

World News Roundup

Greece

Restart economy

New Tsipras govt in office

ATHENS, Sept 23, (Agencies): The new left-wing government of Greek Prime Minister **Alexis Tsipras** took office on Wednesday with a core of returning ministers pledging to restart the country's flagging economy.

Sending a signal to creditors, Tsipras kept the same team that negotiated the country's latest EU bailout but the incoming administration also has to address a burgeoning migration crisis.



Tsipras

Pro-euro Euclid Tsakalotos retains the finance ministry portfolio while George Houliarakis, the reclusive expert who led the country's rocky bailout negotiations with EU and IMF experts, has been appointed junior finance minister.

"Our goal is recovery and reconstruction," deputy prime minister Yiannis Dragasakis told reporters before the ceremony.

"We have the prerequisites to overcome the difficulties," he said. Tsipras later on Wednesday flies to Brussels for an emergency summit on the migration crisis, a day after EU ministers forced through a controversial deal to relocate 120,000 refugees, angering several member states in the process.

Hardliners

The new Greek cabinet is largely a carbon copy of the previous government headed by Tsipras, who resigned in August after seven months in office after losing his majority when anti-euro hardliners in his Syriza party quit in anger over the reform-and-rescue deal.

The liberal daily Kathimerini said Wednesday that Tsipras had been careful to reward loyal Syriza cadres who supported him against the hardliners.

"Tsipras' basic criterion was to keep the balance in his party... and reward those who stood at his side on the bailout issue," the daily said.

Panos Kammenos, the boisterous head of the nationalist Independent Greeks party in the government coalition, was once again given the defence portfolio.

Nikos Kotzias, the former senior Communist who clashed with EU peers over the Ukraine crisis, returns to the foreign ministry, and the key migration portfolio remains in the hands of Ioannis Mouzalas, who as interim minister before the election helped ease pressure on Greek islands swamped by refugee arrivals.

The new government has 16 ministers and 30 deputy ministers, but only four women including the spokeswoman.

Topping Greece's agenda is the need to push through as quickly as possible the painful austerity measures demanded by Greece's EU-IMF creditors, in order to boost growth and to enhance Athens' credibility in foreign eyes.

This hopefully in a second stage would allow the Tsipras administration to achieve its goal of opening negotiations to reduce Greece's soaring debt.

In a statement sent to AFP, the IMF said it was looking forward to working with the new government.

