

Fr Joe Borg
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PN MEP's legal office challenges confiscation of Red Bull

Matthew Vella

THE MALTESE government is facing challenges from the legal office in which Nationalist MEP Simon Busuttill is the senior consultant on European law, after their clients were faced with enforcement action following the confiscation of thousands of Red Bull ener-

gy drink bottles by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority officials and the police force.

The operation resulted in a confiscation of 140,000 bottles and 2,000 cans, all banned under the Non-alcoholic Beverages (Control of Containers) Regulations, which prohibits soft drinks from being imported, traded or consumed in non-



refillable packages, such as cans or glass bottles which are not part of a deposit-and-return scheme.

A judicial protest noted that the actions were "disproportionate, illegal, abusive and causing substantial damage" to their clients Logic International, which import Red Bull.

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Zahra's untruths sent *manipulite* on wild goose chase

Matthew Vella

THE CHARGES brought against Joe Zahra, 50, the private investigator and former *Where's Everybody* consultant accused of fabricating evidence in an investigation he carried out on the contentious Mater Dei tender for the supply of medical equipment, have revealed the extent of Zahra's compulsive prevarication.

MaltaToday is informed that a team led by Commissioner John Rizzo and two assistant commissioners had already asserted themselves of the fabricated evidence provided in Joe Zahra's report, which had been handed earlier on to Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, when just two weeks ago the police inquiry was interrogated people implicated in Zahra's report.

Members of the Simed and INSO consortia, the two main contenders

for the tender, and members from the Foundation for Medical Services were amongst those questioned by Rizzo.

Zahra also implicated relatives of the Director of Contracts of having made frequent trips to Italy where millions of liri had been allegedly stashed away in the country. This newspaper was informed that prior to interrogations, the police team had already asserted itself that the alleged bank accounts did not exist, and that the dates of travel into Italy had been proved to be inconsistent – in one case, Zahra claimed somebody had travelled to Italy when they had actually been in hospital in Malta.

A cordial Police Commissioner John Rizzo declined from divulging any information on whether the investigation had already concluded the extent of Zahra's fabrications prior to inter-

rogating the people implicated in the report: "It would be a breach of my professional ethics if I had to divulge any evidence prior to presenting the evidence in Court."

Asked whether the police were already aware of Zahra's previous embroilment in the fabrication of evidence in the case of Sapri Broker back in 1995, investigated in connection with the mysterious death of an Italian public official, Rizzo said he would not "confirm nor deny" whether this fact had been acknowledged in their investigations.

"The evidence we shall produce in Court will be the ones pertaining to the charges levelled against Zahra," Rizzo said.

Contacted by *MaltaToday*, Joe Zahra refused to comment on the accusations in his report.

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Azzabi: The lateral thinking fugitive

Karl Schembri

HASHIM Youssef Azzabi must have been one of Edward de Bono's most deviant disciples to successfully use lateral thinking to escape from Corradino prison five years ago while still facing drugs trafficking charges.

With his death a month ago still unconfirmed by the Libyan government, details about the man's final moments in prison are emerging, as fellow Corradino prison inmates and former prisoners speak out to *MaltaToday*.

They recall the 49-year-old former engineer and Libyan Arab Airlines pilot avidly attending lateral thinking classes at the prison school during the nine months he spent in custody, describing him as a "reserved" and "intelligent" man.

"He used to come for lateral thinking classes and spend most of the time on his own. He didn't use to mingle much with other prisoners," a former prison inmate says. "I remember he had also started learning the guitar and was all the time playing Santana's Samba Pa Ti."

Meinrad Calleja, who is convicted

of drugs trafficking, speaks of a significant detail which he only understood with hindsight.

"I remember, on the day he escaped, he made an overseas call and then gave me back all the books I had lent him," Calleja says.

While also recalling Azzabi's attendance during lateral thinking classes, Calleja says the prisoner had quit smoking while in custody and remembers him going to the gym everyday.

"He used to do a lot of exercises, especially running," Calleja says.

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I am ready to tango, says Gonzi

Kurt Sansone

LOWERING taxes does not seem to be on government's books for the time being but a momentarily flustered Prime Minister yesterday said that he was ready to tango and start removing burdens on business by reforming the port system.

It was no coincidence that Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi gave this reply to a *l-orizzont* journalist during yesterday's regular monthly briefing. It was an obvious jibe at the GWU-owned Cargo Handling Company that operates a monopoly at the ports.

And a Prime Minister, who was ready to tango, yesterday also sung praises for entrepreneur Bertu Mizzi for helping out in the purchase of the lucrative embassy in Brussels.

Gonzi justified the Lm9 million

expenditure, but admitted that communication between the Permanent Representative Richard Cachia Caruana and the Maltese press needed to improve. "I am not happy with the way government is communicating with the people in general. Communication needs to improve and that also includes the Permanent Representative to Brussels," Gonzi answered to a question from *MaltaToday*.

Ironically, while Gonzi was stressing the need for better communication, yesterday morning on Super One Radio programme *Spiritu Pronto*, host Sandro Mangion explained that a request to the Office of the Prime Minister to invite Richard Cachia Caruana to discuss the Brussels embassy issue was ignored.

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