

Government contracts subject of raids?

Country awaits PM's statement

The Czech prime minister is expected to make a public statement following a night raid by the police's organised crime unit at the Office of the Government. The police made several arrests, detaining among others the prime minister's closest aide Jana Nagyova and the head of the Office of the Government Lubomir Poul. Police raids continued throughout the day on Thursday at the Czech Defence Ministry and private homes and offices. It has emerged that the prime minister received a late night visit from two state attorneys and the head of the organized crime unit Robert Slachta who reportedly briefed him about an extensive criminal investigation. According to some media sources the prime minister had to seek medical attention but his office has denied rumours that he was hospitalized. There are reports that he is now closeted in his office with advisors.

Interior minister confirms raids

While the prime minister excused himself from Thursday's session of the lower house, and stopped communicating with the media, Interior Minister Jan Kubice confirmed news of the raids saying he believed the extensive operation was in the hands of the State Attorney's Office in Olomouc. The minister refused to provide further details. According to the internet news site novinky.cz two Civic Democrat MPs arrested in the police operation are suspected of manipulating public tenders, money laundering and large-scale corruption.

Police confirm influential lobbyists involved

Police have confirmed that the investigation also concerns at least two influential lobbyists, Roman Janoušek and Ivo Ritting. Mr. Janoušek is currently at his summer residence in Croatia, but the police reportedly raided his Prague office on Wednesday night. Investigators have also asked Prague City Hall for a copy of all contracts signed with Janoušek in the past.

Opposition demanding explanation

The news has evoked an outcry on the Czech political scene with the opposition demanding an explanation from the prime minister. Social Democrat leader Bohuslav Sobotka said the reports coming through were extremely grave and the prime minister should address the issue without delay. An emergency meeting of the party leadership has been scheduled for 6pm to consider further action.

TOP 09 says PM should step down if close assistant involved

The Civic Democrat's coalition partner TOP 09 has suggested that the prime minister should step down if it is confirmed that his close aide Jana Nadova is one of the suspects in the case. According to the internet daily lidovky.cz several senior party members confirmed this stand. The party says it will take an official stand after getting more information on the case.

President to hold emergency consultations on government crisis

President Milos Zeman has scheduled a meeting on Friday with the prime minister, the police chief and opposition leader Bohuslav Sobotka to discuss the government crisis. The president's office said Mr. Zeman would not be commenting on developments until he had received reliable information on the case.

Czech Radio expresses disquiet over halting of Greek public service stations

Czech Radio has issued a statement expressing disquiet over the Greek government's decision to halt the broadcasting of the country's public service television and radio stations. The Czech station said the Greek government should not threaten the human rights of freedom and the right to information for all, adding that the independence of public service media was one of the pillars of democracy.