Completion

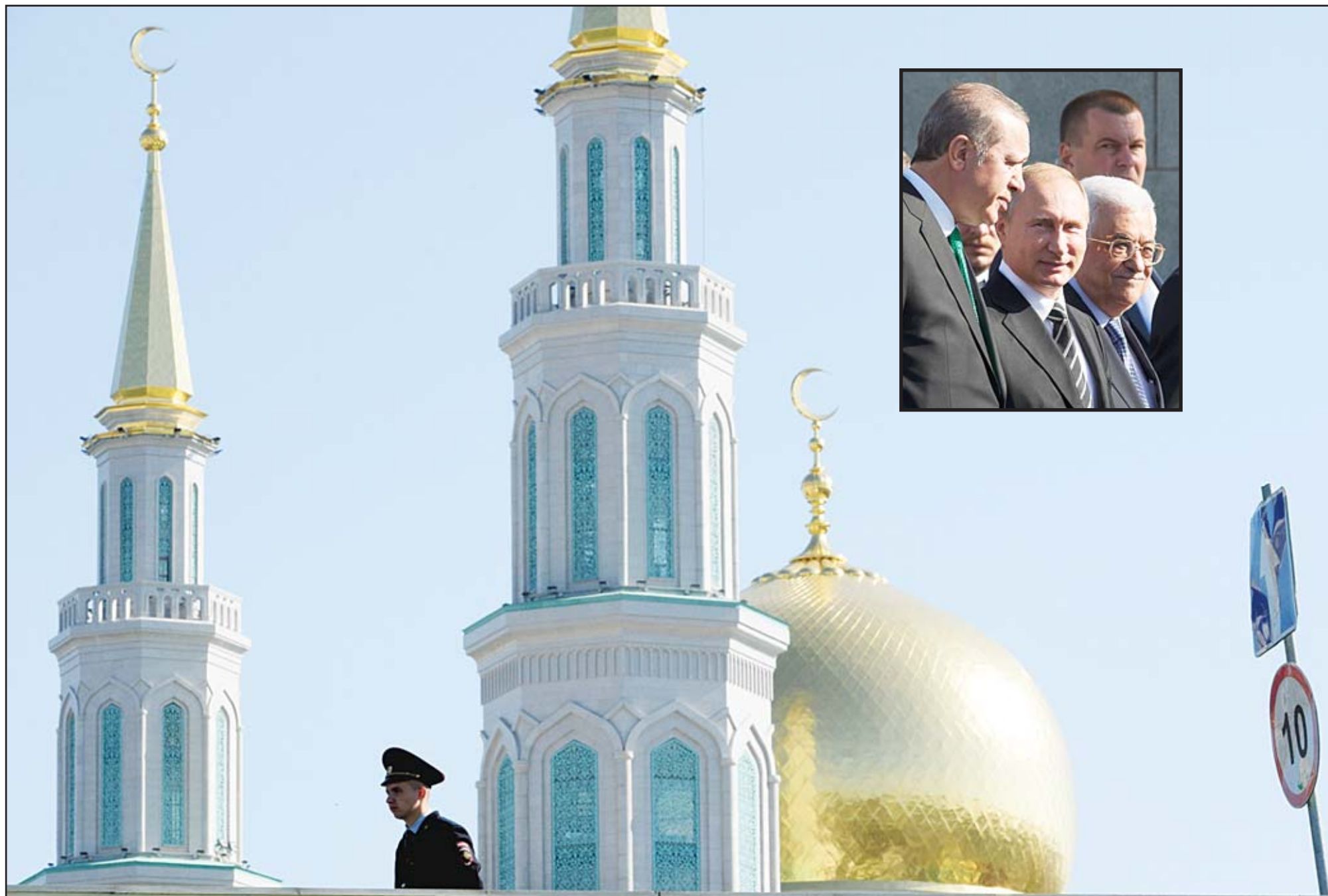
"We welcome the completion of the electoral process in Greece and look forward to working with the new government on the policies needed to put Greece on a path for sustainable growth," the global lender said.

The clock is ticking, with a review due in late October by the lenders on whether Athens is abiding by the reform programme. At stake for the new government will be the release of a new three-billion-euro tranche of aid.

In his second mandate, Tsipras also hopes to strengthen Syriza's left-wing credentials by fighting the systemic corruption and cronyism that has tainted Greek political life for decades, while tackling the migrant crisis with more efficiency and humanity.

Debt-strapped Greece has been the first port of call for some 310,000 refugees from war and persecution in the Middle East and elsewhere this year, but almost all have moved on to seek a new life in more prosperous economies to the west.

Some 4,000 migrants riding flimsy vessels from Turkey arrive on the Greek islands every day, yet shelter for no more than an estimated 2,000 people is available in struggling Greece, with entire families left to sleep outside with little access to basic hygiene, food or transport.



A police officer stands guard near the Moscow Grand Mosque during the opening ceremony in Moscow on Sept 23. (Inset): Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left), Russian President Vladimir Putin (second left), and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (third left), walk together to take part in the re-opening ceremony of the newly restored Moscow Cathedral Mosque in Moscow, Russia on Sept 23. (AP)

Spain

FM warns Catalans over nationality

Sports, politics mix in Catalonia bid

Roadmap to secession

'Vote win would mean independence declaration'

BARCELONA, Spain, Sept 23, (AP): Sports and politics are never far apart in Barcelona's Camp Nou football stadium. Moments after fans emitted a collective sigh last weekend over a narrowly missed strike by Lionel Messi, the chants rang through the stadium as they always do at the 17th minute of a home game: independence! Independencia! Independencia!

