

## IN BRIEF

## Ombudsman seeks better conditions for immigrants

Authorities yesterday pledged to clean up the holding cells for illegal immigrants at Athens International Airport after Ombudsman Giorgos Kaminis condemned the detention conditions there as "inhuman and humiliating." Following a visit to the cells, Kaminis submitted written appeals to several ministries, calling for an improvement. The Citizens' Protection Ministry reacted by pledging to disinfect the cells, replace dirty mattresses and accelerate plans for the creation of a new detention area. The Justice Ministry said it would take immediate action to ensure that migrants are not detained any longer than necessary.

## Unrest over pension reforms

Members of the police, fire service and coast guard are due to hold a protest rally in front of Parliament in central Athens at 6.30 p.m. today. They will be protesting against the pension reforms passed last week, as they feel that their rights have been affected. One of the changes they deplore is that the five bonus working years that count toward their retirement will be scrapped. "We work these years because we go to work six, not five, days a week," the head of the Panhellenic Confederation of Police Officers (POASY), Christos Fotopoulos, told Kathimerini. "Until now we have kept a low profile but it seems that our leaders have no sensitivity, so we have to respond forcefully."

## Cyprus deficit

Cyprus was one of four countries placed under the European Union's deficit watch yesterday. The decision was officially taken by EU finance ministers meeting in Brussels yesterday. Cyprus's public deficit for last year was 6.1 percent of gross domestic product, double the eurozone limit. It has been given until 2012 to reduce the deficit to below 3 percent of GDP. Yesterday's announcement sparked criticism by opposition parties of President Dimitris Christofias's handling of the Cyprus economy. The other three countries added to the EU's watch list yesterday were Bulgaria, Denmark and Finland.

## Doctors probed

Three orthopedic doctors from Thessaloniki are reportedly among the 12 medical professionals being investigated on suspicion of accepting under-the-table payments from DePuy Inc, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, to agree to buy supplies from the UK-based firm. The financial crimes squad (SDOE) is said to be checking their finances after between 5 and 31 million euros was allegedly found in their bank accounts.

Tourists on board a sightseeing bus yesterday morning snap pictures of the Acropolis. Up until noon, this was the only way they could catch a glimpse of the structure, as access was prevented by Culture Ministry employees.



# Acropolis shut in dispute over unpaid wages

## Culture Ministry staff take action

The Acropolis was again at the center of a dispute between unionists and the government yesterday, as unpaid Culture Ministry workers kept the site closed for four hours, turning away hundreds of tourists who had been hoping to make their way up the ancient citadel.

The site had been due to open at 8 a.m. but the public was not actually admitted until noon, as Culture Ministry employees were protesting the government's failure to pay some of their colleagues.

The president of the workers' association, Yiannis Tsakopiakos, said that the aim of the protest was to draw attention to the fact that some 500 employees on short-term contracts had not been paid for 21 months. Ministry sources responded by saying that everything possible was being done to ensure that the workers would get their money as

soon as possible.

The Acropolis was shut down earlier this summer when members of the Communist Party-affiliated union PAME used the site to stage a protest against the government's economic reforms. Striking Culture Ministry workers also prevented visitors from accessing the ancient monument several times last summer during protests over outstanding wages.

Unionists have been repeatedly criticized for using the Acropolis as a bargaining chip in their disputes with the government, amid fears that images of tourists being turned away from Greece's most famous ancient site will only further harm tourism in a year when arrivals have already dropped. Yesterday's protest came ahead of a four-hour stoppage tomorrow by air-traffic controllers, leading to more than 40 flights being

canceled or rescheduled.

There was no official comment from the government yesterday but Deputy Tourism Minister Giorgos Nikitiadis suggested that Greece's tourism industry might benefit from last-minute bookings.

However, the Acropolis protest has put the Culture Ministry in the spotlight as it planned to open 20 new or renovated museums this year, prompting many to ask what the point to this policy is when there is not enough staff to look after the museums and sites already in existence.

Kathimerini, for instance, has learned that the archaeological museum on Delos does not open before noon because there is only one guard, who is also responsible for issuing boat tickets and who has been waiting for a transfer for the last two years due to poor health.

## Hospitals favored Siemens deals

A parliamentary committee investigating Siemens, the German electronics and engineering giant alleged to have paid the Greek state to secure lucrative contracts for security systems and in the transport and telecommunications sectors, has been given an 800-page report with details of dozens of agreements the firm is alleged to have signed with Greek hospitals, Kathimerini has learned.

According to the report by state health inspectors, the company signed 164 contracts with hospitals and provided them with allegedly overpriced equipment for years. The report said the contracts were awarded directly to Siemens with hardly any negotiation between the firm and the hospital managers. This state of affairs is alleged to have resulted in a compromise in quality and in overcharging for equipment and maintenance.

According to Leonidas Grigorakos, a ruling PASOK deputy on the investigative committee who is also a lung specialist, the replacement of tubes on the CAT scan machine at the Thriasio Hospital in Elefsina cost more than half a million euros in the five-year period from 2004-09.

From an initial reading of the 800-page report, MPs on the committee suspect that Siemens had been raising and dropping prices for equipment as it saw fit, sources have told Kathimerini. The official dispatched to inspect the

general hospital in Giannitsa, northern Greece, said the institution's directors were being systematically overcharged. "The hospital's statistics for annual spending on the maintenance of medical ventilators and anesthesia machines is higher than the value of the equipment as stated in the contract," the official wrote in the report.

An extract by the inspector who visited the general hospital of another northern town, Kilkis, goes even further. "There was no evidence of any market research conducted by the hospital into the possibility of comparative evaluations of two or more companies. There were no negotiations between the hospital and company with the aim of improving prices, which resulted in the company unilaterally setting prices."

## Hanged man

A 60-year-old man was found hanging from a tree in the village of Macherado, near the heart of the Ionian island of Zankynthos, yesterday morning. The man, who was not identified, was discovered by a neighbor. Police said they found a black handkerchief tied to the door of the dead man's house.