

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Márton Mönus

Balu, a brown bear in the Budapest Zoo, sees his shadow, which augurs a longer winter, according to tradition.

UPCOMING EVENTS

State secy for health care on nurses' wage hikes

Stats office releases data on factory gate prices

TOP STORY

PM: POSITIONS ON EU BUDGET 'STILL FAR APART'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said stands on the European Union's next seven-year budget are still far apart after a meeting of the heads of government of the "Friends of Cohesion" group in Beja, Portugal.

"We're at the start of the debate, and the stands are still far apart," Orbán said. He said European economic policy had been "ruined" in Brussels in recent years, the results of which will soon become apparent. He predicted that growth in the eurozone would stall this year and cautioned that bad economic policy could have an impact outside of the eurozone, such as in central Europe, too. Orbán said that, unlike Hungary, most member states didn't cut taxes and didn't support competition, but introduced protectionist measures that did economic damage. Europe's competitiveness has "declined on a global scale, and that comes with a price", he added. Member states must agree that regaining competitiveness is of primary importance, and that requires a budget that ensures member states the greatest possible degree of flexibility, he added. The Friends of Cohesion group is a forum of EU member states from the east and the south that aims to prevent a reduction in the EU's cohesion funds that support the convergence of Europe's poorer regions.

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HUNGARIANS EVACUATED FROM WUHAN ARRIVE IN FRANCE, WITH NO SYMPTOMS

Seven Hungarians evacuated from Wuhan, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, have arrived in France and show no symptoms, a Hungarian government official said. Tamás Menczer, a state secretary of the foreign ministry, told MTI by phone that the Hungarians had arrived with other nationals a little after 2.30 in the afternoon on Sunday. They were examined twice by doctors before departure, he added. The Hungarians will be flown home on a Hungarian military aircraft on Sunday, Menczer said.

The seven Hungarians earlier decided they wanted to return home from Wuhan. Hungary's chief medical officer, Cecília Müller, said they will be quarantined in a Budapest hospital for 14 days, the virus's maximum incubation period. French television channel BFFM reported that the Hungarians were among 250 passengers on a French aircraft which arrived at the Istres airbase, in the south of France. There were 65 French nationals on board and citizens from another 30 countries.

Meanwhile, a Hungarian government official said Hungarian colleges and universities and their clinical centres are prepared to implement all tasks related to any possible outbreak of the coronavirus. State secretary of the innovation and technology ministry Tamás Schanda

noted that there have been no cases of coronavirus detected in Hungary but the government has prepared a response to defend against any possible outbreak. At present, 2,722 Chinese nationals are enrolled at Hungarian colleges and universities.

PASSENGERS FROM CHINA TESTED FOR CORONAVIRUS SUSPICION AT LISZT FERENC AIRPORT

All passengers arriving from China at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International Airport are being tested for symptoms of the coronavirus starting on Friday evening, the airport operator Budapest Airport told MTI. The passengers are having their temperatures taken, the statement said.

Cecília Müller, the Hungary's chief medical officer, said no coronavirus cases have been confirmed in Hungary so far.

Meanwhile, the airport operator also said that Hainan Airlines has suspended flights between Budapest and Chongqing from February 7 until March 27. Shanghai Airlines has also suspended its Budapest-Shanghai flights with stopovers in Xi'an and Chengdu, though it will continue to operate its direct flight between Shanghai and the Hungarian capital.

HUNGARY DRAFTS ACTION PLAN FOR CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

A body established by the government to manage measures against infection

by the coronavirus has drafted an action plan. The 28-point action plan, sent to MTI by the Interior Ministry late Friday, directs the police to scrutinise people entering the country from China as well as those who travelled in China in the previous 14 days or who came into contact with people infected with the coronavirus. The action plan tasks the National Public Health Centre with setting up a toll-free telephone number for information on the virus and procuring the necessary healthcare supplies. The centre must also outfit border crossing staff with protective clothing and set up disinfection stations. Stocks of medical supplies must be inventoried to ensure sufficient volume and quality, and laboratory capacity must also be reviewed. Conditions for examining university students returning from abroad must be established. The body will closely monitor the situation and take additional steps if necessary.

ORBÁN TO TRAVEL TO BRUSSELS, ROME

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will travel to Brussels and Rome to discuss challenges facing Europe and current European political issues with the heads of the European Union's most important institutions and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, the head of the PM's press office told MTI. Orbán will meet European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen early Monday, Bertalan

Havasi said. On Monday afternoon, the prime minister will meet Conte in Rome. Orbán will remain in the Italian capital until Tuesday and meet the conservative party leaders Silvio Berlusconi of Forza Italia, Matteo Salvini of Liga and Giorgia Meloni of Fratelli d'Italia. He will also speak at the National Conservatism Conference.

