

PM in last-ditch appeal before pension vote

Minister seeks to win round waverers

Prime Minister George Papandreou yesterday stressed once again that austerity measures are the only antidote for the country's debt-ridden economy but fears are reportedly mounting in the ranks of the government that a significant number of deputies in ruling PASOK will oppose key provisions of crucial pension and labor reforms due to be voted through Parliament tomorrow.

"The country is in a deep financial crisis; we are doing everything we can, within a very pressurized timeframe, to restore some order amid the current chaos," Papandreou said before accusing the previous conservative government of creating the current problems.

For his part, the leader of conservative New Democracy, Antonis Samaras, launched a scathing attack on Papandreou's administration and its pension reform bill, which he described as "unfair, ineffective and incapable of guaranteeing the viability of the system." Samaras reiterated his party's intention to vote against the draft legislation tomorrow. The leaders of the smaller parties added their voices to the criticism yesterday.

But political discontent is not confined to the opposition. There are fears in the Maximos Mansion, sources told Kathimerini, that several PASOK MPs might vote for the bill in principle but oppose specific provisions. This could cause serious problems for the government, which has pledged to push through the pension and labor reforms as part of a



Labor Minister Andreas Loverdos pauses during a debate on a draft bill for pension reform yesterday. Loverdos introduced some last-minute changes to the bill, believed to be an attempt to win back skeptical PASOK MPs.

raft of austerity measures in exchange for 110 billion euros in loans from the International Monetary Fund and European Union member states.

In a bid to appease lingering concerns among ruling party deputies, Labor Minister Andreas Loverdos – who has spearheaded the drafting of the controversial reforms – introduced some last-minute changes to the text of the draft bill. According to sources, these changes include a

commitment by the government to provide "decent pensions" to citizens and to protect auxiliary pension funds.

Even if the pension bill is successfully voted through Parliament in principle, which is widely expected, there are fears that critics will respond by lodging a slew of legal appeals which may slow down the process of the new law's implementation and jeopardize Greece's international rescue package.

Strike to paralyze transport, services

Public services and transport are to grind to a halt once again tomorrow as thousands of workers join yet another 24-hour general strike, called by the country's two main unions to protest a scheduled parliamentary vote on deeply unpopular pension and labor relations reforms.

Flights to and from the country will be grounded be-

tween 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. as air-traffic controllers join the protest and demand the payment of outstanding wages. The air-traffic controllers have threatened to stage rolling strikes throughout the month of July – action that would hamper the travel plans of thousands of tourists – unless they are paid.

There will be virtually no public transport in Athens tomorrow as workers on the metro, buses, trolley buses, tram and Piraeus-Kifissia urban electric railway (ISAP) walk off the job.

Greeks and visitors planning to travel to Aegean destinations tomorrow will face a day of frustration as seamen belonging to unions affiliated with the Communist Party (KKE) join the 24-hour action, blocking access to ferries in Piraeus.

The KKE-backed labor union PAME is also planning a protest rally tomorrow in central Omonia Square at 11 a.m., an hour after members of the General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE) and the civil servants' union ADEDY are due to gather in Klafthmonos Square. Demonstrators from both rallies are expected to subsequently march on Parliament, where a vote on the controversial reforms is expected in the afternoon.

Tomorrow's strike action will also disrupt services in the broader public sector, closing down schools and tax offices and leaving hospitals to operate on emergency staff. There will also be a media blackout as journalists join the walkout.

Wind parks

Twelve areas of the country have been short-listed by the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Climate Change as possible sites for the establishment of wind parks. These are: Ai-Stratis, Alexandroupoli, Thasos, Karpathos, Corfu, Kryoneri, Kymi, Lefkada, Lemnos, Petalioi, Samothrace and Fanari. The proposal has been submitted to the relevant authorities for deliberation.

Migrant deaths

The bodies of another two migrants were found washed up on the shores of the Evros River on the northern border with Turkey yesterday, following the discovery last week of the bodies of another 16 migrants who had tried to swim across the river from Turkey into Greece.

IN BRIEF

Police arrest seven over major cannabis haul

Police in Attica said yesterday that their investigation of a suspect they believe to have links to anti-establishment groups led them to a record drug haul and the arrest of seven people believed to be trafficking cannabis between Greece and Albania. Working with their counterparts in Sparta in the Peloponnese after following a suspicious car from Ioannina in northwestern Greece, police stopped the vehicle on Monday morning and found it to be carrying 150 parcels containing 156 kilos of untreated cannabis. Seven people – five Greeks aged between 19 and 40, a Frenchman and a Romanian woman – were arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking and brought before the prosecutor yesterday.

TNT found at old Iraqi Embassy

Forensic investigators are examining a stash of explosives found on the premises of the former Iraqi Embassy in a suburb of Athens, police said yesterday. The cache of 454 grams of the explosive TNT, 15 sticks of dynamite and four glass vials containing a suspicious liquid were discovered buried in the building's garden by the employee of an engineering company that has undertaken the renovation of the Palaio Psychico property which served as the Iraqi Embassy until four years ago. The Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Athens was informed of the discovery by the company early yesterday. The ambassador's office said in a statement that it has no connection to and no knowledge of the explosive materials.

Bad habits

Research published yesterday by the Institute of Dietary Habits suggests that 88 percent of Greek college and university students prefer fast food to home-cooked meals. The study, which was conducted between March and April on a sample of 928 young people around the country, also found that four in 10 struggle with weight issues, while 22.6 percent are obese and 17.3 percent are underweight. Seven in 10 did, however, say that they would be happy to follow a well-balanced diet if they had the time to do so.

Fudged data

Parliament will be presented with a case regarding Greece's fudged budget deficit data submitted by the former New Democracy government to the European Commission's statistical service, Eurostat, it was announced yesterday. The case comes after charges were filed against the former administration by an MP of the LAOS ultra-nationalist party.