Independence is the question on everyone's minds these days in Catalonia, as the wealthy northeastern region holds an election this weekend that may determine the fate of its separatist movement. And increasingly, the Barcelona football club's stadium is the crucible for breakaway sentiment.

In Sunday's regional election, pro-independence parties hope to win control of the regional parliament to carry out a single mandate: initiating an 18-month plan to create a new European state for the bilingual Mediterranean territory, possibly concluding in a unilateral declaration of independence. Polls show the independence parties headed for a slim win.

Even in less fraught times, FC Barcelona has always been known as "more than a club." Today, as the talisman of separatist spirit, it finds itself at the heart of a burning political question. One of the team's biggest luminaries, former coach and player Pep Guardiola, a living legend for most of Barcelona's faithful, has been outspoken in his support of the independence push, which has gained force in recent years as Spain became immersed in a severe financial downturn.

Guardiola, who left Barcelona in 2012 and became manager of Germany's Bayern Munich, has joined the pro-independence parties "Together for Yes" coalition as a symbolic candidate, though he is not up for a parliamentary seat.

"This is an opportunity that we have to make a new and more just country, starting from scratch," Guardiola said in a pro-independence campaign video. "Nobody can stop the will of the people."

Identity

Known familiarly as "Barca" (pronounced Barsa), the club has been seen as a bastion of Catalan identity dating back to the three decades of Gen. Francisco Franco's dictatorship, when Catalans could not openly speak their native Catalan language.

Franco's soldiers killed Barca's club president in 1936, and the club was

forced to change its name from a Catalan to a Spanish version. Barcelona writer Manuel Vazquez Montalban famously called the football team "Catalonia's unarmed symbolic army."

The stadium is wrapped up with Catalan identity. Under Franco, it was illegal to shout "Long Live Catalonia!" in Spanish but fans could shout "Long Live Barca!" ("Visca Barca!") in Catalan. The chant became code for expressing Catalan pride — and now that role is being updated as a catalyst for the independence movement.

The roar in a home game's 17th minute is a ritual for separatists. It is a pointed reminder of 1714, the year troops defending Barcelona during the War of Spanish Succession lost a siege — and the Catalonia region consequently lost much of the self-gov-

erning power it had for centuries.

Barcelona football club has shied away from openly secessionist gestures. But it has repeatedly supported what Catalans consider their unique cultural identity, as well as the campaign to hold a referendum on independence — a bid blocked by the central government in Madrid.

Following tradition, Barcelona, along with other Catalan sports clubs, sent a delegation to participate in the festivities during the Catalan National Day holiday on Sept 11.

Even then, club vice president Carles Vilarrubi said that Barcelona "must not interfere" in the campaign for the critical regional elections, as the club tries to walk a fine line between supporting its local fans who see it as bastion of Catalan culture, and those other millions around the world who know it as simply one of

the most attractive teams to play the sport.

Maria Rosa Pizjoan, a 63-year-old shopkeeper, said separatists like her "can't take any more of the Spanish state" and are sick of Catalonia being "plundered" by Spain. That's shorthand for the claim — denied by the Madrid government — that the highly industrialized region does not get back from Spain what it pays in taxes.

"I scream for independence in minute 17 because I am Barca," said Pizjoan. She became a fan as a child during the dictatorship, when a customer at her family's restaurant insulted both Catalans and their football team in the same tirade.

"What that man said stayed with me," she said. "If Barca had been a normal club, no way would I have become a fan because at 7 or 8 I didn't like football."

But Mas stressed that any declaration of independence will not come overnight even if his pro-independence list wins.

He said Catalonia would declare independence within 18 to 24 months after setting up the apparatus of a new state and adopting a constitution.

