

## Greece: Japanese ex-diplomat charged with murder

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — A retired Japanese diplomat and his Greek wife have been charged with killing their 36-year-old daughter in their Greek island home.

Masami Tanida, 77, and his wife Maria, 67, appeared before an examining magistrate Monday. They were given 24 hours to prepare their defense, their lawyer Athanassios Tartis said. "My clients' position is that their daughter committed suicide, slashing her wrist," Tartis told *The Associated Press*. Police said authorities became suspicious after the woman's mother approached doctors at a hospital on the island of Evia — with her young granddaughter — to request a death certificate for her daughter, Amphitheia Tanida, claiming

she had suffered fatal head injuries falling down a flight of stairs. The granddaughter, who is the victim's daughter, was unharmed.

Authorities have not yet announced the cause of Tanida's death. But investigators said a deep cut to her left wrist was made after her death and the direction of the cut was not consistent with a self-inflicted wound. Authorities said her body had bruising on the right side of the face. The couple were arrested Saturday and charged by a prosecutor on the island of Evia with murdering their daughter. Both suspects remain in police custody and deny the charges.

The island is just off central Greece, 60 miles (100

kilometers) northeast of Athens.

Police said Amphitheia Tanida's body was found Friday wrapped in sheets in a bathroom in her parents' villa at Amarynthos on Evia.

The victim's Greek companion — who is the father of the three-and-a-half year girl — had declared the victim missing on Thursday after she failed to respond to phone calls. He told police he drove both the victim and their child to see Tanida's parents on Tuesday. Tartis, the lawyer, said Masami Tanida served as Japan's ambassador to the Vatican, among other postings. Tanida settled in Amarynthos with his wife after retiring from the diplomatic service.

## Greek styled "Robin Hood" hits again

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A group of people, who the Greek media dubbed "The New Robin Hood", appeared again in Thessaloniki, seizing food and household products from a supermarket and handing them out to people on the street to protest high consumer prices.

The new action of those who have claimed to be "guards" against the excessive increase in consumer prices, only partly due to the rise in oil prices, follows a similar action carried out in June in Athens.

The increasing cost of living has currently become the main concern of the Greeks according to polls, overcoming even unemployment, while official inflation has reached 5%.

According to oppositional socialist party PASOK, the average purchase power of families has dropped at least 25% in the past four years.

## Cypriot faces 15 years' jail in Thailand

*AN Australian Cypriot has been arrested in Thailand on a charge of defaming the country's monarchy.*

*A Melbourne resident, Harry Nicolaides lived in Thailand from 2003 to 2005, teaching at a university in the northern city of Chiang Rai and writing a weekly column for Phuketinfo.com.*

The 41-year-old, born to Greek Cypriot parents who emigrated to Australia in 1955, was detained when he tried to fly out from Bangkok last Sunday.

"An arrest warrant was issued in March for a book he wrote in 2005 deemed defamatory to the crown prince," Police Lieutenant-Colonel Boonlert Kalayanamit told Reuters.

He has been charged with lese-majeste, a crime that can carry a 15-year jail sentence in Thailand, and

was being held at a remand prison pending further interviews, Boonlert said.

The charge was provoked by a passage in his 2005 novel *Verisimilitude*.

In an interview to *The Weekend Australian*, Nicolaides said: "I wrote that from King Rama, and I didn't say which King Rama, to the Crown Prince, Thai men are well-known for having multiple wives and concubines for entertainment."

Nicolaides said the passage was in the form of "an omniscient narrator passing a rumour to the protagonist ... it's a work of imaginative fiction."

He acknowledges, however, that the passage offended Thai culture and tradition.

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, but has severe lese-majeste laws, mandating a jail term of three to 15 years for "whoever defames, insults or threatens the king, the queen, the heir to the throne or the Regent."

Actual prosecutions are relatively rare, usually a handful each year, in a

country where the 80-year-old king is almost universally revered as a selfless and hardworking benefactor of the people.

