

The Week in Cyprus

FRIDAY

- The island's bishops requested a meeting of the Holy Synod to deal with accusations by the Bishop of Paphos against a Mount Athos monk.
- National Guard commanders rejected a proposal for the withdrawal of troops close to Green Line residential areas.
- The Attorney General took delivery of the report of criminal investigators into charges against Interior Minister Dinos Michaelides.

SATURDAY

- Greenpeace distributed leaflets warning the public that over 100 toys on the local market contain dangerous chemical additives.
- Procopis Nicholas Procopiou, a fifth suspect in the murder of Hambis Aeroporos, was remanded in custody.
- Bishop Chrysostomos of Paphos today joined two of his colleagues in calling for a meeting of the Holy Synod to discuss his allegations of immoral behaviour by clergymen.

SUNDAY

- Police Chief Andreas Angelides spoke of his fears about a possible new gang war after the murder of Hambis Aeroporos.
- Nicos Koutsou, Chairman of the New Horizons party, demanded the immediate deployment of S-300 missiles in Cyprus.

MONDAY

- After studying the special investigator's report, the Attorney General cleared Interior Minister Michaelides of any criminal wrongdoing.
- The House extended the 3% defence levy for a further six month period.
- Iraqis demonstrated in front of foreign embassies in Nicosia against US/UK air strikes on Baghdad.

TUESDAY

- Dinos Michaelides welcomed the Attorney General's ruling clearing him of criminal offences, while reaction against it continued to be heard from other quarters.
- Bishop Chrysostomos of Paphos insisted that the Holy Synod should continue to investigate his allegations about immorality by certain clergymen.
- Akel General Secretary Demetris Christofias was admitted to hospital with pneumonia.

House of Representatives

Party time at the House

GOOD humour, harmless satire, music and carols, food and plenty of drink were the ingredients for a successful Christmas party at the House of Representatives on Monday.

As usual, party and political rivalries were put to one side as MPs, parliamentary staff and guests thronged the main committee meeting chamber.

Akel's Yiannakis Agapiou donned his Santa Claus outfit once again and his now traditional "Review of the Year" soon had peals of laughter echoing through the building.

Frequently speaking in rhyming couplets, Agapiou referred to the personalities and events of 1998, from developments in the Cyprus problem to the Church scandals and problems in the House itself.

The star of the show was impressionist Loucas Constantinou, whose act took the form of a running conversation between party leaders and MPs, with plenty of jokes and spot-on impersonations.



BANANA REPUBLIC: House President Spyros Kyprianou, flanked by United Democrats Chairman George Vassiliou (r) and Disy MP Panayiotis Demetriou, try the bananas handed out by Vassiliou.

Another hit was a video compilation of snippets of MPs in the House, accompanied by apt extracts from popular songs. This was widely applauded.

Defence levy extended for six months

IN its last session before the Christmas recess, the House resolved by a one-vote majority to extend the 3% defence levy for only six months instead of the two years demanded by the government.

At the same time, the House also approved the updating of the special legislation on contribution to the Defence Fund in conjunction with the price of fuels.

The house rejected an Akel proposal for a progressive defence levy, as well as a proposal of the United Democrats for replacement of the levy by an increase in Value Added Tax.

The House did, however, recommend that the government study both proposals, together with the unanimous party position for social grants to the lower income classes.

By 25 votes from Disy and Edek, against 24 from Akel and Diko, with two abstentions from the United Democrats, the decision also increased the tax threshold for pensioners from £1,750 to £3,000.

The House approved petrol prices remaining at current levels until May 10, 1999 and called on the government to study the readjustment of fuel prices on the basis of international standards, bearing in mind the interest of the consumer.

The government was also asked to find ways to ease the lot of the poorer families by returning the surplus from fuel prices in the form of social grants.

Akel's Kikis Kazamias pointed out that, under the special law on fuels, the government earned additional revenue of £60m in 1998,

which will go up to £70m in 1999.

In its rejected proposal for a progressive contribution based on income, Akel recommended that, for incomes of up to £20,000, the defence levy should stay at 2%. From £20,000 to £40,000, it should go up to 3% and then rise to 4% for incomes over £40,000 per year.

Companies with a profit of up to £250,000 should pay 3%, from £250,000 to £1m it should be 4% and from £1m the level should be 6%.

The United Democrats proposal provided for abolition of the compulsory Defence levy and its replacement by an increase in VAT.

The appropriate minister

would also be held responsible to deposit these funds into the Defence Fund.

United Democrats Chairman George Vassiliou, who tabled the proposal, argued that this solution would greatly improve the competitiveness of the country's economy and would ease the tax burden on the lower income classes, while the Defence Fund would get the same amount of funds as it now gets from the levy.

During the debate, the government was accused of renegeing on its promise of last August, when the defence levy was upped from 2 to 3% that it would reconsider the temporary increase. It has not done so.

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