

Portugal seeks European Union bailout money

Portugal's financial sector can expect some relief after the caretaker government decided to seek financial aid after months of what many economists said was a refusal to acknowledge economic reality

Lisbon will have to agree to tough austerity targets to obtain a bailout, and how quickly a deal can be negotiated at the start of an election campaign is unclear. Caretaker Prime Minister Jose Socrates announced he was asking for financing from the European Union, saying the risks to the economy had now become too great to go it alone as borrowing rates soared in recent weeks.

Following in the footsteps of Greece and Ireland, his request comes against a backdrop of political uncertainty after the government resigned on March 23rd following Parliament's rejection of an austerity plan. "I tried everything, but in conscience we have reached a moment when not taking this decision would imply risks that the country should not take," Mr. Socrates said in a televised statement.

The decision removes a cloud of uncertainty over the Eurozone and has a good chance of ending the spread of debt market crises to other countries in the region.

Portuguese banks will be relieved after taking the unprecedented step of warning that they may no longer be able to buy government debt — a move which likely helped force the government into seeking help. Negotiations for financial assistance will



Women speak at a street in downtown Lisbon

take place as a campaign kicks off for a June 5th snap general election which will be dominated by the country's critical economic situation as it enters its second recession in three years.

Mr. Socrates cited no figure but a Eurozone official estimated Lisbon is likely to need between 60 and 80 billion Euros in European and International Monetary Fund loans over three years.

Fernando Ulrich, the Head of the country's third biggest private bank — Banco BPI — said the decision to recognise help was needed was a 'big step'. But Portugal's negotiations for a loan from the European Union and International Monetary Fund could be more difficult than those of Greece and Ireland.

The Socialist caretaker government has said it has limited

powers and Parliament, which EU officials say would normally have to ratify any agreement before disbursement, is dissolved until the election.

The Head of the Social Democrats, the main opposition party, said he supported the request for aid. But the party, in rejecting an austerity plan by the government last month, helped spark the crisis that led to it.

Eurozone braces for ECB rate hike

The European Central Bank's widely anticipated Eurozone interest rate hike to fight inflation is set to cause more problems for businesses and consumers, particularly in sovereign debt-ravaged countries like Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain

It has already pushed the Euro to fresh highs against the Dollar, which is putting an added burden on those weaker countries. Analysts are speculating on how much the ECB might put up rates from the current record low of one percent and whether it will be the first of a series that could extend into next year. And for savers, hoping to get more interest from their money, there are no guarantees. Investment adviser Max Herbst, with FHM Finanzberatung, said, "There may be some banks that will say we'll pass on an interest rate rise to our customers immediately. But most banks will wait and see, to see if customers move to another bank that might offer higher rates. If customers stay and do not move to another bank, then there won't be higher rates." For the policymakers at the ECB this is a difficult decision. They hope to keep inflation — now at 2.6 percent — from spiralling out of control but without weakening the region's still fragile economic recovery.

Mona Lisa mystery could be solved by woman's remains

Researchers will attempt to identify the woman who sat for Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, by digging up the remains of an Italian noblewoman

Art historian Silvano Vinceti believes that by locating the remains of Lisa Gherardini, he can prove whether or not she was the artist's model. A recently discovered death certificate suggests she died in 1542 and is interred in a convent in Florence. The excavation will soon begin at Saint Orsola. The mystery behind the *Mona Lisa* and her enigmatic smile has baffled art experts for five hundred years. "We can put an end to a century old dispute and also understand Leonardo's relations to his models," Mr. Vinceti said. "To him, painting also meant giving a physical representation to the inner traits of their personalities."

Using scientific techniques, Mr. Vinceti says he hopes to extract DNA from the skull of Gherardini — the wife of a rich silk merchant — and rebuild her face. However, some doubts have been cast whether analysing century old bones can be conclusive.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



Shopping may improve health

Shopping prolongs life, at least for the over 65s in Taiwan, according to research

Even after adjusting for factors like physical and mental infirmity, men and women who shopped daily lived longer than those who shunned retail therapy, say scientists. Shopping may provide companionship, exercise and an opportunity to maintain a healthy diet. A leading UK expert said the findings 'made sense' since shopping involves physical activity, social interaction and keeping mentally active.

The researchers found those who shopped regularly lived longer than those who shopped just once a week or less. They acknowledge that shopping could be a marker for those in good health to begin with, but suggest shopping itself may improve health.

New iPad comes to Europe

The latest version of Apple's iPad tablet computer is thinner, faster and faster-selling as the queues outside shops worldwide proved

Buyers were out in droves as the device went on sale in 25 countries including most of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Mexico.

For the fans it was all camaraderie and fun but for Apple and its growing band of tablet rivals it is the difference between profit and loss.

The iPad has hugely boosted demand for tablets. Fewer than 20m of the computers were sold last year — over 95 percent of those were iPads. Technology research

company Gartner predicts 54.8m tablets sales this year, rising to 154.2 in two year time. However, in the near term, the disaster in Japan will likely mean a shortage of some components used in the iPad causing Apple to struggle to meet demand. It remains to be seen if that will benefit its distant rivals.

85 year old man crosses Atlantic Ocean on raft for WaterAid

A grandfather from London and his three-man crew have successfully crossed the Atlantic on a raft made of pipes after 66 days at sea

Anthony Smith, 85, wanted to complete the 4,596km voyage to highlight the fact a billion people worldwide live without clean water. The former BBC Tomorrow's World presenter hopes to have raised £50,000 for the charity WaterAid. They set sail from the Canary Islands and reached the Caribbean. Mr. Smith recruited the team of 'mature and intrepid gentlemen' — aged between 56 and 61. Speaking ahead of the trip Mr. Smith said, "Water strikes at the very heart of need. To voyage almost 3,000 miles upon the salty kind will make us in-



Anthony Smith, second from left, and his crew aboard the An-Tiki

tensely aware of places in the world that are without adequate supplies."

Their vessel, named the An-Tiki, was constructed out of 12m lengths of pipe and was powered by a 400-square-foot sail and steered using

twin rudders and oars, travelling at an average speed of four knots. The crew had intended to end their voyage in the Bahamas, but strong winds and currents forced them to the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Maarten.