

General News

Administrative proceedings over health charges

The interior ministry is to start administrative proceedings against five more regions over health charge refunds – the Central Bohemia, South Moravia, Pardubice, Moravia-Silesia, and Liberec regions. The regions refused to change the method of health charge payments they carry out on behalf of patients. Four regions have already been under scrutiny over the issue since January. *Source: most Czech press*

Another 55 Czech soldiers to join the ISAF mission

The government yesterday approved the sending of a further 55 personnel to the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The reinforcements are to help with the training of the Afghan police force and to man two artillery radiolocators, which are being sent to strengthen security at a Polish base in the Ghazni province. The Social Democrats have expressed their opposition to sending further troops. *Source: most Czech press*

Chief hygiene officer to decide on swine flu vaccination

The government has tasked the chief hygiene officer Michael Vít to decide when the swine flu outbreak requires selective mandatory vaccination for frontline workers such as health workers, fire fighters, the police force, and also the government and the president, who has joined the numbers of those protesting against the vaccination. *Source: most Czech press*

Czech Economy

State finances show CZK 13.1 billion surplus in January

The budget savings brought in by finance minister Eduard Janota have had some success so far. The state's budget sheet for January shows a surplus of CZK 13.1 billion, as opposed to CZK 0.5 billion for the same period last year. This surplus was caused by a combination of EU funds, VAT receipts and savings in individual government departments. *Source: LN 14*

Energy

Litvínov to demand compensation if mining quotas are exceeded

The North Bohemia city of Litvínov will demand from the Czech Coal mining company CZK 1 billion compensation and a CZK 10,000 energy subsidy per household, if the company exceeds its annual mining quota. Litvínov's mayor Daniel Volák told the press that the city council's decision came as a reaction to the letter from Prime Minister Fischer regarding the possibility of relaxing the mining quotas. *Source: most Czech press*

Prague

New cycle path the most expensive in Europe

A new cycle path in the Vysočany district of Prague is to be opened in spring. It is 3 kilometres long and, at the cost of CZK 150 million, it is the most expensive of its kind in Europe. According to the city council, the high cost was due the difficult terrain, which required the construction of seven bridges and flyovers. *Source: LN 5, HN 6*

Politics & Elections

TOP 09 gives qualified support to anti-corruption package

TOP 09 Deputies have given their support to government anti-corruption proposals – the so-called Pecina's package – with the exception of the use of agents provocateurs. According to TOP 09 Deputy Pavel Severa the state should not give any indication that it would provoke anyone to break the law. The party does accept immunity for crown witnesses, a measure which was criticised by the Civic Democrats. *Source: Právo 2*

ODS to lay off 15,000 civil servants

The Civic Democrats have announced that if they form the next government they would merge government departments in an effort to bring the public debt under control. This would involve redundancies for 15,000 out of the 773,000 people employed in the civil service. This would save up to CZK 70 billion, according to Petr Nečas, ODS vice-chairman. 'We could reduce staff numbers by 2% per year,' said Nečas. *Source: LN 1*



Business & Investment

Banks will not raise mortgage prices for old clients

Czech Banks are denying that they have plans to increase mortgage rates by up to 2% for existing customers who have reached the end of their fixed rate term, in effect subsidising the attractive rates offered to new customers. 'It is undoubtedly true that over the last few years in at least two banks there has been upward pressure on interest rates,' said Jan Matoušek, deputy director of the Czech banking association. *Source: Právo 1*

PPF invests over \$3 ml in Russia

Czech investment group PPF has invested over \$3 billion in Russia, making it one of the largest foreign players on the lucrative Russian market. PPF shareholder Jiří Šmejc gave the information in an interview with the Izvestija newspaper. This is not PPF's first foray into Russia. Last year the group gained control of Eldorado, the largest white-goods retailer in Russia. *Právo 14*

ČEZ pledges low emissions at Pruněřov

The energy company ČEZ has pledged to the Environment Ministry to ensure that carbon dioxide emissions in the modernised Pruněřov coal power plant are at the same level as they would be if the changes demanded by environmental activists were implemented. The ministry's decision on the environmental impact of the reconstructed plant is still pending. *Source: most Czech press*

Česká zbrojovka wins rifle contract

The Česká zbrojovka rifle

manufacturer has won a CZK1.5 billion contract to supply around 8,000 new rifles to the Czech army. The rifles are to replace fifty-year old automatic rifles. Allegations have been made by some media, that the winning model may not be adequate in conflicts such as the war in Afghanistan. *Source: HN 4*

Beer sales down at Pilsner Urquell

Plzeňský prazdroj (Pilsner Urquell), the largest brewer in the Czech Republic, sold 7.55 million hectolitres of beer in 2009. This is a drop of 350,000 hectolitres on 2008. The brewer attributes the fall in sales to declining tourist numbers and the slowing down of the economy. *Source: most Czech press*

Czech Railways cancels tender for carriage

Czech Railways has cancelled a long-awaited tender said to be worth CZK 1.7 billion for the supply of 100 used carriages from abroad. Two offers were put forward in the tender, neither of which met the requirements. The firm now intends to renovate its own express carriages. *Source: most Czech press*

Solar energy wins over wind farms

The bulk of investment into renewable sources went into solar energy last year, with the installation of panels with an output of over 400 megawatts. The wind-generated power increased by a mere 42 megawatts. There is opposition to the building of wind farms in many regions, and the return of investment is lower than with solar installations. *Source: E15 8*

More News

- » Christian Democrat (KDU-ČSL) leader Cyril Svoboda is spending CZK 216,000 of his own money on a billboard campaign against Prague mayor Pavel Bém, calling on him to resign.
- » The world-famous Zlata Ulička (Golden lane) at Prague Castle is to be closed at the end of April for vital maintenance work. Water is seeping into the foundations of the historic houses and there is a danger that the buildings could subside.
- » The Temelín nuclear power plant produced 1,501 billion Kilowatt hours (KWh) of electricity in January. This is the first time that monthly output at the plant has exceeded 1,500 billion KWh.