



General News

Magistrála narrowed to cut noise, fumes

Using concrete barriers, Prague 2 Town Hall has narrowed the capital's magistrála artery from four to three lanes in a bid to reduce noise and pollution. The change affects Legerova street. Prague 4 officials fear the move will increase congestion in other areas. [most Czech press]

Unknown Prague photographs of Hitler found

Historians from the Prague Military History Institute have found 70 previously unknown photographs from the 1939 meeting of Adolf Hitler and top Nazi officials at Prague Castle. [MFD A1-A3 Sat]

Birth rate highest in ČR's history

Nearly 120,000 children were born in the Czech Republic last year, the most since the country's founding in 1993, the Czech Statistical Office reported. The Czech population grew by some 86,400 to 10,467,542, owing mainly to immigration. [Právo 3 Sat, ČTK]

Military signs CZK 14.4bn PCA deal

The Defence Ministry Friday signed a CZK 14.4 billion contract with US group General Dynamics to supply the Czech military with 107 Pandur II armoured personnel carriers, made by Austrian firm Steyr. [ČTK]

Law & Regulation

Security service seeking access to mobile data

The leadership of security service BIS is lobbying for legislation to allow the agency to collect data from mobile operators on calls and text messages. The amendment would give BIS access to information on the time, location and participants in calls and messages but not their content. The cabinet and Parliament are slated to decide on the measure this week. [Právo 1, 2 Sat]

Czech Republic in EU & World

Topolánek: US radar will be built

Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek told Prima TV Sunday that he believes the planned US anti-missile radar in the Czech Republic will be realised, but the project might be delayed. Topolánek said he did not expect US President Barack Obama to speak against the plan during his visit to Prague next month. [ČTK]

Albright: Economic crisis could damage NATO

Speaking Friday at a conference marking the 10th anniversary of Czech accession to NATO, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned that political extremism, protectionism and isolationism arising from the financial crisis could threaten the alliance's unity. [Právo 2 Sat, MFD A4 Sat]

Politics & Elections

MfD: PM's friend tried to quash Wolf coverage

Marek Dalík, a close friend of Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, tried to persuade Czech TV reporter Dalibor Bártek to scuttle reporting on former ČSSD MP Petr Wolf, Mladá fronta Dnes reports. Wolf, a frequent ally of the cabinet in Parliament, is under police investigation for suspected misuse of state subsidies. Bártek recorded a meeting at which Dalík said he had been asked by Topolánek to intervene on Wolf's behalf. The PM refused to comment. [MfD A1, A2]

LN: Split brewing in KDU-ČSL

Lidové noviny reports that coalition party KDU-ČSL might splinter unless it finds a strong leader. According to the daily, a group coalesced around Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek is considering founding a new party. Regional Development Minister Cyril Svoboda, who is standing for KDU-ČSL chair, said he has heard of a possible split. Kalousek said he will not comment on the matter until the party's June congress. [LN 1, 2 Sat]

Klaus to speak at ČSSD gathering

President Václav Klaus will address Social Democrats at their party congress on the weekend, becoming the first Czech head of state to attend a ČSSD convention. [MfD A2 Sat, Právo 2 Sat]

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Business & Investment

Crunch hitting healthcare, government plans subsidies

Public health insurers collected 15% less in mandatory contributions in January 2009 than in the same month last year, a rate that would cost insurers CZK 30 billion if maintained through the year. Health Minister Daniela Filipiová will present plans today to boost healthcare subsidies by CZK 5.1bn this year and CZK 8.4bn in 2010. Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek said he is likely to support the proposal. [HN 1, 2]

Kalousek: CZK 140bn bond sale on tap

Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek told Mladá fronta Dnes the government would mitigate the mounting public deficit by selling up to CZK 140bn worth of special bonds to the general public in the next few years. The five- and 10-year bonds will offer 3%-4% interest and the state will be ready to buy them back at any time. [most Czech press]

FinMin eyes VAT cut to save service jobs

Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek is proposing a lower VAT for restaurants, hair salons and shoe, clothing and bicycle repair shops. The move, aimed at preserving jobs in some service sectors, will cost the state CZK 5bn and reduce municipalities' by CZK 2bn, the minister said. [MFD A9 Sat]

ČSSD wants to stop airport privatisation

The cabinet is slated to discuss today a ČSSD bill to keep Prague Airport in

state hands. Legislation introduced by Shadow Finance Minister Bohuslav Sobotka characterises the airport as a strategic asset. Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek said Czech TV Sunday that the cabinet will dismiss the proposal. Kalousek said it was Sobotka, during his tenure as finance minister, who included the airport in privatisation plans. [HN 16]

ČSA likely back in red in 2009

Czech Airlines (ČSA) expects to lose up to CZK 412m this year on a 6% decline in passenger numbers but will "stay on the market", CFO Luboš Černý told Reuters. Last year ČSA earned CZK 500m, according to unaudited results. [ČTK]

Prosperita buys Orco stake

Investment company Prosperita investiční společnost has become the biggest shareholder in Orco Property Group, acquiring 5.02% of the development firm. Miroslav Kurka, chairman of Prosperita's board of directors, said its stake could grow depending on Orco's situation and the larger economic picture. [HN 22]

HN: "Dr Doom" expects sharp growth

In an interview with Hospodářské noviny, controversial Swiss investor and financial commentator Marc Faber, popularly known as Dr Doom, forecast sharp growth on developed countries' financial markets, accompanied by high inflation. Faber advised investment in agricultural, parking lots and precious metals and predicted oil prices will rise to USD 60-70 a barrel. [HN 16, 17]

More News

- » President Václav Klaus on Friday appointed physical chemist Jiří Drahoš to lead the **Czech Academy of Sciences**, replacing Václav Pačes. [ČTK]
- » Police have charged a 26-year-old man in Rýmařov, north Moravia, with selling illegal copies of films via e-mail. The suspect, who was offering more than 600 titles, faces up to two years in prison for **copyright violation**. [Právo 8 Sat]
- » Czechs bought almost 1.18m **personal computers** in 2008, **up 19%** on 2007, according to consultancy Gartner. Laptop sales accounted for the gain, rising 35% to 721,300, while desktop sales were flat. [ČTK]
- » Providers of **consumer loans** and retail instalment plans polled by ČTK have not seen a major deterioration in clients' payment discipline, but they have adopted stricter approval lending policies. [ČTK]

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