

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Mohammed Bin Hamad Bin Qassim Al Thani greets Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Doha

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Vivien Cher Benko

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels

Parliament meets

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

FIDESZ WANTS ANSWERS ON UKRAINE'S 'BLACKMAIL'

Tamás Deutsch, the head of Fidesz's EP delegation, on Saturday said he and his group of MEPs wanted Brussels to give a clear and forthcoming answer concerning "Ukraine's latest serious blackmail against Hungary".

Referring to reports of an alleged plan to blow up the Druzhba pipeline carrying Russian oil to Hungary, Deutsch said in a video statement that the "serious and outrageous case of extortion" must be clarified, adding that his group of MEPs had turned to the European Commission with written questions. Deutsch referred to an alleged meeting in February in which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky may have suggested blowing up the pipeline as well as a message sent by the chief executive of Ukrtransnafta, the company that manages oil transportation operations through the Ukrainian pipeline network, setting Hungary conditions for keeping oil flowing through the pipeline. He also said he had received a message from "the Brussels bureaucracy" that the transit of crude oil to Hungary could well be stopped. He said it was insupportable that no answer had been forthcoming about whether "the direct collaborators of European Commission leaders" had actually proposed to the Ukrainians the "grave act of threatening Hungary's sovereignty" in order to exert political pressure.

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ORBÁN: HUNGARIAN NATION 'STANDS BY ITALY' AMIDST FLOOD TRAGEDY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Saturday wrote to his Italian counterpart, Giorgia Meloni, to convey his condolences and sympathy to the relatives of the victims of the devastating floods in northern Italy, the prime minister's press chief, Bertalan Havasi, said in a statement. The floods have claimed numerous lives and deprived tens of thousands of people of their homes, Orbán noted, wishing those harmed by the floods a speedy recovery. He assured the Italian prime minister of the staunch support of the Hungarian nation "during these tragic days", and he offered Hungary's help in searching for and rescuing the missing, and in clearing up the damage, the statement added.

PRESIDENT NOVÁK IN NY: 'FAIR, LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE PEACE AGREEMENT ROAD TO PEACE'

President Katalin Novák in New York on Thursday told Hungarian public media that a "fair, long-term sustainable peace agreement is the road to peace". Rather than fuelling the war in Ukraine "we must calm tensions and sentiments", she said. The president noted to M1 that more than a year has passed since Russia attacked Ukraine and an end to the war was not yet in

sight. She said it was unknown how many more lives the "cruel war" would claim on both sides. International public opinion on the war, she said, was shifting. So was the mood on the warring sides, she argued.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, she noted, remotely attended a meeting in Reykjavík and "talked about the need for peace", though expelling Russians from Ukrainian soil was Ukraine's precondition. "More and more people are articulating the importance of peace," she added. The president said Russia should not be allowed to meet its war objectives given its "unacceptable and inexplicable" attack on a neighbouring sovereign state. She said Russia must be told clearly that "the Rubicon has been crossed" and conflicts cannot be solved through conflict in this day and age. "That's why ... a fair, long-term sustainable peace agreement is the road to peace."

She noted that the UN, EU and the Council of Europe were established as peace missions after the second world war to prevent any world war in the future. "We may well be on the brink of a world war," she said. Through these organisations, "we have a common obligation to seek a path to peace," she said. Pope Francis's visit to Hungary confirmed that many were trying to find a path to peace. "We Hungarians [and] leaders of Hungary ... are also seeking a path to peace," she added. President Novák warned against intensifying "the rhetoric of war" and "fuelling the war".

She noted that Hungary, an independent and sovereign country, works as a part of a system of alliances. The country has its own firm ideas for the future, she said. "This could well be why many find us an exciting and interesting negotiating partner," she added.