It is not yet clear why it has taken several years for Nicolaides to be arrested.

He described his appalling prison conditions and pleaded to be allowed to apologise.

"I want to immediately apologise to the royal family for my reckless choice of words," he said from Bangkok Remand Prison.

"I want to write a comprehensive letter with the greatest humility to the Thai people for the way the Thai press presented what was written in the book."

Bail of 500,000 baht (฿10,000) raised by his girlfriend and her friends has been refused.

Nicolaides said he entered the prison on Monday a healthy man, but he now had swollen lymph glands, chest pains, constipation and stomach cramps and could not eat.

Almost all the other inmates in his cell were coughing and wheezing, he said. "There is a rumour going around that some of them will be transferred to the tuberculosis ward, which is terribly overcrowded."

Nicolaides' 82-year-old father Takis was quoted in the local press as saying: "My son loves Thailand, travels there often, and helps their children to learn English."

His mother, Despina, also spoke out, saying that, "he hasn't done anything wrong, apart from being careless, simply giving his opinion on a subject he should have spoken more carefully about."

She added that nobody was being allowed to speak with him.

In a statement, the NGO Reporters Without Borders, which advocates freedom of the press, issued a statement condemning Nicolaides' arrest.

"Thailand's lese-majeste legislation is one of the strictest in the world and is often responsible for free speech violations. Nicolaides is aware of the limits on criticism in Thailand. His novel never intended to threaten or defame the royal family. We call on the authorities to drop the charges against him and to release him."

## Wells sucking Greece dry

NON-RENEWABLE groundwater reserves, which may have existed for millions of years, are being exhausted by Greek farmers due to the use of wasteful irrigation techniques and the proliferation of boreholes.

Scientists are predicting that many of the country's rich agricultural zones, such as the plain of Thessaly in central Greece, will soon become barren if farmers continue to plunder their region's aquifer to cultivate water-thirsty crops like cotton and corn. Farming accounts for as much as 85 percent of Greece's annual water consumption, much of it brought up through boreholes that now reach depths as low as 500 metres. With mean rainfall declining, the aquifer in many areas has dropped below the level expected to replenish annually.

"These stores have existed for possibly millions of years," Panayiotis Sambatakakis, a hydrogeologist at the Institute of Geology and Mineral Exploration (IGME) in Athens, told this newspaper. "Not all areas have them, although certainly all plains do, and the depth varies. This knowledge - which is standard in most other European countries and is gathered by IGME - is simply not being taken into consideration by the authorities." Some scientists believe that seawater intrusion, a phenomenon already experienced in many coastal areas, could soon reach far inland, seriously reducing the agricultural output of areas like Thessaly and causing subsidence and other serious environmental damage.

"[Many of the boreholes] go far below sea level. Given that many coastal areas are already affected by seawater intrusion,



While the water level of the picturesque Lake Plastira, in central Greece, is dangerously low, wasteful irrigation techniques in the plain of Thessaly and elsewhere continue unmonitored (above and right)

this will inevitably find a way of entering far inland," says Sambatakakis. "The areas around Mt Olympus and Magnisia [in eastern Greece] are already affected. Thessaly will most likely follow. Once it gets in, it will not leave easily. The area could dry up. Irreversible damage will be done."

The problem, he explains, is the lack of monitoring by the prefectures and regional offices that grant borehole licenses to farmers and private residences.

"This is merely procedural," he says. "As well as there being many illegal wells, [local authorities] take no account whatsoever of the existing scientific knowledge into how deep a borehole should be allowed to reach, which varies according to the area. Nor do they monitor how much water is being pumped, or even if it is being used for irrigation. It has been going on for decades. Islands have suffered most, but increasingly the mainland is also being affected. This year, many areas did not have water because the same wells used by the municipality were also being used by farmers to irrigate olive and other trees."