

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Victims of communism commemorated at smallholder politician Béla Kovács's statue in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

Events related to the wars in Middle East, Ukraine

European Parliament holds plenary session

TOP STORY

KOCSIS: NEW CHILD PROTECTION REGIME NEEDED

Máté Kocsis, the parliamentary group leader of ruling Fidesz, called for the introduction of a new child protection regime with clear-cut rules, in an interview with public radio on Sunday.

Kocsis said the government had ordered inspections into the current state of affairs when it came to protecting children. He said Fidesz's child protection package will contain around 20 amendment proposals, including stricter punishment for the sexual abuse of children. The possibility of imposing harsher punishment on those who help cover up child abuse will also be looked into, he added. Also, the ruling parties will propose ending the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse and make child abusers ineligible for a certificate of good conduct, he said.

On another subject, Kocsis said Sweden had "made several gestures" towards Hungary in recent weeks, including a visit by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. He said it was more the left-wing and liberal parties in Sweden that had "disparaged" Hungary, but this was "either actively, or at least passively tolerated by the entire Swedish political elite". He said the gestures gave cause for hope, and Fidesz's parliamentary group no longer saw any obstacles to ratifying Sweden's NATO membership.

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH BYD EXECUTIVES

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed the status of Chinese electric car maker BYD's investments in Hungary with the company's leaders in his office on Saturday, his press chief said. BYD's construction of its first European plant in Szeged, in southern Hungary, is one of the most important investments in Hungary's economic history, Bertalan Havasi told MTI. The multi-billion euro investment will bring new technologies to Hungary and create thousands of jobs, and will also benefit local suppliers, he said. Orbán said his government wanted the positive impact of the investment to also be felt by the locals. To this end, the government is launching billions of forints worth of infrastructure development projects that will include the road network, the public utility network as well as community services, he added. The sides noted that Hungary has been China's number one CEE investment destination for years. Hungary has built a predictable and stable partnership based on mutual respect with China over the past decade, and bilateral economic and trade cooperation has been setting new records year after year, they said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: BYD PLANT HELPING HUNGARY 'TO SET PACE FOR A GLOBAL TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION'

China's BYD, the world's biggest electric vehicle maker completing a plant in Hungary, has helped the country to a position in which it will "set the pace for a global technological revolution rather than lag behind others," Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, told a BYD ceremony in Budapest on Friday. Electric car making will be a greatly decisive factor in the European economy, and the BYD project will ensure "a long-term guarantee for Hungary's economy to stay on a growth path", the minister said. The project also demonstrates the success of the government's Eastern Opening strategy: "we realised in time that the eastern economies will not only close the gap with the West very soon but they will surpass western ones in some areas," he added. "In Europe there is a huge competition for Chinese projects using cutting edge technologies and offering thousands of jobs," Szijjártó said. "We entered the competition in time ... and Hungary has now become the number one destination for Chinese investments in central Europe," he said, adding that after 2020, Hungary in 2023 had again received the highest FDI from China in the region.

GOVT OFFICIAL: RUSSIA- UKRAINE WAR HAS ONLY BROUGHT HUMAN SUFFERING

The war between Russia and Ukraine that has now been going on for two years has only resulted in human suffering, Csaba Dömötör, state secretary of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office, said on Saturday. Marking the second anniversary of the outbreak of the war, Dömötör said the end of the conflict was not yet in sight. "But what we can see is that the consequences have been dramatic," he said in a video on Facebook, noting that hundreds of thousands have died, millions have fled their homes, and "the war has only brought human suffering". He added that the economic impact of the war was also severe, and not just for the warring sides. Dömötör said Europe had been "dragged into a miscalculated sanctions policy" that had only resulted in more hardship rather than bringing an end to the war, arguing that the sanctions had resulted in higher energy prices and soaring inflation in Europe, "while Russia hasn't been brought to its knees". Hungary, he said, was also feeling the growing economic burdens, "as the country is under constant pressure to provide billions more in financial support for the war". Dömötör said the past two years had shown that the conflict could not be settled on the battlefield, underlining the government's repeated call for peace.

Tamás Menczer, the state secretary for bilateral relations of the foreign ministry, also marked the anniversary, saying that deciding between war and peace was “a very serious choice”, but the Hungarian government had chosen peace, while the left had chosen war. Menczer said in a video on Facebook that the Hungarian left would send weapons to the war, “and those who send weapons already have one foot in the conflict”. He called for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire and peace talks.

