

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Hungary's Michelle Gulyás in the final of the riding event at the Budapest round of the Modern Pentathlon World Cup

UPCOMING EVENTS

Inaugural session of new parliament with oath-taking

War in Ukraine

Stats office releases 2nd reading of Feb foreign trade figures, March PPI

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

EUROPE 'MUST NOT PENALISE ITSELF OVER WAR'

Europe must not impose sanctions in connection with the war in Ukraine "with which we primarily penalise ourselves instead of those we want to sanction", the prime minister's chief of staff said over the weekend.

Hungarians must not be made to pay the price of war, Gergely Gulyás told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio. This can be prevented "if we can continue to buy our energy at the cheapest possible price", he added. The European Union should therefore not approve sanctions that would make it impossible for member states to import Russian oil and gas, Gulyás said. Otherwise Hungary would have to buy this energy at much higher prices, which would make it impossible to uphold household utility price caps and the economy could not function, either, he added. The EU has not approved any type of sanctions that would make it impossible for a member state to pay in roubles for Russian gas, Gulyás said, noting that such a transaction between a state and a company is governed by an agreement subject to civil law. Gulyás said the Hungarian state was in fact not paying in roubles for Russian gas, but had opened a euro account with Gazprom Bank which converts the euros transferred to its account by the Hungarian state into roubles.

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GULYÁS: UNFAIR FOR STATE TO OWE PENSIONERS

It is unfair for the state to owe pensioners, Gergely Gulyás, the prime minister’s chief of staff, said over the weekend in connection with the government’s recently announced pension hike. Gulyás announced earlier this week that pensions will increase by a further 3.9% from July in light of higher than expected inflation, bringing the overall pension hike to 8.9%. Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Radio, Gulyás said the government knows that inflation will be higher than what had been projected prior to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The 3.9% pension increase will make it easier to address the difficulties posed by inflation, he said, adding that the increased pension will be paid retroactively from the start of the year in one go.

Meanwhile, Gulyás also spoke about the method Hungary uses to pay for its gas imports from Russia, noting it had opened a euro account with Gazprom Bank which converts the euros transferred to its account by the Hungarian state into roubles. “There are nine other countries using the same payment scheme, but because today in Europe the idea of being a good European also means that the leaders of those countries are not honest when speaking either in the international arena or to their own people, the other nine countries

won’t say that they are doing the same thing,” Gulyás said. “There should be no doubt in anyone’s mind that countries importing raw materials from Russia use exactly the same method to pay for Russian gas.”

He said that because soaring energy prices required the government to supplement funding from the central budget, the government would need to regularly examine whether the price cap on fuel and staple foods could be maintained. Hungarian oil and gas company MOL is also undertaking a significant burden in order to ensure that the retail price of fuel can be kept at 480 forints (EUR 1.27) per litre, he said.

ORBÁN: RESTORING STATUS OF ESZTERGOM LONG OVERDUE

The restoration of the status of the city of Esztergom is long overdue, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Sunday after a mass at the Esztergom Basilica marking the anniversary of Esztergom becoming a city of county rank. Esztergom is a city of nationwide importance, Orbán said, adding that the city was home to every Hungarian “even if they do not know it”. “Today we pay the debt which we, Hungarians owe to ourselves,” the prime minister said, adding that in recent years Esztergom had proven that it was not just its history that made it one of the most important cities in Hungary, but also the diligence, strength, culture and patriotism of its residents.

Orbán highlighted the strong link between the fate of Esztergom and the history of the Hungarian nation. “Esztergom is our intellectual centre and also our most important link to the Western Christian civilisation which we became a part of over a thousand years ago,” he said. Hungarian statehood would be inconceivable without Esztergom, Orbán said. He called the institution of primacy Hungary’s “first constitutional court”, arguing that in addition to being in charge of the coronation of kings, the Archbishop of Esztergom also had a duty to make sure that the king respected the constitution.