Novák said it was important to show the world what Hungary truly stands for and to foster a realistic image of Hungarians. "I've been doing this for the past year." She noted that a Demographic Summit will be held in Hungary again in September, and next year she would host the world's female heads of state in Budapest. Also, Novák said she is soon to pay a visit to Albania, and she would promote the EU accession of Western Balkan countries. Further, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis will soon visit Budapest for an official visit, she noted.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: ONLY HUNGARIANS CAN DECIDE ON HUNGARY'S FUTURE

Brussels cannot accept that Hungarians have made their own decision on their future and that Hungary is governed by a successful right-wing Christian Democratic government, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Sunday, assessing this week's visit by a delegation of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control to Budapest. Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Radio, Szijjártó said the delegation had comprised people

“suffering from hungarophobia” who “can’t stand Hungary and don’t believe that Hungarians are capable of making mature, adult decisions on the future of their country”. “What’s more, the members of the delegation tried to interfere in matters constituting Hungary’s sovereignty,” he added. Concerning Hungary’s European Union funds, Szijjártó said he believed his fellow ministers would be successful in their talks aimed at unlocking the monies. He added, at the same time, that the talks were not easy “given that international, liberal, mainstream Brussels can’t accept that Hungarians have made their own decision on their future, and that the people have chosen to have a right-wing, nationally minded, patriotic Christian Democratic government in Budapest which is successful despite the external efforts to put pressure on it”. It must be made clear that decisions on Hungary’s future can only be made by Hungarians, not Brussels, Szijjártó said.

Asked about reports that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had proposed to Ukraine that it shut down the Druzhba pipeline, Szijjártó said Hungary had received no explanation regarding the reports from Kyiv. The minister added that he believed that the matter was one which the EC president should comment on publicly, arguing that energy supply security was a matter of sovereignty, and an attempt to stymie it could be considered “an attack against the given country’s

sovereignty”. Szijjártó said there were clear international treaties stipulating how oil is to be delivered through Ukraine. If that is rendered impossible, it will be physically impossible to ensure Hungary’s oil supply, he said, noting that the capacity of the pipeline connecting to Hungary from Croatia was much lower than the combined oil needs of Hungary, Slovakia and partially Czechia. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said that Croatia had taken advantage of the war and “shamelessly” raised the transit fee to several times the European market level, as had Ukraine. He said Hungarians had already been paying a very high price for the war and rightfully expected not to be made to pay an even greater price.

Concerning Ukraine’s potential EU accession, Szijjártó said Hungary would only support it if it saw that the guarantees of ensuring the rights of the local ethnic Hungarian minority were enforced, meaning that Transcarpathian Hungarians regained their former rights. Szijjártó said it was “unacceptable” and “scandalous” that Ukraine had added Hungary’s OTP Bank to its list of “international sponsors of war”, stressing that OTP abided by every regulation. He said Hungary was expected to come under intense pressure in the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday not to insist that OTP be removed from the list when discussing the next sanctions package and as a condition for increasing the EU’s peace funds.

FINMIN: GOVT SUBMITS 2024 DRAFT BUDGET TO FISCAL COUNCIL

Preserving stability and predictability is of paramount importance in times of war, and the government keeps to the practice of submitting next year’s draft budget to parliament as early as the summer, the finance ministry told MTI on Friday, after the government submitted the draft budget to the Fiscal Council. Despite the challenging circumstances, the government’s aim is to “return to a higher growth path of around 4% next year with disciplined fiscal management while curbing inflation to 6%,” the ministry said. The government will keep the price caps on utility fees next year up to the level of average consumption, which is guaranteed by a utility protection fund set up in the budget. It will increase the funds necessary for protecting pensions and will ensure the stability of the value of pensions next year. Pensioners will receive their 13th-month pension in February 2024. “We will maintain the family support system, which is unique in Europe, and continue to support families with tax benefits and targeted programmes, while maintaining high employment,” the ministry said.

In times of war, a strong Hungarian army is needed, therefore, the resources dedicated to defence will reach 2% of GDP. The government is committed to returning to the path of reducing the deficit and the state

debt followed before the pandemic. Under the draft of next year's budget, the budget deficit will be reduced to 2.9% and the state debt to 66.7% of GDP in 2024, the ministry said. With the opinion of the Fiscal Council, the government will submit the 2024 budget bill to parliament on May 30.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER: BILL BANNING LOCAL AUTHORITIES' LAND TAX SUBMITTED TO PARLT

The government has submitted a bill to parliament banning local authorities and mayors from imposing local taxes on land, Agriculture Minister István Nagy said on Friday. The bill was prepared in cooperation with farmers' associations NAK and MAGOSZ, the statement said. Addressing a conference organised by NAK in Gödöllő, near Budapest, Nagy noted that he received a petition signed by 120,000 farmers in March, against a local land tax introduced by the mayor of Hódmezővásárhely, in southern Hungary. Nagy himself also signed the petition, "because using a land tax to bleed out farmers already hit by a war, sanctions and droughts is not right." Farmers need local support rather than further burdens, he said. The government is committed to the concept that farmland cannot be the taxed, and will lay that down in legislation, he said.