AMENDED NATL CURRICULUM TO MERGE INTL PRACTICES, HUNGARIAN TRADITIONS, SAYS HR MINISTER

Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler said amendments to Hungary's national core curriculum (NAT) have been finalised and will incorporate the most efficient international practices along with Hungarian values and traditions. The curriculum will be implemented from the 2020/2021 academic year in the first, fifth and ninth grades and proceed progressively to the others. Kásler said the curriculum aims to provide the same opportunities to all children, regardless of where they live and of their social status.

The amended NAT contains information on shaping a "harmonic family life", Kásler noted. The aim is that Hungarian youth rise among the world's best by 2030, as a result of a public education system incorporating European values and modern educational methods, Kásler said. Regarding specific areas of education, Kásler said that the humanities have been reworked to include new content

and structure as well as modern tools to shape national identity. NAT also aims to employ more effective methods in the teaching of foreign languages, he said. Education will be informed by the modern digital culture and current trends in the labour market, he added.

Ministry commissioner Gabriella Hajnal, who was responsible for the development of NAT and also heads KLIK, the public school operating body, said that the new curriculum introduces caps on children's weekly lessons. First to third graders will have a maximum of 24 lessons a week, which will go up to a maximum of 34 lessons by the 11-12th grade, she said. Regarding the curriculum's content, Hajnal said there will be an option to choose an integrated "natural sciences" subject instead of the subjects biology, physics and chemistry. The contents of the subjects Hungarian language and grammar, music and history have been renewed, she said.

DZURINDA-ORBÁN LETTER EXCHANGE: A STRONG EUROPE, SUBSIDIARITY AND DECENTRALISATION ARE "MUSIC TO THE EARS OF HUNGARIANS"

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has responded to an open letter by Mikuláš Dzurinda, Slovakia's former head of government and the chairman of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the official think tank of the European People's Party

(EPP), published in daily Népszava. In the letter published in Népszava on Friday, Dzurinda said Orbán was underestimating the debate ongoing in the EPP. "Viktor, I know that you are concerned that our political party - the European People's Party - does not fully embrace traditional Christian values. [...] I, too, am concerned about how divisive the matter of deciding and implementing common European responses to the challenges of the financial crises, the unexpected wave of migration, terrorism and climate change has become," Dzurinda wrote.

He wrote that, since 2016, the political think tank of the EPP has pressed for an initiative for a different type of Europe, a strong, global Europe in which the stress is not on deeper integration, but rather on the principle of subsidiarity which "is one of the fundamental political, legal and social principles of Catholic social doctrine". This "New Europeanism" encourages decentralisation and competition and is not built on centralisation and harmonisation, Dzurinda wrote. "It condemns democrats' attempts to use EU institutions to force liberal values on more conservative member states, as this is detrimental to the establishment of a unified Europe," he added.

Dzurinda noted that Orbán would soon travel to Rome where he will deliver a speech at a conference where the head of the conservative Italian Liga party, Matteo Salvini, will also speak. "I suppose, with all due respect for both of you, that you will not be able to deliver workable

solutions for the most important problems of our age. The slogans of national conservatism will not be of assistance to you in finding solutions to such issues as migration and climate change," he wrote. Dzurinda proposed to Orbán participating at a high-level conference on migration that will take place in Athens on April 2.

Orbán posted a reply to Dzurinda's letter on his homepage on Sunday. "It is good to see that you are still inspired by the ideas that connected us when we both served as prime ministers. You know us Hungarians, so you know that the values cited in your letter, such as a strong Europe, subsidiarity, the support of decentralisation and competition, the Catholic social doctrine and stepping up against the forced dissemination of liberal values are all music to the ears of Hungarians," Orbán wrote.

Orbán thanked Dzurinda for the invitation to the conference in Athens. "What a pity that in order to represent Christian values consistently, our party, Fidesz had to suspend its membership in the EPP," he said. "I don't know if you are allowed to invite me to Athens under these circumstances. If so, you can count on me! See you at the Acropolis!" Orbán wrote in closing.

