

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Wax figure of Hungarian soccer legend Ferenc Puskás at Madame Tussauds Budapest opening May 25

MTI/Noémi Bruzák

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

Stats office reports on March wages

Budapest municipal assembly meets

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

ORBÁN IN DOHA: CEASEFIRE NEEDED IN UKRAINE

A ceasefire and peace talks are needed instead of escalating the war in Ukraine, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha on Tuesday.

Hungary's viewpoint of the war differs from that of the European mainstream because it is a neighbour of Ukraine, which has a sizeable Hungarian minority, Orbán said in a discussion with Bloomberg editor-in-chief John Micklethwait. Many of those Hungarians have lost their lives in the war, he added. "This war is the failure of diplomacy. It should have never happened," he said. The main question is not "who invaded whom" but to save the lives that would be lost if the war continues, Orbán said. After a ceasefire is negotiated, the issue of a new "security architecture of the European continent" should also be on the agenda, Orbán said. Peace is only possible through an agreement between Russia and the United States, the prime minister said. Orbán travelled to Doha on Sunday on an official visit at the invitation of his Qatari counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani. Finance Minister Mihály Varga and Economic Development Minister Márton Nagy were part of the delegation.

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ORBÁN: HUNGARY'S DECISION TO BLOCK EPF FUNDS 'A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha on Tuesday that Hungary's decision to block European Peace Facility funds to Ukraine after the country blacklisted Hungary's OTP Bank was "a question of principle". In a discussion with Bloomberg editor-in-chief John Micklethwait, Orbán said: "[I]f a country like Ukraine would like to get your financial support ... they can't put your companies on the blacklist ... So if you need our money, please respect us, and don't sanction our companies."

Answering a question on Hungary "not being keen" on Sweden's NATO accession, Orbán said political relations between Hungary and Sweden were poor. "We would not like to import conflicts into NATO", and they should be solved before Sweden joined the alliance, he said.

Regarding the EU's decision to withhold funding for Hungary, Orbán said that differences of opinion regarding "decoupling" concerning the bloc's policy vis-a-vis Beijing and its handling of the Ukraine war were at the root of the decision. Unlike the EU, Hungary stands for connectivity, and strengthening commercial and political ties, he said. Chinese investments offer a "huge opportunity". "Why should we miss it?" Orbán said. Whether China becomes

a long-term opponent or partner of the West is "our decision", he said. Hungary's LNG purchases from Qatar, which Orbán announced on Monday, are expected to start in 2026, he said. Besides energy security, Hungary also sees Qatar as a potential partner in agriculture, information technology and security, he said. Christian and Muslim countries can find common ground along traditional values such as God, the nation and the family, he said.

Regarding the upgrade of Hungary's sole nuclear plant at Paks, under way under a contract with Russian state-owned Rosatom, Orbán said acting along national interests in Europe quickly resulted in being branded pro-Russian. But, Orbán added, he stood for Hungary and Hungarian national interests.

ORBÁN: US DEMOCRATS INTERFERE WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES

American Democrats are far more "ideologically led" than the Republicans, and Democrats "like to convince you and sometimes force you how to live," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha on Tuesday. "I don't like it," the prime minister said in a discussion with Bloomberg editor-in-chief John Micklethwait. "We have our own culture, the culture defines how we live, don't interfere, please!" "Don't educate us, don't say what is good, what is bad... we don't like that. It's not your job." No nation should tell

Hungarians how to live their lives, he said. Former President Donald Trump "understands" that, he added.

ISLAMISTS TARGET MOL IN PAKISTAN

Islamists attacked a MOL gas and oil plant in northwest Pakistan, killing four policemen and two security guards, local authorities have said. Some 50 extremists attacked the plant of MOL Pakistan Oil and Gas company, a member of the MOL group, in Hangu district, near the Afghan border, police spokesman Ifran Hahn said. So far, no terrorist groups have taken responsibility for the attack, and the MOL subsidiary has been unavailable for comment. MOL told MTI in a statement that none of the company's employees had been present at the plant at the time of the attack. Production at the plant has been temporarily suspended via remote control and switched to back-up safety mode, the company said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY PREPARED FOR NEXT POTENTIAL HEALTH CRISIS

Hungary has taken all necessary and possible measures since the coronavirus pandemic to be prepared for another potential health crisis and be able to protect people's lives, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Geneva on Tuesday. The ministry cited Szijjártó telling the World Health Organisation (WHO) general assembly that the past three years had involved several

challenges and one of the most serious ones was the coronavirus pandemic.

