

Politics

(LN/2) Deputy Health Min. Roman Prymula said that a decision will have to be made today about whether to change the approach to people returning from vacation in Italy. Those exercising professions with the most significance from an epidemiological standpoint might be ordered into home quarantine, he said. This could apply to doctors, teachers and other such professions, he said. Telephone logs are available, he said, although using them to track people down is not entirely standard procedure.

(HN/2) Prymula announced a change yesterday in the rules for testing for the coronavirus. Any person can now be tested if a doctor or public-health official prescribes it. Health workers also began home visits to take samples from those suspected of having the virus. Four more positive cases were reported yesterday, bringing the total of infections in the CR to 12. (LN/1) Prymula said that several more cases of the virus will be imported as the mass of people returns from school holiday abroad. Also, Student Agency said that its airline ticket sales to Bali and Thailand have fallen y/y by 60% in the past week and to Sri Lanka by 30%.

(P/1) The Czech Dental Chamber advised dentists that they may remove teeth in serious situations instead of trying to repair them if they do not have respirators available for protecting themselves against droplets produced while using drills and water syringes. A document that patients must sign states that the health or life of the patient or doctor cannot be put at risk. Pres. Roman Šmucler of the Chamber said that the recommendation was drafted based on the procedures used in the USA and EU.

(P/3) Vice Chair Zbyněk Stanjura of ODS called on journalists to quit speaking of Andrej Babiš's "alleged" conflict of interest, because Babiš himself provided evidence of it by listing himself in a Slovak registry as the final owner of Agrofert. According to Seznam Zprávy, Babiš also used state employees to evaluate a business offer made to Agrofert. Babiš called this nonsense. MEP Veronika Vrećionová of ODS said that Babiš abuses his conflict of interest and that there is "systemic kleptocracy" in the CR. The EU Parliament is to vote next week on a resolution about Babiš's conflict of interest.

(MFD/2) The police asked Parliament to lift the immunity of MP Karla Maříková of SPD for inciting hatred. She had written on Facebook that imports of invasive plants of foreign origin are banned by the EU and that Muslim migrants are not native to the EU either and, like invasive plants, will spread and push out the original population. They should therefore also be banned, she wrote.

Business

(EK/20) CNB Vice Gov. Marek Mora said that if an extreme situation arose and interest rates fell to 0%, he would prefer using an "exchange-rate commitment" rather than negative interest rates. We have already tried this, he said, and it worked relatively

well. Czech rates are quite far from zero, he said. He also said that he can imagine not voting for a rate increase at least in the short term if higher inflation were a result of decreased supply related to the coronavirus. Raising rates would be counterproductive, he said, esp. when most central banks would likely be lowering their rates. In terms of Babiš's criticism of the CNB, he said that this does not bother him in the least. If banks are making money on deposits at the CNB as a side effect of the CNB's duty to maintain price stability, he added, this is not an issue that bothers the CNB.



(MFD/7) Dir. Libor Ostatek of Golem Finance said that mortgage rates could fall, because there has been a reduction of long-term rates of as much as 0.4 percentage points due to a sharp drop in interbank rates. Hypoteční banka said that it is monitoring the development and will react once the current extreme situation abates and the trend becomes clear. Chief Economist Jakub Seidler of ING Bank said that if the economy does not weaken significantly, with a rise in unemployment and drop in inflation, bets on an aggressive cut in the CNB's rates this year could be premature.

(P/4) Josef Kalický of Reconstruction of the State said yesterday that Babiš promised at a meeting with anti-corruption groups to create a working group for reforming the ÚOHS antitrust office. Also at the meeting were Development Min. Klára Dostálová and Justice Min. Marie Benešová. Lawyer Jan Dupák of Transparency Int. said that the problem is not merely ÚOHS Chair Petr Rafaj but rather that it is a systemic problem. If someone wants to influence a public contract, he said, it is enough to influence the chairman. The anti-corruption groups, which also include Oživení, want the chairman to be chosen in an open selection process and his or her powers to be reduced.

(HN/3) The EU Commission announced that it will propose changes to the transparency of employee pay so that companies in all member states are required to disclose how much they pay men and how much they pay women. The CR is one of the countries with no rules on salary transparency.

(P/17) The finance ministry sent a proposal into the review process for eliminating the VAT exemption for parcels valued at below €22 arriving from outside the EU. An EU directive calls for the exemption to end as of Jan. 1, 2021. Česká pošta's data show that 28m such parcels arrived last year.

(MFD/3) Internal inspectors are reportedly looking into money flows at the ÚZSI civil-intelligence agency during the early years of the tenure of ex-Dop. Dir. Zdeněk Blahut, who took office in 2014. He was already charged with embezzling tens of millions of crowns with regard to the rescue from Su-

| | | |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Euro (fixing) | 25.355 | +0.015 |
| Dollar | 22.665 | -0.114 |
| Pound | 29.256 | +0.077 |
| Gold \$/€ Lnd PM | 1660/1483 | +1.1/+0.3% |
| 3-month Pribor | 2.34 | -0.01 |
| Dow Jones | 26121.28 | -3.58% |
| DAX | 11944.72 | -1.5% |
| ČEZ | 469.60 | -1.76% |
| Erste Bank | 710.00 | -4.39% |
| Komerční banka | 727.00 | -2.02% |
| Moneta Money | 79.80 | +0.88% |
| O2 CR | 226.50 | 0.00% |
| Philip Morris ČR | 15120.00 | +0.13% |
| PX | 990.66 | -1.65% |

dan of missionary Petr Jašek and the purchase of Agáta surveillance devices.

(P/5) Czech Railways reportedly risks being fined up to Kč 4bn by the EU Commission, because current Vice Chair Radek Dvořák arranged with ÖBB rail carrier of Austria in 2015 for ÖBB not to sell used trains to RegioJet, although it offered 33% more than the other bidder, WGS of Slovakia. The EU Commission has emails to this effect.

(P/3) The Castle ordered 695 masks of a kind used by the U.S. army and will pay Kč 1.2m to the Czech company Nanologix Corporation. The Castle said they will be used for protection against the coronavirus and also by employees who oversee the removal of asbestos from the Spanish Hall. The Castle will go ahead with a concert to celebrate Zeman's seventh year in office. Vratislav Mynář and Martin Nejedlý, who recently visited China, will not attend.

(HN/12) Y Soft print-management company wants to be ready to make acquisitions in five years or so, once the market consolidates, founder Václav Muchna said. He also said that a digital tax on tech giants could be devastating for his company if the U.S. government retaliated, because Y Soft gets about 20% of its revenue from the U.S.

(HN/2) Mayors, NGOs and government bodies have until the end of March to comment on the latest version of the draft new construction law. (HN/3) Labor unions at Škoda Auto indicated a willingness to accept a two-year collective agreement. (P/5) Ex-Amb. to Nato Jiří Šedivý was elected to head the European Defense Agency. (P/4) The culture ministry began the process of declaring the Intercontinental Hotel a cultural monument. (LN/10) Some politicians reportedly have access to a "cheap" Airbnb in the center of Paris as a form of bribery.

Society

(Bl/2) Dr. Jan Pirk, a cardiac surgeon, said that the coronavirus is merely another type of influenza and that it would be best if we all caught it quickly and gained immunity to it. Dep. Health Min. Roman Prymula, who is an epidemiologist, said that such unfortunate comments do not help. If we all got infected, he said, 340,000 of us would die.