

Greek workers strike over public sector cuts

The streets of Athens thronged with people, placards and banners on Wednesday. The sound of angry chanting reverberated across the Greek capital. Public sectors were out in force to protest against the prospect of more job cuts.

The 24-hour strike coincided with the visit from Greece's international lenders, the IMF, ECB and EU collectively referred to as the Troika. They are in town to check up on the government's progress with austerity measures as part of their 240 billion Euros bailout.

These include cutting down the country's 600,000-strong civil service down to size.

One of the protesters, Chrisa-Fouseki, is a 47-year old mother of two. She has worked in the Ministry of Culture for 25 years, and saw her salary go down by 20 percent over the last four years. She believes that a new law to evaluate civil servants will lead to job losses. "Evaluate me, I have no objection to evaluating me! But it should be according to the right criteria. Come and watch me working. Am I good at my job? Am I efficient? Do not pass a law which eliminates the human existence from one moment to the other," she declared.

Over the last few years, around 20,000 public sector employees have been partially laid off, and the aim is to reach 25,000 by the end of 2014. Antonis Stavrianos, a 31-year old teacher on primary school, believes that the evaluations are merely a front for new layoffs. "Under the pretext of the evaluation, the government is lit-



REUTERS

An employee of the Power Public Corporation (PPC) shouts slogans through a loudspeaker

erally dissolving the public nature of the Greek school system and the public sector in general," he explained.

Meanwhile, trade unions continued their battle against the privatisation of the Public Power Corporation as lawmakers debated the bill in parliament.

The Troika are used to being greeted by protesters, tired of six years of recession and continued austerity measures. This time it was public sector workers fearing for their jobs, and they were joined by trade unionists fighting against privatisation. All of which has created

chaos between the political parties, creating the conditions for an explosive political scene.

With the unemployment rate at 26 percent, the country is facing tough decisions on how to get back to growth whilst meeting its austerity targets.

Global warming creates Arctic shipping route opportunity

Japan's Mitsui O.S.K. Lines says it going to run the first ever regular commercial shipping route through the Arctic Ocean

Starting in 2018 it plans to initially move liquefied natural gas from the huge LNG plant Russian is to build on the Yamal Peninsula to markets in Europe and Asia.

In a joint venture with China Shipping, it will use three ice-breakers, which have been ordered from South Korea's Daewoo.

The Arctic voyage — impassable for conventional ships during much of the year — could knock about one-quarter off the usual travel time through the Suez Canal; that is a saving of about 10 days.

With the melting of sea ice due to global warming effects, the Arctic Ocean route, the shortest shipping route linking Europe and Asia, has opened up in the past few years.

Matisse returns to Venezuela

A stolen painting believed to be by French artist Henri Matisse has been returned to Venezuela from the United States

The Odalisque in Red Trousers (Odalisque à la culotte rouge) is said to be worth over two million Euros. It was taken from a museum in Caracas over a decade ago and

replaced with a fake that no one noticed for years.

The painting was recovered in July 2012 in an undercover FBI operation at a Miami Beach hotel where Pedro Marcuello Guzman, 48, a Cuban living in Miami, offered the work to undercover police for about \$740,000 (544,000 Euros),

admitting it had been stolen.

It was retrieved after his accomplice, Maria Martha Elisa Ornelas Lazo, 52, of Mexico City, arrived from Mexico carrying the painting in a protective tube. Ornelas was released from prison in January while Marcuello is due for release later this year.

Two bodies found in northern Italy floods



Two people are reported to have died in this week's flooding in northern Italy

Residents of Milan and several other towns have been clearing up after Monday night's severe storms,

and the alarm has been lifted.

Reports say the body of an 85-year-old woman was found in a canal at Inzago between Milan and Bergamo. Another body was said to have been spotted overnight in a pipe in the river Lambro.

The storms came suddenly after a period of hot weather. In Milan the river Seveso burst its banks, causing streets to be flooded and serious transport problems. Several towns suffered power cuts as heavy rain and strong winds uprooted trees and damaged buildings.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

Scandal-tainted Vatican bank gets new boss, more restructuring

Management of the Catholic Church's vast wealth is being taken away from its scandal-plagued bank and given to a new central Vatican Asset Management department

The Institute for Religious Works, or IOR as it is known, will now deal just with payment services and accounts for religious orders, Vatican employees and charities. That follows the discovery that some accounts had been used for criminal activity, including tax evasion and money laundering.

The new head of the bank, French businessman Jean-Baptiste de Fransu is part of a new team brought in by Pope Francis to reform the Vatican bank. His boss, Australian Cardinal George Pell, who is in charge of the Church's recently formed Secretariat for the Economy, said he wants the entire Vatican to become 'a model of financial transparency instead of cause for occasional scandal'.

Dexterous hand moved forward

British firm Shadow Robot has designed a prosthetic hand that can analyse the shape of an object and how best to pick it up

It is called the Dexterous Hand, and it includes finger-tip mounted pressure sensors so it can judge how much force is needed when touching something. The developers claim it is a real leap forward in artificial intelligence.



Rich Walker, Shadow Robot's Managing Director explained, "What we've tried to do is put intelligence into the robot hand, and that means sensing. So we're adding sensors on the fingertips that can understand how the robot is touching the world and interacting with it. And we're adding 3D cameras so the robot can see things around it and be able to work out how to grasp and manipulate them."

The 3D depth-sensing cameras let the Dexterous Hand examine an object. The internal software then arranges the fingers for optimal grip, while touch sensors monitor its stability. The software is open source.