OFFICIALS PAY TRIBUTE TO VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

Officials commemorated the memorial day for the victims of communism on Sunday. Speaking at a ceremony at the House of Terror Museum in Budapest, interior ministry state secretary Bence Rétvári said violence was a fundamental aspect of communism, and “the left always looks the other way when it comes to violence”. “The red fog first descended on our country in 1919,” claiming more than 500 victims, according to some sources, he said. During the second communist dictatorship, 700,000-800,000 people were taken to Gulag camps, of whom 300,000 never returned, Rétvári said. A million criminal proceedings were launched, with mainly members of the peasantry and the working class being put on trial, he added, paying tribute to the 1,200 people who were executed and the 200,000 who fled the country in 1956. Violence is a fundamental

aspect of communism, he said, noting that a year ago, far-left Antifa groups had assaulted passers-by on the streets of Budapest. “Extremists think they’re allowed to resort to violence to upset the social order,” the state secretary said.

He said that if communists failed to seize power, “they try to take a detour, by first seizing ideological power”. The victims of communism need to be remembered so that history “becomes ingrained in our central European DNA, and to warn western Europeans ... that far-left ideas must be rejected”, he added. Rétvári said certain politicians tended to “look the other way” when it came to Antifa attacks or when other politicians use violence. Moderates reject violence, and those who defend it are always extremist political forces, he said.

Mária Schmidt, the director of the House of Terror Museum, said those who were born during the fall of communism in 1989-90 and are now parents themselves had a duty to pass on to their children their knowledge of how their grandparents and great-grandparents lived. She said this was not easy, because some still had an interest in keeping children from learning the truth about communist dictatorships. The memorial day is needed to keep repeating the truth about the tragedy of the communist dictatorship, she added.

Réka Földváry Kiss, the head of the National Remembrance Committee, said the memorial day was not just about the personal tragedy of

independent smallholder politician Béla Kovács, who was arrested and deported to the Soviet Union in 1947, but also about confronting the fact that if communists gain power, then anyone can end up being a victim. Földváry Kiss, János Latorcai, deputy speaker of parliament, László Géza Sömjéni, head of the Freedom Fighters Foundation, and Csongor Csáky, head of the Rákóczi Association, laid a wreath at the Monument of National Martyrs.

Csaba Latorcai, state secretary at the public administration and regional development ministry, told a commemoration that “the spirit of communism haunts Europe again”, but this time communists were “backed up by millions of US dollars, rather than Soviet bayonets”. In his speech by a memorial plaque at the Budapest Gyorskocsi Street prison used by the communist police, Latorcai said that in the 1940s, it was “foreign interests” that put communists in power. “Hungarians didn’t want communism then, and they don’t want it now,” the state secretary said. He said the legacy and message of the victims of communism was that Hungary can only be built on Christian culture. “It is only this culture that allows our children to also live in a free and sovereign country,” he added. Under a parliamentary decree, February 25 has been observed as a memorial day of martyrs of communism since 2000. On this day in 1947, leader of the Independent Smallholders’ Party Béla Kovács was illegally detained and deported to the Soviet Union.

CHRISTDEM MEP IN ROME URGES BROAD RIGHT- WING COOPERATION 'TO STOP LEFT'

At stake at the June EP elections will be whether "Europe can be returned to normalcy", which is impossible without "stopping the radical left", and the strengthening and cooperation of right wing forces, Hungary's Christian Democrat (KDNP) MEP György Hölvényi said in Rome on Friday evening. Hölvényi, KDNP's deputy leader in charge of foreign affairs, is attending a two-day congress of Forza Italia at the invitation of the party. On Friday, Hölvényi held talks with Antonio Tajani, Italy's deputy prime minister who also serves as foreign minister and is Forza's candidate for party leader. Speaking to MTI by phone, Hölvényi said that Tajani, a European politician with vast experience, was seeking out ways for centre-right parties to cooperate after "their highly anticipated strengthening" in Europe. "Tajani, if elected by Forza's congress to fill Silvio Berlusconi's post as party leader, will strive to serve as a connecting point in the potential cooperation of centre-right parties," Hölvényi said, expressing KDNP's interest in being party "to such a broad cooperation". "Every opportunity must be seized for building a broader cooperation because this is the only opportunity to create a normal Europe," he said.

