

In Brief

TAXING SITUATION
Policeman shot

A police negotiator suffered a light injury after being shot during a successful attempt to end a hostage situation at a tax office in western Greece yesterday. A 47-year-old man was arrested in Vonitsa after holding a 55-year-old tax office employee hostage for several hours. The suspect was armed with a handgun but the tax official emerged unharmed from the ordeal. The injured policeman was treated in the hospital for a flesh wound. It was not clear what led to the 47-year-old's actions.

MILITARY PROCUREMENTS
Ex-official remains tight-lipped

The former head of military procurements at the Defense Ministry, Evangelos Vasilakos, refused to give MPs further information about comments he made in a radio interview claiming that many of the contracts signed by the Greek state were damaging for taxpayers. "I cannot mention any names or go into greater detail about which contracts damaged the Greek state because I do not have parliamentary immunity," said Vasilakos. In his interview with Skai Radio some two weeks ago, the former public servant had questioned the multimillion-euro deal for the United Arab Emirates-based Abu Dhabi MAR Group to buy ThyssenKrupp's majority stake in Hellenic Shipyards, also known as Skaramanga, and the role of Nikos Papandreou, Prime Minister George Papandreou's brother, in securing the agreement.

Work stoppage

Civil servants' union ADEDY and the group that represents private sector workers, GSEE, are holding a three-hour work stoppage from noon today in protest at the government's economic reforms. The unions are due to hold a rally in front of Parliament at 1 p.m.

Transport strikes to ease this week

Public transport workers partially backed down from their stringent opposition to the government's economic reforms, calling off almost all their protest action for Christmas Eve and making more modes of transport available today.

Their decision, however, did not affect yesterday's 24-hour strike, which means that there will be no metro, tram, buses, trolley buses, electric railway, Proastiakos suburban railway or Hellenic Railways Organization (OSE) trains in operation. As a result, some 2.3 million Athenians who used public transport every day had to find other ways to get to work.

The transport workers have decided to call off the work stoppages at peak hours tomorrow and will instead hold shorter protest action at less inconvenient times. Buses will be running between 9



a.m. and 9 p.m. Metro, electric railway, tram and trolley bus services will be available between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m.

The strike planned for Friday has been called off. Instead, there will be a work stoppage for bus drivers between noon and 4 p.m. All other forms of public transport will be working normally.

Store owners and businessmen had pleaded with the public servants to end their action, claiming that it was hurting trade as shoppers were not able to get around Athens.

The unions involved in calling the strikes to protest wage cuts, personnel transfers and the possible privatization of some public transport firms did not

make it clear why they have decided to soften their action.

Earlier, Transport Ministry general secretary Haris Tsiokas said that the government was considering issuing the protesters with civil mobilization orders. He also revealed that the cost of tickets would be increasing by 35 to 40 percent next year.

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**Christmas dinner
cheaper this year**

The cost of Christmas dinner will be 7.10 percent cheaper this year compared with the same time last year, according to data released on Tuesday by the price observatory at the regional development and competitiveness ministry.

A ministry announcement said that a Christmas dinner for six people will cost an estimated 137.76 euros on average in 2010, down from 148.29 euros for the same items bought on the same day (December 16) in 2009.

Prices were lower for meats such as turkey (14.75 percent), pork (4.15 percent) and lamb (up 6.75 percent), as well as several kinds of vegetables and seasonal sweets and cakes.

According to the ministry, the market was well stocked with goods and competition was working well, helping to keep prices low.