KÖVÉR: SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC HUNGARIANS BENEFITS WHOLE CARPATHIAN BASIN

Support the Hungarian government provides ethnic Hungarian

communities outside of the country's borders benefits the entire Carpathian Basin, House Speaker László Kövér said in an interview published on business website azuzlet.hu. To preserve ethnic Hungarian communities outside of Hungary, those communities need to be livable for young people, which requires support for workplaces, kindergartens, an environment of professional support and social opportunities, Kövér said. He noted that funding from the government's Carpathian Basin Economic Development Programme had supported more than 50,000 development projects worth some 200 billion forints (EUR 593m) in recent years. Hungary has done much to create a common economic area in the region, he added. He said an increasing number of Hungarian professionals, from Hungary and from minority communities, are returning home to start businesses, capitalising on experience gained abroad.

GYURCSÁNY: HUNGARIAN REPUBLIC 'IS DEAD'

Ferenc Gyurcsány, the leader of the opposition Democratic Coalition, in a speech commemorating Day of the Republic, declared the Hungarian republic "dead". Speaking at the statue of István Bibó -- a political theorist who wrote the proclamation "For Freedom and Truth", and was the last minister standing before the Soviets crushed the 1956 revolution -- the former prime minister said

that a republic was embodied in its constitution, rules and institutions. "But it also has a soul carried by its citizens," he said, arguing that the republic consisted in citizens who thought, lived and believed differently from each other as part of a diverse and vibrant community. Gyurcsány insisted that a country which accepts the diversity of its citizens, and protects it, is stronger than one that demands homogeneity. He said that supporters of the republic must not surrender to "violent, homogenising people and groups that seek their exclusion".

Gyurcsány was also asked to comment on Thursday's demonstration against Budapest's 7th district mayor Péter Niedermüller over his recent description of "white, Christian, heterosexuals" as "a scary formation". Asked if he believed Niedermüller had used the right phrasing in his remark, Gyurcsány said the mayor's critics should pay attention to his actions rather than his words.

TOROCZKAI CALLS FOR PUBLIC DEBATE ON POSSIBILITY OF REINSTATING DEATH PENALTY

Commenting on a recent murder case in Sály, in north-eastern Hungary, László Toroczkai, leader of the radical nationalist Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party, called for a social debate on the possibility of reinstating the death penalty. Addressing a press conference, Toroczkai said a 61-

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year old Hungarian woman had been murdered in the village on Thursday “by a perpetrator likely of Gypsy ethnicity”. The leader of the non-parliamentary party said it appeared that Hungary’s current criminal justice system did not pose enough of a deterrent to those who commit murder. Toroczkai said politicians were trying to “sweep this problem under the rug” and “keeping silent on the crimes plaguing the rural public”.

He said Mi Hazánk was the only Hungarian party to raise the question of reinstating capital punishment. Toroczkai added that his party wanted an issue such as this to be decided by the Hungarian people and not from abroad.

Responding to the suggestion that as a member of the European Union, Hungary did not have the authority to reintroduce the death penalty, Toroczkai said: “We don’t always have to accept the status quo, especially when it goes against the interests of the people”. “I don’t care about rights organisations or the EU ... we must change what’s not right,” he added.

HUNGARY TEMPS REACH RECORD HIGH, AGAIN

Temperatures in Hungary reached a record high for February 2, hitting 18.2 C. in the village of Drávaszabolcs in southern Hungary on Sunday, the national weather service said on its Facebook page. The previous record of 18.1 C. was measured in the village of Főnyed in south-western Hungary in 1965, according to data from the weather service. Temperatures hit a record high on Friday, too, reaching 16.7 C. in Drávaszabolcs.

KOREAN AIR LAUNCHES BUDAPEST-SEOUL FLIGHTS

Korean Air is launching a direct flight between Budapest and Seoul, Airportal.hu said. Korean Air will operate the service three times a week -- Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday -- until October 17. Its Airbus A330-200 will land in Budapest at 3.30pm and take off at 6.30pm. Korean Air also operates a freight service between the two cities twice a week. LOT Polish Airlines already operates regular flights

between the two cities. With the new service, direct connections operated by the two carriers will be available every day except Monday.

MEMORIAL DAY FOR ETHNIC GERMANS EXPELLED FROM HUNGARY MARKED IN BUDAPEST

Local and central government officials marked the memorial day for ethnic Germans expelled from Hungary after World War II in Budapest’s Békásmegyer neighbourhood on Sunday. Finance Minister Mihály Varga, who represents the neighbourhood’s district in parliament, said expelling the local Germans from their homes was a “shameful turn of historical events”. The Hungarian government and the Hungarian people reject all views and decisions based on collective guilt, he added. Varga and the district’s Socialist mayor, László Kiss, laid wreaths at a memorial plaque on the St Joseph Church in Békásmegyer. Parliament earlier declared January 19 the memorial day for ethnic Germans expelled from Hungary.