

# World experts join bicommunal restoration project

The UN-sponsored project to restore the Apostolos Andreas Monastery in the occupied area and the Hala Sultan Mosque in the southern city of Larnaca is about to take off following the recruitment of two world-renowned restoration experts to assist with the work. The project is being funded by the US Government to the tune of up to \$8 million as a contribution to the improvement of inter-communal relations in Cyprus.

The important joint enterprise is being managed by the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and more particularly by the UNOPS Programme Manager, Miran Rechter, who announced on 22 May that Prof. Georgio Croci of Italy and Prof. Saleh Lamei of Egypt have been recruited to work on the project. Prof. Croci led the team which recently made the Leaning Tower of Pisa safe from possible collapse, while Prof. Lamei has established an international reputation for restoring and preserving mosques.

Mr Rechter said that, following UN/US approval of the project in January 2000, detailed drawings of the two sites had been completed in October and that work was currently in progress on safeguarding the structure of Apostolos Andreas. This was expected to be completed in the autumn, after which restoration work on both buildings

would be undertaken with the aim of completing the whole project by the end of 2002. Meanwhile, some 9,000 trees have already been planted in the grounds around Apostolos Andreas, while olive trees planted in the garden of Hala Sultan will soon be followed by 80 new palm trees.

Situated on the Karpass Peninsula at the north-eastern tip of Cyprus, the Apostolos Andreas Monastery was built in the early 19th century, becoming one of the most revered sites of the Christian Orthodox faith. Since the Turkish invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974, the building has been allowed to fall into serious disrepair, although in recent years it has regularly been visited under UN auspices by groups of Greek Cypriot pilgrims.

Similar visits have been made by Turkish Cypriots to the Hala Sultan Mosque, which has been maintained in good structural condition and remains in use by Muslim worshippers. The Mosque was also built in the early 19th century, over the tomb of Umm Haram, a reputed relative of the Prophet Mohammed who died when she fell off her mule during one of the first Arab raids on Cyprus in 649. The shrine ranks in importance immediately after Mecca, Medina and the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. □



• Cloistered shade at Apostolos Andreas... Soon to be restored to its original condition.

## Notes & News

● The Ministry of Communications and Works announced on 1 May that 16 groups have been selected to go forward to the pre-qualification stage in the bidding for the contract to operate and develop **Larnaca and Paphos international airports**, under privatization plans unveiled in March. The 16 groups include one or more companies from Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Singapore, South Africa and the UK.

● Defence Minister Socrates Hasikos confirmed on 3 May that Cyprus will shortly have its own **search and rescue capability**, using two Bell helicopters donated to the National Guard by Greece after the Cyprus House of Representatives had voted down a Government proposal to purchase four US Bell helicopters. Until now, search and rescue missions in Cyprus have been undertaken by the British military from the UK bases at Dhekelia and Akrotiri.

● Official figures issued on 5 May showed that **tourist arrivals** in the first quarter of 2001 totalled 293,414, an increase of 2.5 per cent over the same period in 2000, with arrivals in March particularly encouraging at 141,663, 4.6 per cent up on March 2000. Britain provided by far the largest proportion of tourists in March (45.6 per cent), followed by Germany (15.3 per cent), Greece (6.8 per cent), Russia (3.8 per cent) and Sweden (2.6 per cent). EU countries accounted for no less than 83.2 per cent of March arrivals.

● Cyprus' **trade figures** continued their upward trend in January, with exports rising to C£46.2 million and imports to C£183.2 million, compared with C£41.3 million and C£142.3 respectively in January 2000. EU countries supplied 52.4 per cent of imports and received 49.8 per cent of exports in January 2001.

● Former EOKA fighter **Nicos Sampson**, who briefly took over the presidency from Archbishop Makarios in 1974 following a

military coup backed by the Greek junta and thereby provoking the Turkish invasion, died on 9 May at the age of 66. Twice sentenced to death by the British authorities for his role in the liberation struggle of the 1950s, in 1977 he was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment by a Cypriot court for his part in the coup, but was later granted early release on health grounds.

● Cyprus' accession to the EU with a strong **merchant fleet** and an efficient maritime infrastructure was identified as a key Government aim by Communications and Works Minister Averof Neophytou on 5 May.



• Strong and safe merchant fleet is a key aim.

Addressing a conference in Nicosia on the prospects for shipping after EU accession, Mr Neophytou said that during the last three years much new legislation had been enacted to improve the safety standards of Cyprus-registered ships and that harmonization with

EU shipping regulations was 70 per cent complete.

● The creation of an underwater cable company operating mainly in the Eastern Mediterranean was agreed in a memorandum of co-operation signed in Athens on 18 May by the **Cyprus Telecommunications Authority (CYTA)** and its Greek counterpart, OTE. The memorandum also specified that OTE would provide technical aid to CYTA in the context of its prospective conversion into a public company. Communications and Works Minister Averof Neophytou, who was present at the signing, described the agreement as a major step in making Cyprus the telecommunications bridge between Europe and the Middle East.

● A new exhibition at the Archaeological Museum in Nicosia displays artefacts and remains which suggest that Cyprus' **Neolithic period** stretches some two millennia further back than previously thought. The items exhibited include a bone remnant from the earliest known Cypriot cow, deer and goat horns and a unique stone kitten's head, most of them found at the Shillourokamos site near Limassol. They have been dated to 9,000-8,000 BC, indicating that the island's Neolithic period was contemporaneous with those of the Middle East rather than beginning in the 6th millennium BC. □

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