THINK-TANK HEAD CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE 'AT BRINK' OF THIRD WORLD WAR

There is a need for ceasefire and peace, and the leaders best suited to achieve it are Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán, Miklós Szánthó, the head of Hungary's Center for Fundamental Rights, said at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, DC, on Friday evening. Szánthó said the "cult of woke" presented "a clear and present danger to our way of life and even our security". "Woke is just a new form of communism," he said, adding that "it is a civilizational threat, too." "Mass illegal migration waters down the political power of those voters who still remember what the American dream and European prosperity once were. And with its gender ideology, the new left ... targets children ... undermines the family which is the cornerstone of our societies," he said.

Szánthó said "gender ideology, cancel culture, rejection of the divine and illegal mass migration are insidious, but slow acting poisons that seek to paralyse the nation and the body politic". He said Hungary was "a pain in the liberals' neck because we stand firm on God, homeland and the family, and we do not allow George Soros to interfere in our domestic issues by giving millions to his liberal comrades", and repeated the slogan of the Hungarian right wing: "No migration! No gender! No war!" Szánthó called for stopping the wokeists and

setting up the global network of anti-globalist forces, which he said CPAC would also pursue at its next event in Budapest in April.

AGMIN: HUNGARIAN WINEMAKERS BEYOND BORDERS CAN COUNT ON HUNGARY GOVT SUPPORT

Agriculture Minister István Nagy inaugurated the refurbished headquarters and a laboratory of the Association of Transylvanian Hungarian Winemakers in Săcueni (Székelyhíd), in north-western Romania, on Friday. The Hungarian agriculture ministry pays special attention to developing historical Hungarian wine regions and supports Hungarian winemaker communities beyond the borders, Nagy said at the event. He noted that the Hungarian government had provided professional and financial support to Hungarian agricultural producers beyond the borders who form a significant part of Hungarian communities abroad since 2012. The renovation of the Săcueni facility which operates a laboratory, has been one of the projects carried out with the Hungarian government's support, he said.

MAYOR: BUDAPEST WON'T COMPROMISE ON ITS OWN, OTHERS' FREEDOM

Mayor Gergely Karácsony said at a demonstration held on Saturday to mark the second anniversary of the start of the war in Ukraine that Budapest will not compromise on its

own or others' freedom, expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Karácsony said that the demonstration held near the Russian embassy in central Budapest was meant to send "a message to Putin and Putin's students" that "Budapest will not compromise on its own freedom or on the freedom of others". "We are here today to stand with the courageous Ukrainian people and send the message to the world that although we may have a worthless government, we are not a worthless nation," Karácsony said. The mayor expressed shame over Hungary's incumbent government, insisting that there were conflicts in which it did not come into question whether one sides with the aggressor or the victim. "Budapest knows what it is like when Russian tanks roll along its streets. Budapest knows how hard it is to stand up for freedom. But Budapest knows, too, that if there is no freedom, then there is nothing, either," said Karácsony.

Katalin Cseh, an MEP of opposition Momentum, the chief organiser of the event, said that "Vladimir Putin's brutal, bloody, inhumane war has been going on in Ukraine for two years now," with Ukraine fighting "its freedom fight against oppression under a terror which is unimaginable for us overall". She called for standing with and helping Ukraine, saying that "it is our duty to show the world that the Hungarian nation will not serve the interests of Vladimir Putin, a war criminal ... We are not siding with a war criminal," said Cseh. She noted that more than 500 children had been killed and some

20,000 Ukrainian children had been deported by the Russians in the war. The Momentum MEP called it "shameful" that "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has made assistance to Ukraine subject to blackmail because of his questionable and shady dealings with Putin".

"It is a primary goal for us all that Hungary should not be dragged into the war, but one who acts as a servant to an aggressor in a war is one with a pro-war mind-set. Viktor Orbán is one doing so, Viktor Orbán is a pro-war [politician]," Cseh said. At the demonstration, participants observed a minute of silence to pay tribute to the victims of the war.

OPPOSITION PARTIES STAGE DEMONSTRATION FOR DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN BUDAPEST

Opposition parties held a demonstration for the direct election of the head of state in downtown Budapest on Sunday. At the event held at Kossuth Lajos Square in front of Parliament, speakers from the Democratic Coalition (DK), Momentum, the Socialist Party and Párbeszéd criticised Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "regime" and a pardon granted by outgoing President Katalin Novák to the deputy head of a children's home convicted of covering up child abuse.

Klára Dobrev, DK's shadow prime minister, insisted that the responsibility for the child abuse case at the Bicske children's home lay with "Orbán's Fidesz-linked paedophile ring", but

"they won't be able to make this network disappear with legislative amendments". She said the ruling parties were now "scrambling to elect someone who looks like a president", calling the process "a presidential election coup" that she said was needed "because Viktor Orbán is afraid of the people".

