

IN BRIEF

Riot police quell fighting in Patra port and city

An altercation between migrants of African and Balkan origin living in a makeshift settlement in the port of Patra spread to other parts of the city on Sunday evening. The flare-up began at 10 p.m. on the Akti Dymaion seafront and spilt over to the Church of Aghios Andreas, where a wedding had been under way. Later in the evening, more scuffles broke out by the port's northern entrance and riot police were called in to quell the violence at the makeshift camp. The cause of the altercation is not known. The Peloponnesian port has been at the center of migrant-related violence in the past.

Unions appeal to prosecutor

Representatives of seamen participating in ongoing protests at the port of Piraeus met with Supreme Court prosecutor Yiannis Tentes yesterday to object to court decisions deeming their actions illegal. They also said they would be continuing their blockades during Thursday's general strike. Tentes responded that striking is one thing and becoming engaged in illegal action another, referring to the workers' blockade of outgoing ferries and inbound cruise ships. Deputy Prime Minister Theodoros Pangalos yesterday lashed out at the actions of the Communist Party-affiliated PAME group that has been behind the seamen's blockades, saying that they are tarnishing Greece's reputation "among every tourism market in the world."

Shop heists

Police in Athens reported three armed robberies in less than 24 hours yesterday. The first involved two armed men storming an eatery on Patission Street in central Athens at 2.30 a.m., firing a shot into the air and making off with money snatched from the till. Later in the day, during the late morning rush hour, a lone armed robber made off with 47,000 euros from a lingerie store in Alimos, south of Athens. About an hour later, a supermarket in Metamorphosi, western Attica, was held up in a similar manner by a lone assailant who got away by motorcycle with an undetermined sum.

ND deputies

Opposition New Democracy party chief Antonis Samaras officially appointed his two deputies yesterday. The head of the main conservative opposition party announced that he would be placing Dimitris Avramopoulos in charge of a range of portfolios, including foreign policy, tourism and education, while Stavros Dimas, the former European environment commissioner, was put in charge of policy regarding the economy and development.

Pension bill to test PASOK unity

At least three Socialist MPs considering voting against some provisions despite PM's calls for solidarity

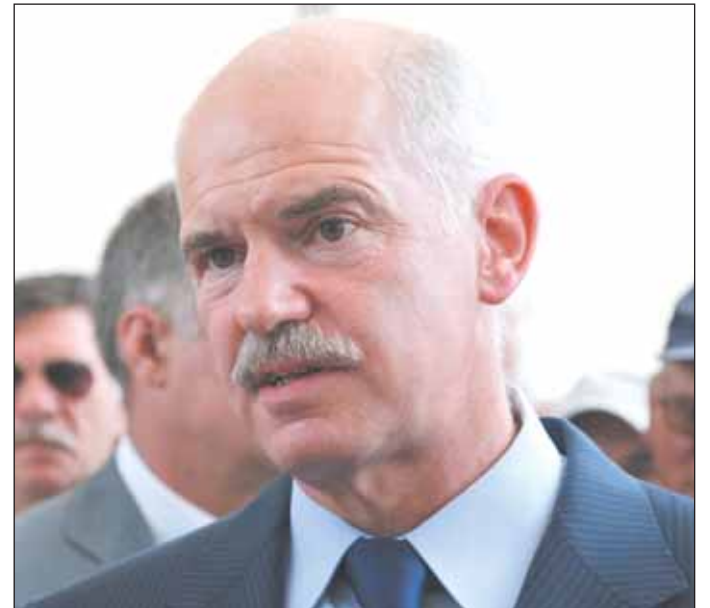
As controversial draft legislation foreseeing radical reform of the pension system and labor relations is submitted to Parliament's plenary session today ahead of Thursday's crucial vote, sources have told that at least three deputies of ruling PASOK are considering voting against some of the provisions in the bill.

The general feeling in the office of Prime Minister George Papandreou is that the bill – which would reduce monthly payments to pensioners, increase the retirement age to 65 and make it easier for employers to dismiss staff – will be voted through Parliament on Thursday. But sources have told Kathimerini that three MPs have made clear their intentions to vote against certain articles in the bill, defying Papandreou's calls for party unity. One of the three deputies, Panagiotis Kouroublis, stated his intentions outright yesterday. "I disagree with four or five provisions – the others I might vote for," he told Sto Kokkino radio station. "Do I not have the right to express a different opinion?" he remarked.

Sources told that another two deputies have a similar outlook to Kouroublis's but did not identify them.

A close aide to Papandreou told that the extent of the loyalty of PASOK's cadres would become clear on Thursday. "We will see what happens on the day, and we will act accordingly," the aide said, without elaborating.

The General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE), which along with the civil servants' union ADEDY has called a general strike for Thursday to protest the planned reforms, yesterday sent a letter to Labor and Social Insurance Minister Andreas Loverdos, pushing for concessions to be made to private sector workers. "Our disagreements [with the bill] remain completely unchanged. But we are obliged to intervene in a matter that affects the overwhelming majority of insured citizens," the letter said. GSEE wants private sector employees insured with the Social Security Foundation (IKA) before 1983 to be exempted from the impending pension reforms, as is the case with civil servants insured with IKA before 1983.



Attica firebombs

Unknown assailants doused a parked car with petrol and set it alight in the northern Athenian district of Halandri early yesterday morning, police said. Meanwhile, in central Athens, at 5.30 a.m., an eatery was torched by two unidentified men, though the fire was quickly put out by local residents and did not cause any injuries or major damage.

Illegal bets

Police yesterday arrested four people, two on the island of Lesbos and two in the northern city of Kilkis, on charges of making illicit profits by organizing illegal bets on World Cup soccer games.

OSE to cut some 35 costly routes

The Hellenic Railways Organization (OSE) is planning to suspend the operation of at least 35 under-used routes around the country believed to be burdening the debt-ridden state by some 3 million euros a day, sources said yesterday.

According to a written statement by TRAINOSE, a subsidiary of OSE that is responsible for the organization's railway itineraries, dozens of loss-making routes are due to be discontinued imminently.

These include several routes in the

Peloponnese linking the cities of Patra, Pyrgos, Kalamata, Messini and Olympia. Many more routes in northern Greece, connecting the cities of Thessaloniki, Serres, Alexandroupoli, Edessa and Kozani, will have their weekly itineraries drastically reduced. OSE itself had not issued an official statement by late yesterday to confirm the exact routes that will be affected and the date the changes are to come into effect.

In a related development, a fresh



rift appeared to open up amid the ranks of ruling PASOK yesterday as Infrastructure, Transport and Networks Minister Dimitris Reppas said he was opposed to the privatization of the ETHEL blue bus company as part of a broader initiative spearheaded by Finance Minister Giorgos Papaconstantinou to sell off – partially or wholly – loss-making state companies in the transport sector. Speaking from Thessaloniki, where he had gone to inspect the progress of works for a metro system for the northern port city, Reppas said he was in favor of streamlining ETHEL but against privatization. "If some other minister or any of the prime minister's advisers has a different opinion, we respond with a resounding 'no,'" Reppas said. In what many commentators interpreted as a swipe at Papaconstantinou, Reppas remarked that tax evasion was the biggest drain on state revenues and should be the focus of the government's cutbacks.