

INTERVIEW
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Land transfer at Ricasoli backdated to day government sold Maltacom

James Debono

The land at Ricasoli earmarked for SmartCity has officially been transferred from Malta Industrial Parks Ltd, a subsidiary of Malta Enterprise to the Commissioner of Land as per legal notice published by government

on Friday, which transfer is backdated to 17 May 2006. The backdated transfer date coincides with the day government sold its shareholding in Maltacom to the same Dubai investors currently in discussions with government over the SmartCity project. SmartCity is mired in

controversy after sister newspaper MaltaToday had revealed that real estate and other commercial development unrelated to the promised IT village covered the larger footprint of the project. This was further confirmed last Sunday with the publication of detailed

plans for the area.

IT-related office blocks only cover 19 per cent of the land area allocated to the project with the rest taken up by two hotels, four villa zones, residential apartments, a yacht marina, shops and other commercial outlets.

The legal notice eases the transfer of the former industrial estate from public hands to Dubai investors, TECOM.

The Ricasoli land includes Maltacom's Innovate centre which was rented to Maltacom by Malta Industrial Parks. ▶ page 3

PBS considering hiving off advertising services

Karl Schembri

The national public broadcaster, PBS, is considering to hive off its advertising department and to farm out its services to private companies, Business Today can reveal.

High-level sources at the state broadcasting company say PBS is seriously considering issuing a call for tenders to farm out its own sales and advertising services in the coming weeks – a move that is expected to raise yet another controversy given the sensitivity of the sales department's operations and the potential conflict of interest of anyone taking up such a contract.

The Investments Ministry is said to be "assessing the plans" that remain officially under wraps.

Contacted yesterday night, PBS Chief Executive Albert Debono cited "sensitive commercial issues" that forbade him from giving more information, but he did hint that the station was seriously considering the plans.

"It could be an option that may be on the cards and cannot be



discussed further due to sensitive commercial issues," Debono said.

Asked why PBS was considering making such a move, Debono said that "such a decision, when and if taken, is a commercial one and its grounds are also commercial".

He added: "Such a decision would not necessarily entail the

dismantling of our own sales function, though of course inbuilt in such a move would be the orientation of our sales operation. As much as unlikely to discuss with me the sales methods of the organisation that employs you, I am not at liberty to provide any further details." ▶ page 3

Tug Malta asset value up ahead of privatisation



Matthew Vella

Tug Malta Ltd, one of government's most successful public entities, yesterday inaugurated its latest acquisition, as the company's asset value continues to increase ahead of government's plans to divest its hefty sharehold-

ing in the company.

Yesterday, during the blessing of Tug Malta's latest acquisition, Investments Minister Austain Gatt said privatisation was an opportunity to strengthen Malta's competitiveness. "We're not interested in somebody who wants to keep everything as ▶ page 3

Gonzi, statistics and the countdown

When the Prime Minister addresses his supporters tonight in Floriana, he may not have elections on his mind but what he says could very well determine when electioneering will start. James Debono analyses Gonzi's electoral options. See page 4

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Maltacom decides on 3G

Karl Stagno-Navarra

3G technology is on the cards for Maltacom plc, as the board of directors is reported to have started internal discussions on adopting the technology and announcing the hefty investment due to its shareholders.

Though cautious in his approach when asked about the matter, Maltacom Group plc chairman Sonny Portelli told Business Today that "the company would announce a decision and go public through the proper channels informing all our investors and

shareholders".

He commented also that Maltacom is already licensed for 3G, and is conscious about the deadlines imposed by the licence issued by the Malta Communications Authority (MCA).

Sonny Portelli's remarks indicate a clear intention by Maltacom to join the fray for 3G technology after rivals Vodafone launched 3G during the summer.

It also adds flair to a more reserved approach expressed last July by newly appointed CEO David Kay who went on record in his first meeting with the media, that "a

small market like Malta needs to be approached differently than, say, a market like Germany".

Since the "rather cool" approach to 3G last July, the board of directors at Maltacom are reported to have discussed the issue and taken "preliminary decisions".

Meanwhile, Sonny Portelli confirmed the board of directors' decision to appoint Peter Gauci at the helm of Go Mobile, with a remit to run the company following former CEO Juanito Camilleri's departure to Melita Cable and subsequently to the University of Malta.

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