The most important task of the international community would be to prepare for potential future challenges, he said, adding that over-politicising international health care should be avoided. He added that politics and ideology had nothing to do with saving people's lives and if geopolitics are mixed up with health issues, it will cost many lives.

The lesson learnt from Hungary's successful epidemic management was that taking geopolitical issues into consideration would have resulted in many more victims. Had Hungary waited for the European Commission's president to place orders for vaccines "by text message", much fewer lives could have been saved, he added. The government took action instead, and purchased Eastern vaccines whose effectiveness was tested by Hungarian experts, he said. As a result, Hungary was able to launch the fastest vaccination campaign in the European Union and was able to lift restrictions as the first member state, he said. Hungary was even able to offer 8.6 million doses of vaccine to countries in need, he added. The pandemic has made it clear that it is vitally important to set up strategic reserves even if they are considered unnecessary or too expensive under normal circumstances, he said.

Szijjártó said Hungary had taken all necessary measures to be prepared for the next potential health crisis, citing the purchase of cargo aircraft, building

a national vaccine plant and ventilator production plant, and being ready to produce protective masks and gloves.

PARLIAMENT AMENDS ELECTION LAW

Hungarian lawmakers on Tuesday passed an amendment on the local aspects of the country's election law. Parliament's legislative committee last week approved provisional changes that would see a compensation list awarded in respect of settlements with more than 10,000 people voting in local government elections to parties that nominate candidates in at least two-thirds of individual constituencies. In Budapest, a party that nominates mayoral candidates in at least two-thirds of the districts will be entitled to submit a compensation list. Also, it will no longer be possible to call a by-election one year prior to the local government election if the mandate of an individual constituency MP ends prematurely. Accordingly, a person on the party's compensation list would step in. Further, interim municipal elections will only be held before next year's local council elections if a campaign is already under way. The amendment was passed with 130 votes in favour, 51 against and 6 abstentions.

PARLT APPROVES MODIFIED WHISTLEBLOWER LAW

Lawmakers on Tuesday approved a law regulating complaints and the

reporting of abuses after President Katalin Novák sent it back to parliament for reconsideration. The law passed with 147 votes in favour, 6 against and 30 abstentions no longer contains a section criticised by the president which would have made it possible to file reports in the public interest of protecting the Hungarian way of life. In her justification for returning the law to parliament, Novák said that a section of the legislation which was meant to provide stronger protections to Hungary's constitutional rights and values instead weakened those values because it was not based on the assumption that there is a national agreement on them.

HUNGARY'S AMBASSADOR TO US: HUNGARY ALSO PROTECTS NATO EASTERN FLANK

The Hungarian government's basic aim is to protect Hungary and its citizens, which also involves protecting NATO's eastern flank which is especially important in light of the war in Ukraine, Hungary's ambassador to the United States said in Washington, DC, at an event marking Armed Forces Day. Szabolcs Takács said on Monday, local time, that Hungary's approach was also determined by the fact that a large number of ethnic Hungarians were fighting in the Ukrainian army. Hungary's military attaché in Washington, László Szegő, said in front of the representatives of partner

countries' armed forces serving in Washington that Hungary fully supported NATO's policies in Ukraine and continued to fulfil all obligations resulting from its membership. NATO is a cornerstone for collective defence, and by improving its own defence capabilities, Hungary is also contributing to NATO's joint defence system, he said. Hungary will fulfil the NATO requirement to allocate 2% of GDP for defence spending this year, he said. Another NATO requirement to spend at least 20% of the defence allocation on modernising the army has been met for a long time, he added.

Szegő said that the US had been a steady supporter of Hungary's defence capabilities and he expressed thanks to the Ohio National Guard for its 30-year cooperation and help to improve Hungary's military capabilities. In the current uncertain and constantly changing defence environment, the Hungarian government and the Hungarian army highly appreciate the cooperation with the US, he said.

Daniel Bischof, Director for Eastern Europe at the US Department of State, said that the US and Hungary were partners and allies. The US greatly appreciates the close partnership defence cooperation involved and is thankful for the contribution of Hungary's defence forces to establishing joint security. He added that he was pleased to hear the Hungarian ambassador's comments on protecting NATO's eastern flank.