ORBÁN LEAVES ON OFFICIAL VISIT TO QATAR

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Sunday morning left on an official visit to Qatar, Orbán's press chief said. Orbán is visiting Qatar at the invitation of the country's prime minister and will address the Qatar Economic Forum at the invitation of the emir, Bertalan Havasi told MTI. The prime minister's delegation will include Finance Minister Mihály Varga and Economic Development Minister Márton Nagy. Orbán's talks in Qatar are set to focus on boosting bilateral energy, economic and financial cooperation, exploring new investment opportunities as well as topical global political issues. Hungary's delegation aims to strengthen the country's energy security, Havasi said, adding that in respect of the war in Ukraine, it supports a peaceful diplomatic settlement instead of "harmful sanctions and forcing war politics".

PRESIDENT NOVÁK MARKS NATIONAL DEFENCE DAY

President Katalin Novák greeted soldiers in her capacity as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, marking National Defence Day on Sunday. "You are the guarantees to Hungary's independence, freedom and security," she said in a statement published on the website of Sándor Palace which houses the office of the president. "Today, when there is a war going on

in a neighbouring country, Hungarians rely on your service even more, to ensure that our home country and our families are safe. We are proud of you and we ask you to look at the example of the proud forbearers during your daily service, and never forget your oath: For the homeland, unto death! Long live the Hungarian Armed Forces and soldiers!" the president said in her greeting.

BAKONDI: NEARLY 49,000 BORDER VIOLATORS STOPPED THIS YEAR

Nearly 49,000 border violators and 387 human smugglers have been stopped in Hungary this year, the prime minister's chief domestic security advisor said on Sunday. György Bakondi told public radio that migrants and human smugglers had kept Hungary's borders under significant pressure. Some 12% of prisoners in Hungary are spending their sentence as a result of human smuggling, totalling 2,048 people from 73 countries. "They are the people on the edges, the real big criminals who are the movers of the networks don't come even close to the border, and they cannot get caught," he added. Action against human smuggling poses great burdens on the Hungarian state, he said.

Hungary cooperates with all countries that help control national borders, which also serves domestic security, Bakondi said. Hungary also tries to cooperate with Frontex, the

European Union's border control agency. Cooperation is under way with Austria and Serbia, and between Croatia, Slovenia and Austria, too, he added. Bakondi said these were correct initiatives but added that "there does not seem to be any change in the European Union's position, neither from the point of financing, nor in legal support".

He said that despite recent political statements, such as remarks by the German chancellor, the president of the European Commission and the group leader of the European People's Party calling for protecting the EU's external borders, possibly by building fences, "we are not getting any money or actual decisions concerning this". "The only thing I can think of is that such remarks are made only because of the approaching European parliamentary elections where migration will be a big issue, but they are not actually solving the situation," he added.

Bakondi also said that ideologies promoted by foundations linked to US financier George Soros still make an influence on the handling of migration. An EU audit committee recently visiting Hungary said that "if we do not accept the political and ideological position they represent, then they do not give support to us", Bakondi added. Since the migration crisis of 2015, Germany has increasingly experienced problems, such as the overburdening of the social support system and terrorist attacks claiming hundreds of lives, Bakondi said.

GOVT OFFICIALS MEET SCOTLAND HUNGARIANS

Katalin Szili, the prime minister's chief advisor, and Árpád János Potápi, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad, met members of the local Hungarian communities in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Lochgelly, in Scotland on Sunday. Scotland's Hungarian community of around 15,000 is a fast-changing one both in terms of its size and composition, Potápi told MTI by phone. Many come here to study or work, before moving on within a few months or years to England or elsewhere in western Europe, or returning home to Hungary, he said. This is one of the reasons why many of them are young couples with small children, the state secretary added.

Potápi said that a consulate general has been operating in Edinburgh for several years, helping with maintaining contact with the local Hungarian community and supporting them in preserving their identity. He expressed hope that an association of Hungarians in Scotland would be established soon, which could then apply for support from the state secretariat, contributing to, among other things, the opening of a Hungarian weekend school.