Tímea Szabó, acting co-leader of Párbeszéd, said freedom in Hungary today was under threat "from Viktor Orbán and his paedophile ring". She insisted that "Orbán's entire regime is guilty, most of all the prime minister." Ágnes Kunhalmi, co-leader of the Socialists, said those actually responsible for the Bicske child abuse case were "hidden in the shadows", adding that those staying silent on the case were accomplices. She also said the opposition parties should field joint election lists for both the European Parliament and municipal elections. Momentum lawmaker Dávid Bedő said it had still not been explained why the accomplice of a child abuser had been granted a pardon. He said that in addition to a direct presidential election, the opposition should also be demanding justice for victims of abuse.

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said Hungary had a government which had spent more on "state propaganda" than on social and child protection. He said the government was spending "tens and hundreds of billions a year on repeating that it is against migration and for families while releasing people smugglers and the accomplices of paedophile monsters from prison".

GYURCSÁNY: 'DEMOCRATS OBLIGED TO COOPERATE'

"Democrats are obliged to cooperate in the fight against [Prime Minister Viktor] Orbán's regime, but not everyone thinks the same way about this cooperation," Ferenc Gyurcsány, the leader of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK), said in a speech assessing the past year on Saturday. Gyurcsány said those in the opposition who wanted to fight both the government and the rest of the opposition were setting themselves up for defeat and their opponents for victory. He said 2023 had been a difficult year for the world, but "the most rubbish year" for Hungary in a long time. He said the government and "democrats" disagreed on the reasons for the international order coming unbalanced.

He said it was right for a country to try to manoeuvre between the global powers in a complex and contradictory international situation, adding, at the same time, that manoeuvring "cannot be treason". Gyurcsány said the one aspect of any international conflict DK and the government agreed on was that Israel had a right to defend itself after Hamas's terrorist attack, even if what was happening in Gaza right now "gives cause for concern".

Turning to domestic politics, Gyurcsány said the fierceness of political debates in Hungary was about deciding whether the country should be "Christian, as [ruling] Fidesz says, or civic, which sums up what democrats want".

"Hungary is the country of believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians," he said, arguing that "if the homeland belongs to everyone, it cannot identify itself solely with the faith of a single group". Gyurcsány said DK considered Fidesz's system "unconstitutional" because "they strive to obtain and hold absolute power". He said DK would not view Tamás Sulyok, the ruling parties' nominee for head of state, as president if he is elected, but as "Viktor Orbán's employee", arguing that Sulyok, as head of the Constitutional Court, had already been playing "an active role in creating, consolidating and upholding Orbán's unconstitutional power".

Meanwhile, Gyurcsány said the past three weeks had been "shocking", as it had come to light that individuals close to the government had abused children, "and the highest-ranking state officials tried and are trying to ... cover up these crimes". He insisted that this "permanently tarnishes Viktor Orbán's regime, making the prime minister the number one leader of dishonesty".

Ruling Fidesz in response said in a statement that Gyurcsány was still the leader of the "dollar left", and they "still refuse to take responsibility for their crimes". The party said Gyurcsány's speech was "once again all about their aim to gain power at all cost". "They still refuse to take responsibility for their actions...", Fidesz said, adding that with Gyurcsány "crimes have no consequences". The party said Gyurcsány wanted to get back into power after having "pushed the country

into a crisis in eight years, scrapped one month of pension and eliminated family support" as prime minister.

HUNGARIAN INTERCHURCH AID SUPPORTS OVER HALF A MILLION PEOPLE SINCE OUTBREAK OF WAR IN UKRAINE

Hungarian Interchurch Aid has provided help in various forms to more than half a million people since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the leader of the organisation told daily Magyar Nemzet in an interview published on Saturday. "We have given help to some 513,000 people in one of the largest humanitarian assistance programmes in our history," László Lehel told the paper, on the second anniversary of the start of the war. He noted support provided to people moving to temporary community centres set up in the vicinity of the war zones in 22 Ukrainian counties. "We provided them food and supplied on many instances appliances such as refrigerators or helped the facilities that lacked a bathroom or a cooking space," Lehel said. Speaking about the charity's financing, Lehel noted grants won from a humanitarian fund for Ukraine managed in Kyiv in addition to support received from the Hungarian government. "This year, we have 18 billion forints available to spend on aid programmes," he said.