

Greece bailout talks to start on Monday

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Athens: Talks between the Greek government and international creditors on a third bailout package for Greece are expected to begin on Monday, a state minister said.

Meetings with officials from the European Commission, European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had been expected to begin on Friday, were delayed by logistical issues, including the location of talks and security.

Referring to the visit here of EU, IMF and ECB mission chiefs for talks on a fresh loan for Greece, state minister Alekos Flambouraris told reporters here on Saturday that "if the agreement says that they should visit a ministry, we have to accept that".

While EU negotiators arrived on Friday, there is widespread feeling here about inspection visits by lenders as a violation of Greek sovereignty.

The move comes after Greek MPs approved tough new conditions set by the EU lenders last week that included an increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) and pushing back the retirement age.

Greece's next major deadline is August 20, when it must pay 3.2 billion euros (\$3.5 billion) owed to the ECB, followed by a payment of 1.5 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) to the IMF in September.

The IMF confirmed on Monday that Greece had cleared its overdue debt repayments of 2.05 billion euros (\$2.24 billion) and was no longer in arrears.

On Wednesday, the ECB increased its cash lifeline to Greek banks by 900 million euros (about \$980 million).

Meanwhile, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said his priority is to secure the bailout package before dealing with the political fallout of the rebellion in his left-wing Syriza party.

The party rebellion has made his government dependent on votes from the pro-European opposition parties to get the tough bailout terms approved in parliament.

According to a poll on Saturday by Metron Analysis for the newspaper Parapolitika, 61 percent of Greeks had a positive view of Tsipras, compared to 36 percent who disapproved.

An overwhelming majority of 78 percent wanted Greece to stay in the Eurozone against 19 percent in favour of returning to the drachma.

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