FIDESZ MEP: HUNGARIAN FARMERS MUST NOT BE MADE TO PAY PRICE OF HELP TO UKRAINE

The fact that Ukraine is currently unable to safely export agricultural products must not result in Hungarian farmers paying the price of aid offered to war-torn Ukraine, at a time when they are unable to sell their own produce, Hungarian MEP Enikő Győri said on Tuesday. She told Hungarian journalists at the scene of a protest organised by farmers from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania in Brussels that an agreement had been signed with the European Commission concerning the imports of agricultural products from Ukraine. The agreement required the affected countries to join forces and farmers to make their voices heard in order to make the Brussels body keep its promise. The Commission must address the issue, Győri said, arguing that "it cannot depend on the war in Ukraine whether the grain stored by Hungarian farmers remains in their stores unsold and whether Ukrainian agricultural goods get to those in need in Africa and other parts of the world".

MEP Balázs Hidvéghi said in a statement that it was "unacceptable" that the EC had forced poorly prepared and ill-conceived measures on member states, causing serious damage to farmers in central Europe. He noted massive support provided to

the Ukrainian state and its people. He called on the European Commission "to pay a lot more attention to the protection of the European people's interests". "We will not allow our farmers to be pushed to the brink of collapse because of their irresponsible decision," Hidvéghi said.

Hungary's agriculture ministry issued a statement, saying that it supports the farmers who went to stage a protest in Brussels. In the statement, Agriculture Minister István Nagy praised the farmers "calling on the European Union to take the steps against the influx of Ukrainian grain seriously and to extend the ban until the end of the year".

RÉTVÁRI: DECISION TO EXPEL PEOPLE SMUGGLERS CONSEQUENCE OF EU PENALTIES OVER CROWDED PRISONS

The Hungarian government "had to" make a decision to expel convicted people smugglers from the country because "Brussels refuses to contribute to border control costs but fines Hungary if its prisons are overcrowded", a state secretary of the interior ministry told MTI on Tuesday. Bence Rétvári said the EU owed Hungary over 1.5 billion euros in return for Hungary protecting the bloc's external borders. He insisted that the EU had only refunded one percent of that "unbelievably large total". "We stop illegal migrants at our southern border, and we

apprehend and then keep in prison the people smugglers," he added. Brussels does not contribute to the expenditure of Hungarian prisons "but they expect us to keep foreign people smugglers at the expense of Hungarian taxpayers," he said.

Some 2,000 people smugglers have been convicted in Hungary so far, contributing to prison overcrowding, Rétvári said, and noted that Hungary had faced European procedures because of "inhumane prison conditions". He also added that the cost of keeping one convict in prison amounted to an annual 5 million forints (EUR 13,300). The decision to expel 808 convicts, mostly nationals of neighbouring countries, was aimed at "saving Hungarian taxpayers from having to pay the cost of keeping them in Hungarian prisons", he said.

HUNGARY AMBASSADOR PRESENTS STATE HONOUR TO CROATIA'S ZVONKO MILAS

Csaba Demcsák, Hungary's ambassador to Zagreb, presented the Hungarian state's Order of Merit, Officer's Cross, to Zvonko Milas, the president of the Office of Croatians Beyond the Borders and the co-chair of the Hungarian-Croatian mixed committee for minorities, in Zagreb on Tuesday. At the ceremony in the Liszt Institute, the ambassador said that the state honour was awarded by Hungarian President Katalin Novák in recognition of Milas' achievements

as the mixed committee's co-chair. Radován Ruzs, Hungary's consul general to Zagreb, said that Milas considers caring for the members of Croatian communities abroad not only his duty but "a cause he supports from the bottom of his heart". Accepting the award, Milas said he was honoured to receive it which would be an inspiration for him to continue his work for the two countries and their respective minorities.

In the laudation, it was noted that serving as the Croatian co-chair of the mixed committee since 2017, Milas has facilitated a successful partnership cooperation with Ferenc Kalmár, the committee's other chair for Hungary. Milas played a major role as state secretary in the presentation of the mixed committee's work as a European best practice at OSCE events in Vienna and during the Hungarian presidency of the Council of Europe which had the protection of minorities and the promotion of their rights as one of the priorities.

