

"There are destinations which don't offer a quarter of what we're giving"
Philip Fenech on tourism INTERVIEW ■ PAGE 10

'No, not everything is doom and gloom this season'
George M. Mangion on that Christmas feeling OPINION ■ PAGE 8

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DEATH OF A TYRANT



Opponents of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet hold posters of Pinochet at Sant Jaume square in Barcelona. The posters read, 'Rot pig'. General Augusto Pinochet died last Sunday aged 91. In an unprecedented move just days before his death, Pinochet released a statement with which he assumed all responsibility for the widespread human rights violations the nation suffered under his rule. An estimated 300,000 people are said to have disappeared during his iron handed dictatorship, of which only 3,000 were later to be found in mass graves around the country through the years.

Holiday Inn developer loses bid bond

- Government has already informed other bidders
- George Muscat meeting senior ministers over debacle

Karl Stagno-Navarra

George Muscat, the prospective developer of the former Holiday Inn and Fort Cambridge is reported to have met a senior government minister yesterday, three weeks after he lost a bid bond estimated to be approximately Lm100,000 following his failure to sign the multi-million contract last November 30.

Other meetings are expected to continue this morning, a public holiday, at senior government level, in an attempt to conclude on the matter that has been stalled for the last weeks.

While details about the meetings

remain unclear, deputy prime minister Tonio Borg told Business Today yesterday evening that "government will stick to the original conditions as laid out in the brief".

Adamant on government's position, the minister, who is also responsible for the Lands Department that is handling the matter, added that "whether Mr Muscat is still interested or not in the offer is up to him."

Tonio Borg explained that since George Muscat failed to sign the contract as scheduled last November 30, it automatically prompted the Contracts

Department to start corresponding with the other short-listed bidders. "There is nothing else we (government) can do about it," he said bluntly.

Other bidders contacted yesterday declined to comment on whether they have been invited to come forward with their bids to the offer. Contacted throughout the week, George Muscat, who is one of the Bay Street Holdings shareholders, explained that he is "more than confident" that with goodwill from all sides, "an amicable solution will be found and the contract will be signed".

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AX bond issue oversubscribed within two hours

An oversubscribed bond issue yesterday closed in two hours as AX Investments plc announced that the offer of Lm4 million AX Investments bonds 2014-2016 as well as the over-allotment option of a further Lm1 million made by the company to the general public had been fully subscribed.

The company closed the applications within a few hours of opening of subscription lists. In view of the substantial demand, a number of applications will have to be scaled down. AX Investments plc will be publishing the allocation



Angelo Xuereb

policy by not later than Wednesday 20 December 2006.

The fast subscription of the bonds also confirmed the public's thirst

for stable investment and the clout and trust enjoyed by construction magnate Angelo Xuereb, whose concerns include hotels, property, construction, and also has a considerable shareholding in VISET's Valletta Waterfront.

Angelo Xuereb's aggressive marketing campaign and generous coupon also proved effective – two weeks ago, Xuereb issued a DVD highlighting his achievements and the role of his family in the operation of the extensive AX group, which was available in nearly every Sunday newspaper. ► page 4

Enforcement slackens on illegal parallel trading

Matthew Vella

Vans stocked to the brim with merchandise collected from Sicily, just hours away by sea on the catamaran ferries that regularly cross the Maltese channel, are cutting in on legitimate traders' business in what is being described as a 'racket' of illegal parallel trading.

Entrepreneurs and traders who spoke to this newspaper are talking of their exasperation at illegal traders driving up to Sicily by ferry to transport merchandise back to the island, without being licensed or paying the taxes and charges upon landing.

"They have cut into our trade radically, by using ferries and not having to pass by customs, declare the merchandise, present any manifest of goods being carried, or even pay the haulers to take the merchandise to Hal-Far," an established firm told Business Today.

The illegal parallel trading has gone beyond mere booze cruises and now turned into an underground enterprise of illegal 'groupers', who collect merchandise in Sicily – mainly clothes and detergents amongst other items – for various Maltese traders. Their prices are net of government taxes and charges, because they are bypassing customs and port authorities by taking domestic ferries.

By law, any groupage – a consignment of goods carried for commercial purposes and destined for more than one trader – has to land at the Hal-Far Groupage Complex, as the authorised landing place for the unloading of groupage consignments. This includes paying haulers the fixed rates to transport the consignment to the Hal-Far complex.

But the illegal traders are ferrying the goods using the catamaran service, bypassing all authorities.

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The Maltese property market skyrockets ► page 5

JAMES DEBONO on how prices have shot up despite the increase in housing units

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