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Josef Bonnici earmarked for finance ministry

- Dalli appears ready to vacate Auberge d'Aragon

Prof. Josef Bonnici is being earmarked as the next finance minister by the Lawrence Gonzi think tank. Prof. Bonnici, best remembered as an academic who will have to match the robust and energetic Finance and Economic Affairs Minister John Dalli. Josef Bonnici, who returned to Parliament last year through a casual election, may be offered another stint at ministerial level pending a possible cabinet reshuffle when newly elected PN leader Lawrence Gonzi is sworn in as prime minister.

On whether he has been approached by Gonzi himself to take on the finance ministry portfolio, he candidly refused to 'make the news' by choosing to answer neither positively nor negatively to questions put forward by *The Malta Financial and Business Times* on the job offer: "This is something I cannot give an answer to. One is jumping the gun here. It is still too early and it is entirely up to the new prime minister to decide." Asked whether he would cate-

gorically confirm or deny that he has been approached for current Finance Minister John Dalli's post, Bonnici said he would not answer any questions, nor would he deny the claim. "You are putting me in a difficult position here," he told this newspaper. "You are not going to get me to commit on either one thing or the other, since either answer will make the news for you. My preference is to say 'no comment'."

Continues on page 2



Academic Josef Bonnici may find himself as the new finance minister

Jobs, business and the economy: what Lawrence Gonzi promised

By Kurt Sansone

It should not be a tall order for prime minister-to-be Lawrence Gonzi to try and reconcile the promises made during the leadership campaign with the electoral pledges of the PN manifesto. The former were lacking in content, while the latter was simply an EU bulletin bereft of concrete measures.

At a time when business is bogged down with a cash flow crisis, the manufacturing industry is shedding jobs and losing out to competition abroad and government is saddled with a huge deficit, the high flying statements made by the three PN leadership contestants over the past few weeks have been music to many people's ears.

Continues on page 2

Gonzi to be confirmed PN leader tonight

All is set at the Nationalist Party headquarters in Pietà for the second round of the leadership contest tonight, which will see Lawrence Gonzi standing as the sole candidate for the top post. 50-year-old Dr Gonzi needs two-thirds of the PN councillors' votes to become PN leader and eventually Prime Minister. Today's election is seen as a formality required by the party statute, which will only confirm the backing of the absolute majority of councillors. Councillors will have between

3pm and 9pm to cast their vote at the party headquarters. The PN electoral commission, headed by Foreign Minister Joe Borg, said the only difference from last Saturday's election will be that there will only be one candidate tonight. Dr Gonzi already garnered 508 (59.1 per cent) out of the 860 valid votes cast in last Saturday's election, earning more votes than his predecessor got in the first round 27 years ago. "It's precisely as much as I had

envisioned," Dr Gonzi told reporters Saturday night. The case was quite the opposite for John Dalli, who suffered a crushing defeat after three weeks of intensive campaigning, earning 25.4 per cent of votes against the 45 per cent he had said were backing him until Friday afternoon. Mr Dalli announced, to roaring applause, that he was backing out of the contest as soon as the results were made public Saturday night.

Continues on page 2

MSE Index: 2,431.935
 see page 23

| Rates of exchange | |
|-------------------|----------|
| EURO | 2.3454 |
| US DOLLAR | 2.9145 |
| UK STERLING | 1.5612 |
| SWISS FRANC | 3.7036 |
| JAPANESE YEN | 318.1611 |
| CANADIAN DOLLAR | 3.9086 |
| GOLD US Dollars | 399.0750 |
| SILVER US Cents | 689.0000 |

| World indices | | |
|---------------|----------|--------|
| Index | Value | Change |
| NASDAQ | 2043.74 | -0.68% |
| FTSE | 4540.1 | 0.07% |
| CAC 40 | 3785.36 | 0.97% |
| DAX | 4100.34 | 1.13% |
| H. SENG | 13731.35 | -1.35% |
| NIKKEI | 11361.51 | 0.80% |
| S&P | 1151.58 | -0.38% |
| DJIA | 10609.55 | -0.64% |

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