

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán meeting Li Keqiang, his Chinese counterpart, in Dubrovnik

MTI/Prime Minister's press office/Balázs Szecsódi

UPCOMING EVENTS

Govt official for family policy attends Intl Democratic Union congress in Chile

Párbeszéd mayoral candidate launches local election campaign

Democratic Coalition launches EP campaign

March of the Living held in Budapest

TOP STORY

BUDAPEST-BELGRADE RAIL TO BE SIGNED

Construction contracts in connection with the upgrade of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line could soon be signed, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said.

Speaking at a summit of the China-Central-Eastern Europe cooperation in Dubrovnik, Orbán said that cooperation between China and the CEE region “serves true European values with regard to the deep and comprehensive changes in the global economy and global politics”. Countries in central and eastern Europe build their policies “on common sense and rationality”, on a basis of mutual respect, which is reflected in the successful and multi-faceted cooperation with China, Orbán said. He noted that Hungary and China are celebrating the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties this year. Concerning the railway project, to be implemented with Chinese participation, Orbán said that it will offer the fastest way to transport goods between China and western Europe. The project is an integral part of the Belt and Road Initiative aimed at promoting free trade. Orbán said hopefully similar projects such as construction of a high-speed railway link between Budapest and Bucharest would follow in the future.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: MIGRATION MUST BE 'STOPPED RATHER THAN MANAGED'

If the world can prevent situations in which people are forced to flee their homes, conditions can be established whereby migration can be stopped altogether, Hungary's foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, told a UN Security Council debate on peacekeeping in New York. Peacekeeping is an important means to cope with the global challenge of migration, the foreign ministry cited Szijjártó as saying in a ministerial-level debate on the topic of women in peacekeeping. Whereas peacekeeping is one of the UN's most important activities, the organisation needs to be reformed, the minister said, adding that the Hungarian government was ready to promote reform. He noted the government's recent decision to increase Hungary's number of troops serving abroad from 1,000 to 1,200, adding that this would also enable the country to increase its number of troops in UN peacekeeping missions.

Hungary will send 60 peacekeepers to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL mission, Szijjártó said, noting that those troops will serve under Italian command. The minister expressed his gratitude to the Lebanese government for having taken in millions of refugees. Hungary sees a great opportunity in deploying police forces to peacekeeping missions, Szijjártó said, noting that Hungary's

"highly skilled" officers regularly help their colleagues in the Balkan region with border policing. Whereas this may not be a traditional peacekeeping role, having secure borders does contribute to preserving the peace, the minister said. He said 20% of the Hungarian Armed Forces and 23% of the police force are women.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY'S ECONOMY 'SUCCESS STORY'

The Hungarian economy is "a success story", a finance ministry state secretary said, attending the regular spring session of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Washington, DC. Gábor Gion has been meeting representatives of US financial institutions, ratings institutes and investors. He told MTI that the IMF's latest forecast for Europe lowered growth expectations for all European countries bar Hungary. "The IMF also expects the Hungarian economy to grow further," he said.

On Thursday evening local time, Gion held a speech on Hungarian family policy and the tax measures supporting it at a meeting of the conservative Americans for Tax Reform organisation. "I talked about our demographic programme and the state of Hungarian economy in general. I detailed the government's strategic decision in 2010 and 2011 to reduce income taxes and increase the VAT which, together with a low corporate tax, resulted in falling unemployment

rates and growing investments," Gion said. American participants praised the performance of the Hungarian economy and suggested that the Hungarian experiences should be shared in other countries too, Gion said.

ÁDER TO ATTEND PAPAL MASS IN SUMULEU CIUC

President János Áder and his wife Anita Herczegh will attend the mass celebrated by Pope Francis in Sumuleu Ciuc (Csíksomlyó), a traditional place of pilgrimage in central Romania, on June 1, the president's office said. Áder will attend the mass at the invitation of György Jakubinyi, the archbishop of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár). They will also visit the traditional pilgrimage taking place a week later on June 8, the office said. Over 100,000 visitors have already registered for the mass celebrated by the pontiff, with a "pilgrim train" operating from Hungary to rise to the demand.

PUZSÉR SLAMS 'OLD LEFT' OVER LOCAL ELECTION PACT

Publicist Róbert Puzsér, an independent Budapest mayoral candidate backed by opposition Jobbik and LMP, has slammed what he called the "old leftist parties" for coordinating candidates for the autumn local elections without having agreed on a joint platform.

The opposition Socialists, Párbeszéd, Democratic Coalition

(DK) and Momentum parties last weekend agreed to field joint mayoral candidates in most districts of Budapest in the elections. Puzsér underlined the importance of opposition coordination in the election, saying the only way to defeat ruling Fidesz was by fielding a single opposition candidate in each district.

He said the Socialists, Párbeszéd, DK and Momentum had done nothing more than “bargain over positions”. In response to those parties naming their mayoral candidates, he said his team would now launch its campaign for a livable Budapest. Puzsér, who is running on a promise to expand the pedestrian zone of the city beyond the current one in the fifth district, said it was untrue that his campaign was only focused on the capital’s inner districts. He said his campaign wanted to end “Budapest’s pathological centralisation and create new, pedestrian, green and human-scale city centres” in the outer districts, too.