The prime minister also noted that over the course of its history Esztergom had endured its share of crises. The one-time nation’s capital was ravaged by the Tatars and later betrayed by foreign mercenaries to the Turks, he said. The past century also took its toll on Esztergom, Orbán said, noting that with two-thirds of Hungary’s territory ceded to neighbouring countries, it had gone from being a city in the middle of the country to a border city in the north. The elimination of the old county system by the communists in 1950 was the “nail in the coffin” for Esztergom, Orbán said. “We are here to restore this city of nationwide importance to its former status,” he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT PURSUING ‘SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC STRATEGY’

The outcome of the general election is partly a recognition of the



government's successful economic strategy that it has pursued over the past twelve years, Péter Szijjártó, minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Friday. The government plans to continue pursuing this strategy, he added. Szijjártó was speaking at an event announcing the capacity expansion of Swiss Krono, the ministry said in a statement. The state is providing the firm support of 350 million forints (EUR 930,000) for which the company has agreed to retain 150 employees. The government, he said, rejects austerity, supports investment and job-creation, while gradually reducing taxes on labour. Data indicates that 2021 was the most successful year in Hungarian economic history, with record economic growth and exports, and all-time-high investment and employment levels, the minister said. "Supporting families and job-creation will remain a top priority," he said.

FINMIN: ECONOMY STILL ON GROWTH PATH, WITH DEFICIT, DEBT SHRINKING

The next four years are likely to see high growth coupled with a gradual tapering in public debt and budget deficit levels, according to Hungary's Convergence Programme sent to the European Commission. The finance ministry expects economic growth of 4.3% this year, combined with a budget deficit of 4.9% of GDP and a public debt level of 76.1%. Hungarian economic policy over the past year has

focused on controlling the epidemic and relaunching the economy, the ministry said in a statement. Top priorities were protecting jobs, supporting families and businesses, and promoting investments, it said. Accordingly, last year the economy expanded by 7.1%, much higher than the growth forecast in the 2021 Convergence Programme of 4.3%, the statement said, adding that the figure equalled the seventh highest growth level in the European Union. The new programme aims at boosting competitiveness, creating balanced and sustainable economic growth, and narrowing the gap with average European development levels. A strong labour market and healthy consumption, as well as the high investment rate and new capacities, will serve as the backbone of these goals, the ministry said.

Growth is targeted at 4.3% this year and 4.1% in 2023, while next four years it is expected to exceed 4% each year. By 2026, the deficit is expected to decline to 1% of GDP, while the public debt will be on course to fall to 63.1% of GDP. The forecasts are weighed by risks such as a possible resurgence of the coronavirus and a long-lasting war in Ukraine, it added. Inflation is likely to average 8.9% this year before falling significantly in 2023, the convergence report says. The government continues to aim to protect families from rising prices by capping utility costs and fuel prices, while keeping a lid on interest on household loans and food prices, the statement said.

AZBEJ: GOVT SUPPORTING RELIEF EFFORTS IN UKRAINE, TRANSCARPATHIA

The Hungarian government is adding new financing of 200 million forints (EUR 531,000) for humanitarian aid and efforts to help the internally displaced and those in need in Transcarpathia in Ukraine, a government official said on Friday. The government is supporting war refugees both in Hungary and in Transcarpathia, Tristan Azbej, the state secretary for assisting persecuted Christians and implementing the Hungary Helps Programme, said in Uzhhorod after a meeting with the leaders of the Hungarian Cultural Association of Transcarpathia (KMKSZ). Also, an additional 120 million forints will be given in support of other charitable activities, alongside a consignment of medicines and equipment worth 210 million forints destined for Transcarpathia next week. Fully 230,000 refugees have officially made their way to Transcarpathia, though the real number may be double that, KMKSZ vice-president József Barta said at the event. The state secretary met local entrepreneurs involved in the One Meal Programme provided by Hungary Helps. Around 60,000 servings of hot food have been served to refugees in Transcarpathia over the period of a month.

KDNP: GOVT COMMITTED TO ASSISTING MOTHERS

Hungary's government is committed to doing everything it can to assist mothers through its social policy measures, the parliamentary group leader of the co-ruling Christian Democrats (KDNP) said on Sunday, marking Mothers' Day. Motherhood and raising children comes with a great amount of responsibility and sacrifice, "the burdens of which do not have to be borne by women alone in our society", István Simicskó said in a statement. Measures introduced by the government aimed at supporting mothers include flexible working arrangements, family tax preferences, home-creation support, free textbooks and school meals for children as well as a personal income tax exemption for mothers with at least four children, Simicskó said. Women can best take care of their families if they feel they have financial, physical and mental security, he said. "There is no strong and proud nation without strong and proud families," Simicskó said. "And mothers are without a doubt the driving forces of families." He said the comprehensive family policy measures introduced by the government over the last 12 years aimed to strengthen families.

