

INTERVIEW
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Angry hoteliers' conditional "yes" to tourism minister

Karl Schembri

With the tourism operators repeatedly calling for the tourism minister's resignation over the last months now appointed on the tourism consultative board, it will be a question of time before they will turn on the minister to fork out the money

they deem necessary or tender their own resignation.

That is at least one of the conditions laid out by the former MHRA president and current MIA board member Winston Zahra Jr before accepting to sit on the new consultative board after months calling for the resignation of Francis Zammit Dimech.

"My acceptance included the condition that we would be given the tools and resources we need," Zahra said yesterday when contacted. "If we are not given the tools to turn the tourism situation around we can't function, there is no magic solution."

Zahra would not go into

whether the board would ask for its own budget.

"I can't confirm that," he said. "We'll be holding our first meetings in the next couple of weeks to set our action plan. We'll have to see what is left to spend at the MIA, which will remain the implementing body."

Apart from others, Zahra is

flanked on the board by two hoteliers who have been also calling for Zammit Dimech's resignation - Kevin Decesare and Michael Zammit Tabona. The latter also referred to "seriously needed government funding" to solve the current tourism crisis, adding that they were "not magicians". ▶ page 3

AFM will not participate in Lebanon peacekeeping force

Karl Stagno-Navarra

The Maltese government last night excluded deploying a military contingent to the Middle East as part of an EU-led peacekeeping force mandated by the UN to buffer the state of Israel and Hezbollah-controlled South Lebanon.

Acting Prime Minister Tonio Borg made it clear that notwithstanding the Maltese government's pledge to the EU, prior to becoming a member state, on participation in humanitarian missions mandated by the UN, "the country will not participate" in the peace keeping mission that is currently being coordinated by the Finnish Presidency following recent diplomatic developments within the UN after a brokered cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah.

The Foreign Office last night was informed that the Finnish Presidency of the EU has called an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers for Friday, to discuss the deployment of an EU-led peace keeping force. Diplomats meanwhile, were awaiting the preparatory agenda for this meeting as Tarcisio Zammit, Malta's Ambassador to Belgium,



Maltese soldiers will not set foot on Lebanese soil

today is expected to hear the technical brief from the Political and Security Committee.

The ongoing diplomatic exchange between Malta, Italy and the EU Commission regarding the initiation of joint patrols in the Mediterranean, is the

current priority for the Armed Forces following recent positive developments that have seen Libya willing to discuss solutions to the problem.

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SmartCity plans kept hidden

James Debono

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority has set the ball rolling to pave the way for the SmartCity@Malta project by initiating a revision of the Grand Harbour Local Plan (GHLP).

The government plans to get the

new plans approved by parliament by the end of October, pending a successful outcome of negotiations with Tecom.

Yet, government has declined to reveal the contents of the plans submitted to MEPA in response to the authority's call for a revision of the GHLP. ▶ page 4

L-Istrina 2004 cost PBS Lm85,000

The Public Broadcasting Services' financial statements published last week list the costs of charity telethon L-Istrina as forming part of the station's cash flow, with expenses related to the event going as high as 10 per cent of the cash handed over to charitable institutions.

In its financial statements, PBS lists Lm413,512 cash receipts for L-Istrina 2003 and another Lm880,551 for the 2004 edition up to the end of September 2005, with cash handed over to charitable institutions being Lm840,000 and Lm626,000 respectively.

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iSoft's partners: no "believable" date for software release

Matthew Vella

With the decision over Mater Dei's IT system ever more imminent, sections of the Maltese press have touted troubled UK software firm iSoft as the bidder whose "proven and tested systems" in the UK national health service "should carry a lot of weight", ignoring the serious financial troubles the company is in.

In a taster for the impending decision on the Mater Dei system, an anonymous article entitled A Bidder's View carried in last week's The Sunday Times ignored iSoft's worsening share price and

the revelations of a report by its contractors that iSoft's Lorenzo software may miss already delayed release dates.

iSoft is among the final two bidders for a EUR30 million Integrated Health Information System for Mater Dei hospital. The other bidder is the AME consortium, which includes Italian firm Inso SpA, the current supplier of medical equipment at Mater Dei.

Playing off iSoft's dominant position within the UK's multi-billion National Programme for IT (NPfIT), which will link up the UK's hospitals to a database of 30 million patients, the Sunday

Times report ignored revelations that Sheffield's NHS trust had abandoned plans to implement iSoft's patient administration system after delays hampered the installation of the software.

The system was due to go live in June this year.

But it is concerns about iSoft's centrepiece for the NPfIT, the Lorenzo software, which has put the beleaguered company under the spotlight once again, after a confidential report by its main contractors - Accenture and Computer Services Corporation - revealed there was no "believable plan" for the release of Lorenzo. ▶ page 5

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