

The Washington Post

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington.

RE V1 V2 V3 V4



Partly sunny 57/45 • Tomorrow: Mostly cloudy 63/44 B20

Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 • \$4

Rubio tries to boost Orban in Hungary

The prime minister, a Trump ally, is facing tough reelection bid

BY JOHN HUDSON

BUDAPEST — Secretary of State Marco Rubio sought to throw Viktor Orban a political lifeline on Monday, as the Hungarian prime minister trails in most polls ahead of an election this spring that could see Europe's most pro-Russian and longest-ruling prime minister voted out of power.

The top U.S. diplomat praised Orban's leadership, signed a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with his government and defended issuing Hungary an exemption from U.S. sanctions despite Orban's decision to continue buying Russian energy.

"We want this country to do well," said Rubio standing alongside Orban during a news conference in Budapest, "especially as long as you're the prime minister and the leader of this country."

"President Trump is deeply committed to your success, because your success is our success," Rubio added.

Rubio's support for Orban marks the latest example of the Trump administration working to keep in power right-wing populist leaders who have praised President Donald Trump and are seen as ideologically aligned. In summer, political neophyte Karol Nawrocki narrowly won a presidential runoff in Poland after being invited to the White House by Trump.

In a post on Truth Social last week, Trump endorsed Orban for the April elections and called him a "truly strong and powerful Leader" and a "true friend, fighter, and WINNER."

Whether the efforts by Trump

SEE HUNGARY ON A10

Welcoming in the Year of the Horse



AJENG DINAR ULFIANA/REUTERS

A worshiper lights incense sticks on the eve of the Chinese Lunar New Year on Monday at Boen San Bio temple in Tangerang, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia. Tuesday marks the start of the Year of the Horse.

'Us versus them' battle tears small Va. town apart

Purcellville drama involves 'Team Mayberry,' felony charges, lawsuits and an attempted citizen revolt

BY PAUL SCHWARTZMAN

The town council meeting had reached the point on the agenda where the public could speak on any topic, and emotions, to put it mildly, were a tad raw.

"It's not too late to resign!" a woman shouted at the lawmakers, four of whom, including the mayor, are the focus of a recall campaign.

"Stop screwing our town!" a

man railed.

"We are broke and sicker of you than ever!" someone else yelled.

Small towns often are known for their quirky, insular intrigue, but the drama unfolding in Purcellville, a Virginia exurb that's a 50-mile drive west of Washington, is a brass-knuckled version of quaint.

The battle is rooted in tensions that often divide communities across the country — change

versus status quo, growth versus no growth — only in Purcellville the weapons are lawsuits, an attempted citizen revolt, and the kind of ferocious rhetoric that defines much of public life in contemporary America.

Residents could be forgiven for needing a whiteboard to chart the dizzying developments.

Over the past year, state police accused the vice mayor and town manager of orchestrating a bid-

rigging scheme — charges both men deny. The vice mayor has filed a \$42 million lawsuit against a gaggle of town and law enforcement officials, alleging that his rights have been violated. The interim police chief has filed a \$20 million defamation lawsuit against the vice mayor.

Then there are the more than 1,100 residents who signed petitions seeking to recall the mayor,

SEE PURCELLVILLE ON A4

Popular anger burns in Iran

CITIZENS IN SHOCK AFTER CRACKDOWN

Trump raises pressure going into nuclear talks

BY SUSANNAH GEORGE

As Iran heads into a second round of nuclear talks with the United States in Geneva on Tuesday, under the threat of U.S. forces building up in the region, Tehran is attempting to project strength and unity. But seething popular anger has not abated in the weeks following a government crackdown that killed thousands of protesters, according to accounts from inside the country.

Following the partial rollback of a government-imposed communications blackout that closed off Iran during the protests and crackdown last month, more information has begun to circulate. Iranians described to The Washington Post a society deeply traumatized, with many people saying they only recently learned the full extent of the violence, as security forces continue to carry out waves of arrests.

But some analysts say Iran's unprecedented weakness at home could diminish the flexibility of its country's leadership to make the kinds of compromises necessary for a deal.

Iran remains a nation in shock. The government crackdown left more than 7,000 people dead, more than 6,500 of them protesters, according to the Human Rights Activists News Agency, a U.S.-based advocacy organization for rights in Iran. The figure is expected to climb. Thousands are

SEE IRAN ON A9



LUCIAN PERKINS/THE WASHINGTON POST

ROBERT DUVALL | 1931-2026

A chameleon of the silver screen dies at 95

Duvall became one of the most respected acting talents of his generation

BY ADAM BERNSTEIN

Robert Duvall, an Oscar-winning actor who disappeared into an astonishing range of roles — lawmen and outlaws, Southern-fried alcoholics and Manhattan boardroom sharks, a hotheaded veteran and a cool-tempered mob consigliere — and emerged as one of the most respected screen talents of his generation, died Feb. 15. He was 95.

Robert Duvall dances with his wife, Luciana Pedraza Duvall, in their Virginia ranch home.

IN THE NEWS

Ballroom redesign New renderings offer the clearest look yet at President Donald Trump's White House addition, which faces legal challenges and questions on Capitol Hill. B13

Obama believes The former president said the universe is too vast for alien life not to exist, but he hasn't seen proof of it. A2

THE NATION
A federal judge in Pennsylvania ordered the Trump administration to restore displays discussing slavery to the site in Philadelphia where George Washington lived during his presidency. A6

THE WORLD
The abduction of Mexican mine workers remains a mystery and has raised fears locally and more widely generated questions about the security improvements touted by President Claudia Sheinbaum. A8

FINANCIAL
More companies are allowing weeks or months of paid or unpaid leave as a perk to valued employees. A15

STYLE
The Y2K 'it' jeans 7FAM, which millennials associate with a particular moment in celebrity history, are back. B7

SPORTS
The U.S. women's hockey team seems like the only sure thing at the Winter Olympics after thrashing Sweden to reach Thursday's gold medal game. B1

Barry Svrluga asks: Can you simultaneously love and loathe the Olympics? B1

LOCAL
Maryland's two largest school districts are facing backlash for using a Muslim holiday to make up for lost class time after last month's winter storm. B13

A man's body was found beaten and burned in his Logan Circle condominium. B13

BUSINESS NEWS A15
COMICS B10
OBITUARIES B14
OPINION PAGES A17
TELEVISION B12
WORLD NEWS A8

CONTENT © 2026
The Washington Post
Year 149, No. 5449

0 70628121100 3