LMP URGES MORE SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS

Full-time caregivers of their own family members perform work and should

therefore be entitled to an income of at least the minimum wage, leaders of the opposition LMP party said on Sunday, marking International Labour Day. "On the occasion of Labour Day we can declare that we still regard the state as the worst employer because it has failed to recognise social workers by providing them due remuneration," LMP's co-leaders and parliamentary group leader said in a joint statement. Back in 2004, when the now ruling Fidesz party was in opposition it pledged to recognise in-home care as a form of employment, they said. "But even being in power for the past 12 years has not been enough for Fidesz to deliver on its promise," they added. Increasing the amount to be paid for in-home care would cost the central budget 45 billion forints (EUR 119m) annually, which the party's leaders said was "an insignificant amount". They demanded that the government increase payment to people who provide in-home care to a family member other than a child.

HUNGARY STATE-OWNED CARGO PLANE TO START FLYING TO DOHA

The Hungarian state's cargo plane is set to enter into commercial service between Budapest and Doha following "intensive negotiations" with Qatar Airways, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Saturday. The Airbus A330-200F plane, acquired after the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic to

help ship health-care supplies, recently began commercial operation between Budapest and Chengdu in China, Szijjártó noted in a post on Facebook. The addition of the new route means that "the cargo plane owned by the state of Hungary, operated by a Hungarian carrier, maintained by a Hungarian company and supported by Hungarian ground service will now be in commercial service in the Middle East alongside its flights to Asia," he said.

Szijjártó noted that just over two years ago it became clear to the world that "those who buy time can save lives". "When the pandemic first hit, not only was there a severe shortage of masks, ventilators and other protective equipment, but once these were procured there was a question of how and when they could be delivered here," the minister said. "We made a clear strategic decision to build our own readily deployable air transport capacities so that Hungary and its supplies would not be affected by the global supply chain challenges," Szijjártó said. This was why Hungary procured the Airbus A330-200F cargo plane which has been used to ship some 6.8 million doses of coronavirus vaccine to the country, he added.

POLICE: 13,747 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON SATURDAY

Fully 5,582 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Saturday, while another 8,165 from

Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 584 people, the police website said on Sunday. Holders of such permits must contact a local immigration office near their place of residence within thirty days to apply for permanent documents, it added. Budapest police received 881 refugees, 260 children among them, by train, according to the municipal police website. Meanwhile, the municipal government office of Budapest said staff at the BOK sports and events centre serving as a humanitarian transit point had helped 702 refugees on Saturday, accommodating 349 of whom stayed overnight. The BOK centre provides food and drink, medical services, toilets, internet access and help with travel arrangements in cooperation with charity organisations and volunteers. National railways MÁV operates a ticket office at the site, while buses are provided to take people to the main train stations and the airport.

DANCING 1925, HUNGARIAN ARTISTS IN PARIS NIGHTLIFE EXHIBITION OPENS AT NATIONAL GALLERY

A chamber exhibition presenting drawings by three Hungarian artists on the nightlife of Paris in the 1920s reflecting on the euphoria after the first world war opened at the Hungarian National Gallery on Saturday. In focus of the exhibition is Dancing (1925), an album presenting twelve lithographs by painter, graphic artist, illustrator and set designer Marcell Vértés who, following the collapse of the Soviet Republic, moved from Budapest to Vienna and later to Paris in 1920. There he frequented nightclubs and bars where he made sketches of guests dancing on the floor, jazz musicians and even people waiting at dawn to leave for home. He became famous of imitating Toulouse-Lautrec's style and in 1952

was "hand-double" for Lautrec in the film Moulin Rouge. Vértés's work on the film earned him two Academy Awards, for Best Costume Designer and Best Production Design, according to the exhibition's booklet.

János Vaszary, the second artist, returned to Paris in 1925 aged around sixty in search of new artistic experience. There he made sketches about shows in the Moulin Rouge, the Folies Bergère, La Cigale and the Casino de Paris which he later used for his oil paintings.

The third artist, Miklós Vadász settled in the French capital in the early 1920s where he made a living by painting portraits while making sketches on the city's nightlife in his free time. The exhibition also features segments from archive newsreels and the Mikiphone, the pocket phonograph designed by István Vadász for his brother. The Mikiphone produced excellent sound quality and is regarded as the predecessor of the Walkman and the Discman. The exhibition runs until August 28.