those of foreign powers,” he said.

According to Fidesz, the Socialists “may feel uncomfortable when confronted with the pro-migration

plans of Brussels or Soros”. In a statement, the ruling party insisted that the Socialists “and other pro-migration politicians” have just voted for “another point in the Soros plan” in the European Parliament under which “funds to finance the accommodation of migrants would be tripled”.

V4 SIGN TOURISM COOPERATION PACT

The Visegrad Group countries signed a tourism cooperation protocol in northern Slovakia. The protocol aims to boost the effectiveness of the tourism marketing strategies of the four countries both via joint projects and by taking advantage of their individual opportunities and experiences.

Addressing a joint press conference with his V4 counterparts after the signing ceremony, Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, highlighted the growing importance of V4 cooperation. When it comes to tourism, Hungary is trying to set a good example, he said, pointing out that over the past eight years, the number of tourists visiting Hungary has risen by 50%. Tourism accounts for 10.7% of Hungary’s GDP, Kovács said, adding that the government’s goal is to increase that share to 16% by 2030. In recent years, the government has spent some 800 billion forints (EUR 2.5bn) on the sector, with some 1,000 tourism projects set to be carried out again this year, the state secretary said.

The signing of the agreement wrapped up a two-day meeting of the V4 countries in Štrbské Pleso (Csorbató). The meeting focused on the situation of the tourism industry in the four countries, its sustainability as well as opportunities for cooperation in the sector.

DK CALLS ON GOVT NOT TO MOVE CHILDREN FROM FÓT ORPHANAGE

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on the government to abandon plans to remove children from the state-run orphanage in Fót, near Budapest, the deputy group leader of the party said. Christian Democrat lawmakers have submitted a proposal to parliament on providing a charity, the International Children's Safety Service, state land in the same area as the orphanage. According to press reports, the property is to be sold to a private investor. DK lawmaker Gergely Arató told a press conference that it was questionable

whether the children should leave the Fót orphanage simply because the charity was being promised state land. Sándor Rónai, DK's parliamentary group spokesman, said the proposal contained no provisions on how the children, many of whom are disadvantaged and require special care, would gain access to the charity's services.

HUNGARY INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 4.4% YR/YR IN JAN

Industrial output rose by an annual 4.4% in January, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second reading of the data. Adjusted for the number of work days in the month, output grew by 5%. In a month-on-month comparison, industrial output was up a seasonally and working day-adjusted 0.6%. Vehicle manufacturing output grew by an annual 4.8% in January, beating the overall increase in industrial output in spite of a week-long strike at German carmaker

Audi's plant in Győr, in north-western Hungary. The automotive segment accounts for about 29% of manufacturing sector output in Hungary. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment, which makes up 12% of manufacturing, rose by 3.2%. Output of the food, drink and tobacco products segment, which makes up 10% of manufacturing, increased by 4.7%.

HUNGARY AIR FORCE GRIPEN DAMAGED DURING LIVE-FIRE EXERCISE

A Hungarian Army Gripen fighter jet has been damaged during a live-fire exercise. No one was hurt in the incident on Monday, according to a defence ministry statement. The Gripen pilot detected the error, suspended shooting and returned the aircraft to the Kecskemét airbase. The cause of the error and the exact circumstances will be examined by both Hungarian and Swedish experts in the next few days.