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Letters

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September 27, 2006

Taxi dance

Clearly, Mr. Pavlát, head of the Prague Taxi Operators Guild, skipped his Economics 101 class too often ("Taxis to be new, yellow and air-conditioned," News, Aug. 23-29). Apparently, he also hasn't traveled much. He was probably too busy refining his self-serving arguments, or maybe ripping off tourists himself. His idea about fair prices suggests that much.

Here's a quick economics lesson for Mr. Pavlát: The taxi business is not like the shoe or show business — the consumer has a choice when he buys shoes or when she attends shows. I often do not have that choice when I need a taxi: not at train stations (where many of the thugs seem to congregate), not at many other taxi stands, not — until recently — at the airport. Tourists have to rely on these locations quite often. Plus, the little thieves that exploit the situation impose significant externalities on other taxi drivers, the City of Prague and their reputations. You wonder why tourist growth rates have slowed? Well, rogue taxi drivers surely are part of an explanation.

And therefore, Mr. Pavlát, City Hall officials have all the right to interfere. In fact, they have a ways to go. If you don't like it, leave the business. AAA taxi seems to do just fine with the fees that City Hall allows to charge.

Confidential to Mr. Pavlát: Should you ever make it to Manhattan, make sure to notice how cab prices are regulated there, too. According to your logic, that makes New York City Hall the last bastion of socialism in the United States. Surely Mr. Bloomberg, the mayor, will get a good chuckle out of that idea.

Andreas Ortman

Center for Economic Research & Graduate Education, Charles University Economics Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

Correcting Cabannis

U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic William Cabaniss said, "The United States is, I think, the only country that has politically appointed ambassadors ("On commerce and charm school," News, Aug. 16-22)."

Nonsense. Plenty of other countries apart from the United States are run on the basis of nepotism, a corrupt judiciary and general cronyism. The U.S. is no better or worse in this respect than any other tin-pot military dictatorship.

John Andrews

Prague

Clear signal

Good for Octopus ("Global reach," News, August 16-22)! America needs this channel to offset Fox News. I'll be watching.

Carla P. Heidelberg

Washington, D.C.

I just finished reading your article about the young Czech start-up that will be working for Al-Jazeera International (AJI). I found your article to be premised on several false assumptions.

First, you start your discussion about Al-Jazeera by describing the channel as "controversial." Al-Jazeera is not controversial anywhere in this world except in the United States. Al-Jazeera is a professional, objective, highly respected news channel across the Arab East and the entire world. It is only the U.S. government and media that considers Al-Jazeera "controversial."

Second, you point out that AJI is opening its base in Washington, D.C., in "proximity to the anniversary of 9/11." Is it proximity to the date? Or proximity to the New York location? This is not clear, but regardless of your intended meaning, it is a racist assertion to link an Arabic language news channel to the terrorism carried out by Arabs. Is CNN, which broadcasts in the same language of George W. Bush, responsible for the crimes of the U.S. president? You went on to say that the channel has a "controversial nature ... and is accused by many of anti-American bias." (Emphasis added). The channel is not controversial, and the only accusations of anti-American bias come from officials in the U.S. regime and their corporate-owned media outlets in the United States. The rest of the world does not view Al-Jazeera in this way.

In this era of globalization and mass media, objectivity is critical. It is very important not to allow our perceptions to be shaped by global power politics. I speak Arabic (Do you? And if not, how did you judge Al Jazeera as controversial?) and English. I watch Al-Jazeera, the BBC and CNN daily. Al-Jazeera is a highly professional and



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JAN MACUCH/The Prague Post

Many tourists and residents would welcome City Hall's plans to overhaul the infamous Prague taxi system and regulate fares.

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KURT VINION/The Prague Post

As happens in other countries also, U.S. Ambassador William Cabaniss was politically appointed.

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