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Hellenic News, Culture & Lifestyle



Cyprus agrees terms of bailout with troika

Cyprus on Tuesday agreed on the terms of its 10-billion-euro bailout with the troika as the country's Finance Minister Michalis Sarris stepped down pending an investigation into the running of Cyprus Popular Bank (Laiki), where he was previously the CEO.

Government Spokesman Christos Stylianides announced that a memorandum had been agreed with the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund.

"This is an important development, which brings a long period of uncertainty," he said.

Cyprus expects to receive its first bailout tranche in early May. Nicosia will be charged an interest rate of 2.5 percent for its loans but will receive a 10-year grace period on repayments. In return, Cyprus has agreed to a range of fiscal measures and

reforms that include the corporate tax rate rising from 10 to 12.5 percent, 4,500 civil servants leaving the public sector by 2018 and 170,000 Cypriots paying a temporary insurance fee of 1.5 percent on monthly salaries for access to healthcare. Stylianides said Cyprus will retain "exclusive responsibility" for the exploitation and management of natural gas revenues as part of the agreement.

The memorandum foresees Cyprus running a primary deficit until 2016 and a primary surplus of 4 percent of GDP from 2017 onward.

Sarris's departure from the Finance Ministry was expected as due to an investigation into practices at Cypriot banks. It is also thought President Nicos Anastasiades lost confidence in Sarris. Labor Minister Harris Georgiades was named as his replacement.

Store owner was 'threatened' after reporting police

A 31-year-old Pakistani national who owns a convenience store in Piraeus claims to have been intimidated after reporting two police officers who demanded that he pay them 300 euros during an inspection in February in order for them to waive a fine.

The store owner claims his shop facade was smashed by vandals and that he received a note containing threatening language last Sunday – two weeks after the officers' arrest. And on February 25, when the officers' went on trial, the 31-year-old said he was taken to his local police precinct for an identity check.

The officers, aged 26 and 31, received 22-month suspended prison terms that they have appealed.

Greek-Canadian identified as al-Qaida militant killed in Algerian raid

A Greek-Canadian man in his early 20s has been identified as one of 29 al-Qaida militants killed during a raid on an Algerian gas refinery in January, Canadian state television CBC reported on Tuesday.

Christos Katsiroubas and his secondary school friend Ali Medlej, both from London, Ontario, were among militants who stormed the facility in Amenas, killing 38 hostages.

It is believed that the two men blew themselves up during the raid.



Tender for Athens state mosque to be launched

Seven years after a site in central Athens was earmarked for the construction of the capital's first state-sponsored mosque, a tender for the project is expected to be announced by the government on Wednesday.

The tender, which is to be uploaded onto the government's Diavgeia portal (diavgeia.gov.gr), where draft laws are published, is for a 1-million-euro project.

The construction of the mosque, which will not have minarets, is estimated to cost 846,000 euros, with another 150,000 euros going toward the feasibility studies that must precede construction on the former naval base in Votanikos. An existing structure will form a part of the mosque.

The much-delayed project is reportedly moving forward at the behest of Prime

Minister Antonis Samaras, who is keen to establish a mosque in Athens – the only capital of the original 15 in the European Union that lacks a state-backed venue for Muslim worship – in a bid to boost Greece's diplomatic hand when it comes to other sensitive issues in the region, including those relating to religious minorities.

Also, the establishment of a mosque is a prerequisite for Greece to launch inspections on an estimated 120 venues illegally operating as mosques in Athens. These makeshift spaces serve an estimated 30,000 Muslims living legally in the capital and thousands more illegal residents.

Sources say the Votanikos mosque will be able to hold around 350 worshippers as well as hundreds more in an outdoor area.