Catalans would be asked to vote on the constitution in a referendum which would also give them another chance to vote for or against independence.

Meanwhile, Mas said he intends to negotiate a friendly divorce from Spain and an agreement with the European Union for Catalonia to stay in the bloc.

"The Catalan state must be recognized as an EU member but that must be negotiated before independence," he said.

If it reaches an agreement with Madrid and Brussels, he said Catalonia would take on its share of Spain's debt.

"If there is no agreement, we will have no obligation to pay Spanish debt," he said, reiterating a warning he has made over recent days.

Catalonia accounts for 16 percent of Spain's population and a fifth of its economic output. Spain's debt is nearly equal to its own total gross domestic product, around a trillion euros.



Catalonia's regional government president Artur Mas gestures during an AFP interview on Sept 22 at the Palau de La Generalitat in Barcelona. Mas says the region will not need a referendum to break away from Spain if pro-separatist candidates win a majority of votes in Sunday's regional election. (AFP)

Europe

Egypt buys 2 warships: Egypt has agreed to buy two Mistral-class warships from France, the French government said Wednesday, announcing its second military sale to the economically-strapped country this year.

The assault ships, which can each carry 16 helicopter gunships, 700 troops and up to 50 armored vehicles, were originally intended for Russia.

France continued building to Russia's specifications 6 including stenciling Cyrillic writing throughout the vessels until the deal finally fell apart because of the Ukrainian crisis. It was originally supposed to be the biggest arms sale ever by a NATO country to Russia.

The Egyptian government has been battling a long-running insurgency in the northern Sinai region, which escalated after the military ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in July 2013 amid massive protests against his rule and cracked down on Islamic groups.

A local Islamic State affiliate has been claiming responsibility for militant attacks in the area. (AP)

3 can be extradited to US: A Czech court approved the extradition of three foreigners to the United States, where they are accused of trying to sell arms and drugs with the aim of harming US interests, the court spokeswoman said on Tuesday.

Lebanese citizens Ali Fayad and Khaled Merebi and Ivory Coast citizen Faouzi Jaber are charged in the United States with aiding terrorism, an attempt to sell ground-to-air missiles, cocaine trafficking and other crimes, Prague Municipal Court spokeswoman Marketa Puci said.

"The Prague Municipal Court has ruled that the extradition is permissible," she said.

The ruling is not final as the three men filed a complaint, which will be considered by the High Court. If the ruling is upheld, then it falls to the justice minister, whose power it is to ultimately decide on the matter, Puci said.

The three were arrested in Prague in April 2014 as they were trying to close deal with people they thought were members of Colombian guerrilla group FARC. (RTRS)

Albania extradites recruiter:

Albanian authorities say they have extradited to Italy an Albanian accused of recruiting for the Islamic State group in Syria.

A police statement from Wednesday said that 40-year-old Baki Coku, who was arrested in July on an Italian request, was flown to Italy on Tuesday.

Italian authorities accuse Coku of being part of a recruiting ring that included his nephew, Aldo Kobuzi, who allegedly underwent weapons training in Iraq with Islamic militants.

Among the people allegedly recruited were Kobuzi's Italian wife, Maria Giulia Sergio, who converted to Islam, allegedly



Morsi



Le Pen

became radicalized and went to Syria. (AP)

Le Pen to go on trial: French far-right party leader **Marine Le Pen** will go on trial for comparing Muslim street prayers to wartime Nazi occupation, party officials and the prosecutor's office said on Tuesday.

Le Pen, whom polls see likely to win a regional election in northern France in December, has widened the National

Front's appeal since she took its helm in 2011 by expelling extremists and cracking down on anti-Semitism.

But the party also thrives on concerns over immigration and radical Islam. In a meeting in 2010, Le Pen criticised Muslims meeting in the streets when mosques are full.

She will be judged on Oct 20 over charges of "incitement to discrimination over people's religious beliefs," the prosecutor's office in Lyon said. (RTRS)