In response to a question, Puzsér said the rivalry between what he called his “centre opposition” and the “old left” did not rule out the possibility of the two sides coordinating on their candidates in the elections. He added, however, that coordination would not mean that the two sides would “govern together”. Puzsér said he was ready to contest a primary against Socialist-Párbeszéd mayoral candidate Gergely Karácsony if he received a “fair offer”.

NUMBER OF ANTI-SEMITIC HATE CRIMES IN HUNGARY LAST YEAR EASES

In Hungary, unlike the rest of Europe, the number of anti-Semitic hate crimes fell in 2018, according to an annual report released by the Tett és Védelem foundation. Fully 32 anti-Semitic hate crimes took place last year, four less than in 2017. In 2016, there were 48 such cases, 52 in 2015 and 37 in 2014. Of the cases in 2018, three were physical attacks, ten acts of vandalism and 19 hate speech incidents. In all the cases, the perpetrators were men and none of the cases were organised, according to the report. The rise in the number of anti-Semitic hate crimes in 2018 was significantly higher in the two largest Jewish communities in Europe, in Britain and France, the report notes. The foundation has released its annual report based on methodology suggested by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

HUNGARY CO-ORGANISER OF NATO MEDICAL EXERCISE HELD IN BUCHAREST

NATO’s Budapest-based Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE) was one of the co-organisers of the 2019 Vigorous Warrior, the largest military medical exercise in the history of the alliance, held in Romania in the first half of April. Some 2,500 soldiers from 26 NATO member states and 13 partner states

participated in the exercise held at the base at Cincu (Nagysink) in central Romania and other venues.

Hungary co-organised a rescue drill held in the Bucharest metro in the early hours of Friday. According to the script, participants had to rescue 200 civilians from the metro tunnel after a series of blasts. The Romanian ambulance service and volunteers also helped in the operation. MILMED COE cooperates with a host country to organise Vigorous Warrior exercises biannually. This year’s drills focused on humanitarian missions and rescue missions on water, air and land.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 5.9% YY IN FEB

Industrial output in Hungary increased by an annual 5.9% in February, according to both unadjusted and adjusted data, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second reading of the data. In a month-on-month comparison, industrial output was up 1%, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data. Vehicle manufacturing output in Hungary rose by an annual 10% in February, beating the overall increase in industrial output. The automotive segment accounts for 31% of manufacturing sector output in Hungary. Manufacturing itself accounted for 95% of industrial output. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment, which makes up 11% of manufacturing, rose by 11.4%. Output of the food, drink and tobacco products segment, which makes up 10% of manufacturing, grew by 5.4%.

NBH TARGETS 110 POTENTIAL ISSUERS WITH CORPORATE BOND BUYING SCHEME

The National Bank of Hungary (NBH) is targeting 110 potential issuers with a 300 billion forint corporate bond purchase scheme, central bank deputy governor Márton Nagy said at an international conference organised by the Budapest Stock Exchange. Nagy said the details of the programme will be published late in April, while a presentation for the 110 potential issuers would take place early in May. Evaluations of the companies will start early in June and last no longer than two months, he added. The first bond auctions could start on July 1, according to plan, he said.

NBH policy makers unveiled the programme, dubbed the Bond Funding for Growth Scheme, after a monthly policy meeting in March. Under the scheme, the NBH will purchase 300 billion forints of bonds issued by domestic non-financial corporations with a credit rating of "at least B+".

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS TO GO ON WARNING STRIKE ON APRIL 17

Hungary's Hungarocontrol has confirmed a two-hour warning strike by air traffic controllers would be staged from 11:00 am on April 17, Eurocontrol said on its network operations portal. Depending on the outcome of negotiations, air traffic controllers could start a strike starting on April 23, it said.

HUNGARY AMONG COUNTRIES WITH LOWEST LABOUR COSTS IN EU

Hourly labour costs were the fourth lowest in Hungary in 2018 among EU member states after Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania, according data published by Eurostat. Hourly labour costs came to 9.2 euros in Hungary in 2018 compared to an average of 27.4 euros in the European Union. They came to 5.4 euros in Bulgaria, 6.9 euros in Romania and 9.0 euros in Lithuania. The highest labour costs were recorded in Denmark at 43.5 euros, Luxembourg at 40.6 euros and Belgium at 39.7 euros.

Labour costs increased by 6.4% from a year earlier in Hungary compared to the EU average of 2.7%. Within the euro zone, the highest increases (in euro terms) were recorded in Latvia (12.9%) and Lithuania (10.4%). Outside the euro zone, the largest increases in hourly labour costs in national currency terms were observed in Romania (13.3%) and Hungary (9.8%) last year.

BENCE MÁTÉ WINS NATURE CATEGORY AT WORLD PRESS PHOTO AWARDS

Hungarian photographer Bence Máté's photo "Survival instinct" won first prize in Nature category at the World Press Photo awards, the organisers said in Amsterdam. The photo shows frogs struggling to the surface, surrounded by frogspawn, after their legs have been severed for culinary purposes and they were thrown back into the water. The photo was made in Covasna (Kovászna), in central Romania, last April. Over 4,700 photographers sent in some 80,000 pictures to be considered for the awards, organisers said in a statement. The jury recommended 43 photographers from 25 countries for awards in various categories, they said.