Szili highlighted the ongoing progress in the organisation of Scotland's Hungarian communities. She said it had been important to the Hungarians in Aberdeen to celebrate the upcoming Day of National Cohesion together.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR 'HOUSEHOLDS RESCUE PACKAGE'

The opposition Socialists call for the introduction of a five-part rescue package for households, the party's co-leader said on Sunday. Imre Komjáthi told an online press conference that the proposal would enable "real and immediate help" to families in trouble. He added that the party "would not even mind" if ruling party lawmakers took the rescue package under their name, "just so that it gets introduced and help is given to Hungarians in trouble", he added. He said that making a living in Hungary was increasingly difficult and contrary to the "illusory figures" cited by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, GDP data showed that the country was in recession. The message that companies get makes them untrusting about the future and they increase wages under the inflation rate, he added. Trade union sources show that average wage increase has been around 13-15% as against the food price inflation of around 40%, he said. Independent analysts say that 19% of Budapest residents and 40% of people in the countryside survive on income which is below subsistence level, he added.

The five-point rescue package for households includes reducing VAT on basic foodstuff to zero and maintaining price caps until the tax cuts are carried out. The third proposal involves introducing a food bank card with

monthly 20,000 forints (EUR 54), offered to 300,000 families most in need. The party also calls for fair pensions, another 5% pension increase from June, and targeted support to small retailers, he said.

STUDENT ORGS PROTEST FOR TEACHERS’ WAGE HIKE, AGAINST PLANNED LEGISLATION

Student organisations held a demonstration in Budapest on Friday, protesting for wage hikes for teachers, and called for the withdrawal of planned changes to their employment status and other planned regulations. Protesters marched from Kossuth Square in front of Parliament to Oktogon Square, carrying banners reading “History is written by youth”, “We also have a heartbeat” and “All power belongs to the people”, and waving EU and Hungarian flags, as well as those representing the teachers’ movements. Flags of the Tanítanék movement and teachers’ trade unions were also to be seen. Opposition politicians Ákos Hadházy (independent), Bence Tordai and Tímea Szabó of Párbeszéd, András Fekete-Győr, Anna Orosz and Miklós Hajnal of Momentum also joined the protest, among others.

Budapest police (BRFK) have reported that a small group of demonstrators had tried to disrupt the demo. After the demonstration, a smaller group marched to the headquarters of ruling Fidesz near Heroes’ Square, where police cordoned off both sidewalks.

BRFK reported that some protesters were trying to “intentionally provoke” police. Participants of the “unlawful protest” tried to push through the police line and threw bottles and other objects, while verbally provoking them, the statement said.

Commenting on the demonstration, ruling Fidesz said the party was fully on board with the notion of a wage hike for teachers. “Leftist politicians earn 5-6 million a month to stop teachers getting 800,000 forints,” the party said in a statement. Had Hungary received the EU funds it is “entitled to”, teachers would have already had their raise, the party said. Leftist politicians drawing large salaries are working in the EU to block those resources, the statement said.

BUDAPEST POLICE: FEW HUNDRED VIOLENT PROTESTERS TRIED TO BREAK THROUGH POLICE LINE

“An aggressive crowd of few hundred people unceasingly and violently” attempted to break through police lines in a coordinated manner following a student protest in Budapest on Friday evening, the Budapest police headquarters said on its website. Police checked the identity documents of 15 people and filed reports against two for violent behaviour against an officer, the statement said on Saturday. Police showed “great patience” and acted in a lawful, professional and proportionate way, it added. The statement confirmed information announced at a press

conference late on Friday that two people were apprehended for an alleged violent act against an officer. The Budapest police has initiated an administrative investigation for abuse of the right of assembly and violations linked to the use of pyrotechnical devices. Investigators will carry out further analysis of recordings made at the unlawful assembly, it said. After the pre-announced student protest ended on Friday, a group of people moved from Oktogon to Heroes’ Square after 7pm, police said. They provoked officers verbally at first and later also physically, pushing them and throwing objects at them, including beer cans, plastic bottles, smoke canisters and large metal screws, the statement said. Police repeatedly instructed them over loudspeakers to stop their unlawful action. Despite the fact that the law on police would have allowed the use of means of coercion, police showed restraint and used only bodily force to hold back “the violent participants of the unlawful assembly”, the statement added.

OVER 12,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 6,271 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 5,989 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 64 people, ORFK said on Sunday.

