Pirates kill Greek sailor off Cameroon

YAOUNDE: A Greek sailor was shot dead by pirates off the coast of Cameroon at the weekend, the state radio broadcaster said on Monday, the latest in a series of attacks on shipping in African waters.

Around 30 armed pirates travelling in three boats seized one Greek vessel on Saturday in the Atlantic off Kribi, south of the main port city Douala, and were taking it towards international waters when a sister ship gave chase.

"The pirates then opened fire on the second vessel, climbed into the cabin and shot the captain ... three times in the neck," the radio report said.

Shipping lanes off both the east and west coasts of Africa have become increasingly dangerous in recent months. The Greek merchant marine ministry identified the victim as Theodoros Mastaloudis.

"A Greek sailor was killed on Saturday evening, when two fishing ships were attacked by pirates off Douala, in Cameroon. No one else was injured," said a ministry official who declined to be named.

The pirates robbed the crew of the second ship before abandoning both vessels and escaping in their own boats, state radio said. The Cameroonian navy rescued the 40 surviving crew of the two Greek ships later on Saturday. The United Nations and Western law enforcement agencies have said they are concerned about piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, especially off Cameroon and major oil producer Nigeria.

Gunmen have used fast launches to raid and rob banks and ships in an area where Niger Delta militants are already fighting Nigerian government forces.

Last October gunmen seized 10 crew members of a French oil supply vessel off Cameroon, later releasing them unharmed. The militia groups responsible have said they object to Nigeria's transfer of the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon in August, obeying a ruling by the International Court of Justice.

Off East Africa, scores of attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean have pushed up insurance costs, prompted navies to scramble to protect merchant vessels, and earned Somali pirates tens of millions of dollars in ransoms.

Theophanous return divides colleagues

COLLEAGUES of former cabinet minister Theo Theophanous, who is defending rape charges, fear his return to parliament next week will damage the Brumby Government.

As the Government comes under pressure on public transport amid a factional brawl and the fallout of "star" recruit Evan Thornley's defection to the private sector, there is concern Mr Theophanous's return will bring more negative publicity.

But supporters of the veteran Labor MP believe these fears are misguided and that Mr Theophanous has every right to return and hold his head high.

Mr Theophanous conducted a fresh publicity blitz on the weekend protesting his innocence.

One Labor MP said that although there was considerable sympathy for Mr Theophanous, his return to the parliament was not welcome. "We are wishing he would just bloody take leave; even if he's not resigning, he should take leave," he said.

"We are going through some tough times at the moment and we really don't need Theo prosecuting his case through the media or in the parliament."

A caucus colleague said Mr Theophanous had an obligation to attend parliament, both to his constituents and the Government. "The numbers are very tight in the upper house in circumstances where there is a significant amount of legislation coming forward," he said.

Another of the former minister's colleagues said: "*If the guy is innocent, why shouldn't he come back?*" he said.

It emerged on the weekend that Mr Theophanous had taken a $10million civil action in the Greek courts against his accuser, a former Melbourne woman in her 40s who is currently residing in Greece. He spoke of the hurt her allegations had caused him and his family.

Mr Theophanous has resigned from his portfolio as industry minister but is determined to attend parliament.

Health Minister Daniel Andrews, the only minister publicly available yesterday, refused to comment on the effect of Mr Theophanous's return.

"The impact on the Government of these sorts of things is not for me to judge, that's for others to judge," he said. Mr Theophanous has been charged on summons and is expected to face a committal hearing in the middle of the year.

Article from: The Australian

Former minister ... Theo Theophanous (with wife Rita) has filed a damages claim against the woman accusing him of rape.

The unveiling...

Hagia Sophia is ready for a grand reveal. The subject of a comprehensive restoration project, the 55 meter high scaffolding, which has been under the dome of the museum for the last 16 years, is being removed. The restoration of the Hagia Sophia Museum, was a key part of Turkey being awarded the honor of "Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture." The city was awarded European Capital of Culture status for 2010 in 2006 by the European Union, along with the German town of Essen and the Hungarian city of Pecs.

During a press conference last Saturday, a Turkish official recognized that 'this scaffolding is our shame' - referring of course to the damage inflicted to the structure over the centuries.

Greek firefighters to learn from CFS

Major Kapakis and Major Lambris from the Hellenic Fire Service are in South Australia as part of a national tour. The deputy chief officer of the CFS, Andrew Lawson, says the two visitors want to know how firefighters here battle large-scale bushfires. Devastating bushfires in Greece killed 76 people just over a year ago.

Mr Lawson says the conditions Greek and Australian firefighters work in are very similar.

"We're both Mediterranean climates, they have a very different fuel type, different vegetation than us, but they do have a lot of similar plants and grasses, so the fuel, the bit that burns, is very very similar and so is the weather conditions," he said.

"It's an exchange of information, exchange of experiences, the fires they had a couple of years ago would challenge any fire service in any country and it's of benefit to them and benefit to us that we learn from each other."