



Gejtu Vella interviewed Pages 14-15

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Gonzi defends email as Institute of Journalists demands explanation

Karl Schembri

PRIME MINISTER Lawrence Gonzi has defended his Communications Coordinator's email sent to *The Independent* last week in which a journalist was denied for asking questions about government's economic advisors.

Speaking to *MaltaToday*, Gonzi said he was the first Prime Minister to give a monthly press briefing that was open to all journalists' questions but added that his coordinator was reacting to unfair questions.

On the other hand, the Institute of Maltese Journalists said it will be raising the issue with the Office of the Prime Minister.

The email, which was leaked to *MaltaToday* has caused quite a stir in Government quarters

after its contents were revealed last Sunday.

"As you know every month I give a press briefing that is open to all media, in which every journalist can ask any kind of question," Gonzi said. "I can't be clearer than that. There was no other Prime Minister who did this. I open the door completely to all journalists to make all the questions they want to, and I always try to reply in the best way I can."

His communications coordinator, Alan Camilleri, had reacted to a journalist's questions by sending a terse email to the editor of *The Malta Independent on Sunday*.

"Look at the questions I'm getting from your journalists," he wrote. "Are they by any chance the future editors of *Maltastar*?"

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Doctors leaving Malta says medical association



Medical examination: doctors' chief takes Health Minister to task over proposed health reforms

MALTA FACES a brain drain with most doctors that graduated in 1999 leaving the island, Martin Balzan, the Medical Association of Malta's secretary-general, tells *MaltaToday* in an interview.

Balzan is not pleased with the health reforms and believes doctors should be offered a better deal. He also takes Health Minister Louis Deguara to task over recent declarations made in Parliament on wages paid to consultants. Deguara claimed that some consultants had turned down a wage of Lm45,000 instead preferring to earn Lm8,000 while keeping their private practice.

Challenging the Minister, Balzan says that medical consultants would agree to work with government and give up their private practice if they were offered a yearly salary of Lm45,000. Speaking this week, Balzan indicates that surgeons are paid less per hour than painters and laments the number of elderly 'patients' that are at St Luke's when they should be in a home.

See full interview on page 8

THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF AT MALTATODAY WISH ALL THEIR READERS A HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Competition law applies to school uniforms and books



Matthew Vella

THE MINISTRY for Competitiveness has confirmed to this newspaper that Church Schools remain subject to competition laws with regards to the provision of school uniforms and the book lists, two areas in which 'rackets' of exclusive arrangements with select retailers were reported to this newspaper.

The Ministry confirmed that all schools, including Church schools, are obliged to issue a tender for the provision of school uniforms, of which adequate publicity and adequate time should be allowed for all possible suppliers to submit their quotes. On the award of tenders, exclusive agreements are then normally allowed for five years.

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Gozo businesses pay Lm300 a year in VAT

Matthew Vella

GOZO'S ECONOMIC output may be lingering behind mainland Malta's but the large discrepancy in the amount of VAT paid by businesses and service providers in Gozo when compared to their Maltese counterparts raises serious doubts as to how effective enforcement is in the sister island.

The total of 3,588 registered businesses and individuals offering services on the island of Gozo are accountable for just one per cent of VAT collected and on average pay eight times less than Maltese VAT-registered units.

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Telephone enquires also taken on Sunday