

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Headline News

Czech EU presidency 2009

The Czech Republic will preside over the affairs of the 27-member European Union from January to June 2009. The motto of the Czech presidency, "Europe without Barriers", reflects the free movement of information and knowledge in addition to the four basic freedoms on which the union is based – free movement of goods, capital, workers and services. The main priorities of the Czech presidency can be summed up in the simple slogan "3E" – Economy, Energy and External Relations.

Business

Škoda Auto sold 674,500 cars in 2008

Last year Škoda Auto of Mladá Boleslav sold a record 674,500 vehicles, a 7% increase on the previous year. Sales to individuals accounted for the most significant growth. The Volkswagen group, of which

Škoda is a part, recorded a 0.6% increase in sales overall, delivering a record 6.23 million vehicles.

Van Graaf to open a new store in Prague

A new clothing chain is entering the Czech Republic. Van Graaf, a German retailer, will open its flagship store in the centre of Prague this year. The outlet will offer women's and men's fashions in a space covering 12,000 m². Van Graaf is part of the Peek & Cloppenburg KG group, which in Germany and other European countries has its own stores or rents large retail units in shopping centres. The group is currently represented in the Czech Republic only under the Peek & Cloppenburg brand; Van Graaf will thus be the group's first store in the Czech Republic.

Skandia enters the Czech Republic

Skandia, a financial group, is entering the Czech Republic and the Central and Eastern European market through its Austrian Division. On 1

January the company established a branch in Prague, where it plans to offer, for example, consulting services and life-insurance products tied to investment funds. After long-term monitoring of the situation, the group sees interesting potential for such life-insurance products in Central and Eastern Europe during the current period of rising living standards.

Economy

Eleven billion crowns for small enterprises

The Ministry of Industry and Trade has announced the TIP programme to support science and research primarily for small and medium-sized enterprises, which can receive up to 80% of costs related to development of new products, materials and technologies. The programme's total aid budget is CZK 11 billion over a period of five years; one billion crowns will be released this year.

R&D

The Czech Republic has its first biotechnology cluster

The association CzechBio introduced its biotechnology-cluster project in January. The project's main goals are to facilitate and accelerate development of the biotechnology field, improve competitiveness of firms and to strengthen the commercial activities of biotechnology organisations in the Czech Republic. The cluster, which is the first in this sector in the Czech Republic, is also planning to focus on the construction of a national centre for biotechnology production.

Czech scientists make breakthrough in the area of biomolecule behaviour

A group of Czech scientists has developed a unique method of studying the behaviour of biomolecules in real time. The new method makes it possible to study ongoing processes in cells of living organisms, which are not possible to measure using any other laboratory techniques. Biochemists thus have new opportunities to study the functioning of biological systems at the lowest molecular level. Studying the behaviour of biomolecules in their natural environment has enormous significance for the development of biologically active substances such as chemotherapeutics, antibiotics and pesticides.

Czech specialists' discovery offers new hope in fight against parasites

Scientists from the University of South Bohemia and the Biology Centre of the Academy of Sciences in České Budějovice have published details of a discovery that should be beneficial in the fight against parasites, particularly ticks. The discovery could become the basis of a new generation of vaccines. The researchers discovered a new protein molecule that fundamentally influences the digestive process of parasites and could therefore be used as a parasiticide.

Infrastructure

Prague-Ruzyně Airport handles the most passengers in its history

Last year Prague-Ruzyně, the Czech Republic's largest airport, handled 12.7 million passengers and 175,000 take-offs and landings. Both figures represent historic highs. In spite of the global decline in air travel, passenger numbers at Prague-Ruzyně grew by 2% in 2008, with the highest growth being recorded in the summer.

Highways in the Czech Republic to be extended by 53 kilometres

The Czech Republic's highway system will undergo improvements in 2009 with the addition of 53 kilometres of roads, which is the greatest expansion since 2000. New sections of highway will be opened

mainly in the South Moravia, Moravia-Silesia and Plzeň regions. The Czech Republic has a high density of road networks which currently comprise over 1,000 kilometres of highways and expressways.

Exchange Rates
Averages for January 2009
EUR 1 = 27,169 CZK
GBP 1 = 29,594 CZK
USD 1 = 20,535 CZK
Source: Czech National Bank

Sources: Czech AM by Czech Information Agency, Prague Daily Monitor, Radio Prague, dailies Hospodarske noviny, Pravo, MF Dnes and Lidove noviny

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