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DEMOCRATS FACE OFF ON BUSH PARDON



Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Democrat of Nevada (left) and US President George Bush (right) are shaping up again for yet another confrontation as the President refused to rule out a complete pardon for Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, former Chief of Staff to Vice President Dick Cheney who was found guilty of lying under oath. Bush commuted Libby's 30-month jail sentence but did not exonerate him on his role in the Valerie Plame affair, a move which has angered Democrats across the country as the campaign for the 2008 Presidential Elections edges closer.

Positive reactions from industry on port workers agreement

Sarah Attard Gialanze

Although both the Federation of Industry and the Chamber of Commerce are still studying the agreement signed last Saturday between the government and the Malta Dockers Union establishing much-reduced tariffs at the ports, the general reaction from industry has been quite positive.

Chamber President Victor A. Galea said that he was very satisfied with the agreement indicating that there was at last some movement to change work practices that had been ossified for years.

"The Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise is pleased to voice its satisfaction on the announcement that the authorities have reached an agreement with port workers so that the Port Reform process can be concluded with substantial savings for the business community."

The President of the Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, Mr Victor A. Galea said this following the signing of the agreement between the authorities and the union representing port workers, which agreement will



Port reform should bring about substantial reductions in industry costs

reportedly lead to average savings of 20% on operating costs at our ports.

Mr Galea said that the Chamber had been working hard behind the scenes, to lobby for an effective port reform which is based on the fundamental principle that fees need to reflect today's competitive realities and actual services rendered.

"Once again, we acknowledge the fact that the path was far from straightforward and that some delay was necessary to ensure a meaningful reform. We have always stated that Port Reform was not a simple exercise and that it revolves around challenging practices which have been 'fossilised' for a number of decades," insisted the Chamber President. ► **page 3**

25,000 more passengers for Air Malta in summer

Charlot Zahra

National airline Air Malta is expecting to carry an additional 25,000 passengers this summer with the introduction of new scheduled flights to Liverpool and Venice, Business Today has learnt.

"We are forecasting that through the introduction of Liverpool and Venice, Air Malta will bring over 25,000 additional tourists to Malta this summer," a spokesperson for the national airline said.

Explaining the rationale behind the decision, the spokesperson said: "Research undertaken by Air Malta shows that there is market potential for a scheduled operation to/from Liverpool and Venice."

"This is the first time that these routes have been introduced as a scheduled operation, although over the years they have operated a number of times as charters," the spokesperson said.

Air Malta is flying to Liverpool twice a week on Mondays and Fridays, while the flights to Venice are on Mondays and Fridays too.

In addition to the new scheduled flights, AirMalta will be operating charter flights to Ronchi dei Legionari in Northern Italy and Timisoara in Romania this Summer, which will carry additional passengers.



This will provide an added boost to the tourist figures which have already shown a slight improvement over last year's disastrous figures.

National Statistics Office (NSO) figures for the first five months of this year show that 384,380 tourists came to Malta during that period, an increase of 6 per cent over the same period the previous year.

This growth was primarily attributable to an increase in holiday visits, mainly from the Scandinavian, Irish, Italian and British markets as a direct effect of low-cost airlines. Decreases were recorded in respect of the French, Dutch, Austrian and Belgian markets.

Malta mostly attractive for business - survey

Gerald Fenech

With a 95 per cent rating for a clear and stable legislative environment and ratings of 90 per cent for the level of English of local human resources, a clear and stable political environment and administrative environment, Malta is viewed extremely favourably overall by top business executives who operate large to medium sized companies in the country.

These results are revealed in the Malta Attractiveness Survey for this year prepared by Ernst and Young, a copy of which was seen by Business Today. A set of questions was sent to the top 58 executives of foreign owned companies in Malta with an eventual response rate of exactly 50 per cent, that is 29 executives who responded.

From the respondents who answered to the survey questions, the turnover of 10 companies exceeds €35 million, 5 companies have a turnover ranging between €12 million and €35 million while the turnover of 7 other companies is between €2 million and €12 million. The remaining 7 companies have a turnover of less than €2 million.

Malta ranks highly in almost all the other categories in the survey. A rating of 85 per cent is obtained in skills and ► **page 4**

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