

INTERVIEW
PAGES 10-11

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Minister seeks consultation over new MTA chairman

Matthew Vella

Tourism Minister Francis Zammit Dimech is meeting with stakeholders in a bid to find a suitable candidate for the chairmanship of the Malta Tourism Authority.

Following the resignation of Romwald Lungaro Mifsud, who spent 15 months at the helm of the MTA, Zammit Dimech has asked hoteliers and business associations to forward their preferences for the authority's leadership.

A meeting with stakeholders was held yesterday, Business Today can reveal.

Zammit Dimech's decision to seek consultation also comes after Winston Zahra, former president of the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association, called for both the chairman and minister's heads in the wake of worrying results for tourism in the first quarter.

On Sunday, a survey conducted by sister newspaper MaltaToday showed Zammit Dimech, who is currently taking the brunt for tough choices facing the Cabinet on low cost airlines, as the minister with the lowest approval rating.

Zammit Dimech saw his approval rating slipping from 49 per cent last September to just 20 per cent in July, after spending months on the receiving end of criticism by leading hoteliers for not delivering on pre-established targets on tourist arrivals.

Lungaro Mifsud's appointment had been a sore point between Zammit Dimech and the implementation team entrusted with MTA's plan for reform, namely Winston Zahra, George Micallef and Sam Mifsud - the team had refused the nomination of Lungaro Mifsud to managing director three times.

Sam Mifsud, a director at S. Mifsud and Sons, is touted as a possible favourite for the post at MTA, sources told Business Today.

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MLP will not divulge Chircop's pension report

James Debono

The Labour Party will not divulge the contents of opposition spokesperson Karl Chircop's pension reform report, limiting itself to a four page reaction denying the existence of a pension crisis before 2025 and delaying reform till 2011.

But the delay proposed by the MLP risks undermining Malta's international credibility said

leading economist Prof. Edward Scicluna.

"The government has spent 10 years preparing for this reform. The international credibility of the government and the economy is at stake; it is unthinkable that this would be postponed further," Scicluna told Business Today.

Yet despite mounting criticism that the Malta Labour Party is simply evading the issue for electoral purposes, the

party will not be divulging the report prepared by opposition spokesperson Karl Chircop.

On Saturday, at a press conference addressed solely by Alfred Sant despite the presence of the deputy leaders and Karl Chircop, the party presented a four page 'document' that contained no concrete proposals.

Talking to Business Today, Chircop insisted that his report was merely a platform for inner

party discussion, which was followed by 10 other meetings during which other reports were consulted.

"I cannot divulge the contents of the report. What I can say is that many things in my report were accepted. Next week I will address this issue in detail in the 90 minutes, allocated to me in the parliamentary debate," the opposition spokesperson told Business Today. ▶ page 5

Majority to visit trade fair, most will not spend anything

James Debono

With the most exciting world cup matches still being played, it was a slow start for the 49 edition of the Malta International trade fair at Naxxar. But judging by the results of MaltaToday's July survey most Maltese people will not lose their appointment with this annual event.

The good news for businesses exhibiting their wares is that 54 per cent intend to visit the trade fair grounds in Naxxar by 16 July when the fair comes to a close. But the bad news is that 58 per cent of those attending do not intend to buy anything in particular.

This is an indication that many Maltese consider the trade fair as a family outing rather than an occasion for a shopping spree. ▶ page 3

How much do you intend to spend?

maltaToday
SURVEY

Ambassador to Spain silent on resignation call

Karl Schembri

Malta's Ambassador to Spain, Gaetan Naudi, has said he will limit his response to Labour's call for his resignation in written replies to the Foreign Ministry, in the wake of a damning National Audit Office report detailing the squandering of public funds at

the defunct Voice of the Mediterranean three years ago.

Naudi was then Permanent Secretary at the foreign ministry when Richard Muscat was MD for three years, in which according to NAO, Muscat ignored public procurement regulations when spending thousands of liri ▶ page 5

Maltacom goes cool on 3G and DTTV

Kurt Sansone

Go Mobile may be providing its customers with television streaming over its current upgraded network but the decision whether the company will roll out third generation (3G) technology, which would allow all sorts of data services to be provided over the network, still has to be taken by the new board of directors.

Addressing the media for the first time since his appointment, Maltacom's new CEO, David Kay, on Monday said that no final decision has yet been taken on 3G.

"A small market like Malta needs to be approached differently than, say, a market like Germany," Kay told Business Today.

The official terminology being used by Maltacom's management to describe the company's plan of action for rolling out 3G and digital terrestrial television is "works in



Maltacom CEO David Kay

progress".

Asked by Business Today to explain what he meant by 'works in progress', Kay said the new board of directors had to get "comfortable" with the company's Maltese management and plans before embarking on hefty investments required to upgrade the company's technology and services.

"Malta is a small market and needs to be approached with caution. We

are evaluating the business case," Kay said.

Go Mobile was issued a licence by the Malta Communications Authority in August last year to operate a 3G network and is committed to roll out the service and offer at least 50 per cent coverage of Malta's territory within two years of the granting of the licence.

This means that by August 2007, Go Mobile would need to have commissioned the 3G technology and ensure that at least half of Malta and Gozo are covered by the network.

Maltacom also has a licence from the MCA to operate a digital terrestrial television network. The licence, granted in May 2005 could be lost if Maltacom fails to provide full national coverage of no less than 95 per cent of the islands by November this year. ▶ page 7

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