HUNGARY CBANK LEAVES BASE RATE UNCHANGED AT 13%, BUT CUTS O/N COLLATERALISED LOAN RATE

Hungarian central bank rate-setters decided to leave the base rate on hold at 13%, but voted to cut the central bank's O/N collateralised loan rate by 100 basis points to 19.50% at a monthly policy meeting on Tuesday. The Council left the O/N deposit rate, at the

bottom of the "interest rate corridor", at 12.50%. In a statement released after the meeting, the Council said its members had also decided to cut the interest rate on the central bank's one-day quick deposits offered at daily tenders by 100bp. It also decided to reduce the interest paid on optional reserves by 100bp from 18% to 17%. The Council said it was necessary to maintain the current level of the base rate over a prolonged period in order to ensure "that inflation expectations are anchored and the inflation target is achieved in a sustainable manner".

At a press conference, National Bank of Hungary governor György Matolcsy said the measure marked the start of the "normalisation" of monetary policy. He said the inflationary peak was being followed by disinflation. Matolcsy said that after the twin deficits that had characterised the past two years, the stability of Hungary's financial markets had improved significantly as a result of both external and internal factors. He added, at the same time, that it was likely there would be no talk of lowering the base rate for a longer period of time.

BUDGET DEFICIT CLOSE TO HUF 2,710 BN IN APRIL, MINISTRY CONFIRMS

Hungary's cash flow-based budget balance reached 2,709.7 billion forints (EUR 7.2bn) at the end of April, the finance ministry confirmed in a detailed release of data on Tuesday. The deficit widened from 2,089.7

billion at the end of March. The central budget deficit reached 2,671.6 billion forints at the end of April and the social security funds were 77.4 billion in the red. Separate state funds had a 39.3 billion forint surplus.

The ministry noted that expenditures related to the regulated utilities price scheme for households came to 848.5 billion forints by the end of April. Expenditures on home subsidies reached 283.3 billion forints in January-April, climbing by 106.4 billion forints from the base period on higher payouts for home renovations, the ministry said. Spending on state assets grew as building investments and transport infrastructure developments “advanced by a large degree”, it added.

“The government’s primary goal is to protect families as well as preserve workplaces and the value of pensions, even amid the drawn out war and the energy crisis caused by the resulting sanctions,” the ministry said. With a nearly quadrupled allocation to keep the regulated utilities price scheme in place in the 2023 budget, the government continues to ensure families, businesses and local councils the “biggest utilities support in Europe”, it added. “The government is improving balance indicators in the perilous international environment,

too, reducing the fiscal deficit and state debt,” the ministry said. The full-year deficit target is 3,400.2 billion forints. The deficit reached 4,753.4 billion forints in 2022.

OVER 10,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 5,766 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 4,476 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 32 people, ORFK said on Tuesday.

MADAME TUSSAUDS TO OPEN IN BUDAPEST

A new Madame Tussauds will open in Budapest on May 25, featuring 51 Hungarian and international celebrities and historical wax figures. At the media premiere at Palazzo Dorottya, Chris Scurrah of franchise owner Merlin Attractions Operations Ltd. noted that the Madame Tussauds brand was part of UK-based leisure park operator Merlin Entertainments Group. Madame Tussauds Budapest is the first such franchise to be fully

uniquely developed and newly built with local partners, he said.

Paul Fox, the United Kingdom’s ambassador to Hungary, said the opening of Madame Tussauds Budapest was also a celebration of the Hungarian capital’s rich cultural heritage and vibrant spirit. He noted that the Budapest museum was the only Madame Tussauds in central Europe. Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said Madame Tussauds was a “gift” to the capital marking its 150-year anniversary, adding that its figures of the present, past and distant past made it “a bit like this city itself”.

Madame Tussauds Budapest will feature a total of 51 wax figures, including 17 Hungarian or Hungary-related ones created specifically for the Budapest museum. Those include historic figures such as Saint Stephen, Hungary’s first king, King Matthias, reform politicians Lajos Kossuth and István Széchenyi, poet Sándor Petőfi, pianist Ferenc Liszt, computer scientist János Neumann, Dracula actor Bela Lugosi, and soccer legend Ferenc Puskás. International figures include Queen Elizabeth II, Pope Francis, Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, among others. The Budapest Tussauds is the only one to feature Bud Spencer, Chuck Norris and Peter Falk, the organisers said.

