

maltatoday



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Sunday, 14 October 2007 – issue 414

www.maltatoday.com.mt

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Dalli left hanging as auditor report remains unfinished

JAMES DEBONO

A long awaited report by the Auditor General into the procurement of air tickets by government ministries is still pending three years since the inquiry was launched upon the resignation of former minister John Dalli – but the Auditor General is not even reporting for work, MaltaToday can confirm.

The report was believed to be an investigation into the purchase of air tickets in John Dalli's

foreign ministry, before MaltaToday confirmed last July it was an exercise covering all ministries' procurement practices.

Now, three years since Dalli's self-proclaimed "forced resignation", Lawrence Gonzi has insisted he will not commit himself to restore the former finance and foreign minister to Cabinet, the prime minister has told MaltaToday.

And statements by PN secretary-general Joe Saliba that Dalli would be exonerated by the report's findings now ring hollow:

Dalli was never under investigation, and Gonzi will not commit himself to reinstating Dalli as a minister once the report is concluded.

The matter is a complex issue because Auditor General Joseph G. Galea's appointment was renewed beyond the Constitutional limit of two consecutive terms. He was reappointed on 28 July moments after MaltaToday confirmed the outgoing Galea would not be presenting Gonzi with the crucial audit on the procurement of air tickets –

as yet unfinished on Galea's last day of work.

John Dalli claims the purchase of Lm40,000 in air tickets, was "the excuse used by the Prime Minister to accept my resignation, short of not being accused of any wrongdoing."

Dalli however argues the real reason for his "forced resignation" was the fabricated Joe Zahra report on alleged kickbacks received for a medical equipment tender at Mater Dei Hospital.

"The airline tickets report is totally irrelevant as can be con-

strued from PN secretary-general Joe Saliba's declaration that the real reason for my forced resignation was the Zahra report and all I am expecting is a confirmation of this to clear this issue once and for all," Dalli told Maltatoday when contacted on Friday.

The Courts had found the former freemason, police sergeant and Bondi plus consultant Joe Zahra guilty of fabrication and condemned him to two years' imprisonment. The case is on appeal.

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Abela orders army to give him Prime Minister's salute



Aiming high: Tony Abela. He was not even entitled to step on the podium

KARL SCHEMBRI

JUNIOR minister Tony Abela ordered the Armed Forces to give him the salute that is normally accorded to the Prime Minister at the Trooping the Colour parades on 30 September: a clear breach of military protocol that embarrassed the army from the top brass down.

The unassuming Rabat notary, with a penchant for dressing up as Old Testament figures in church pageants, forced the AFM to give him the general salute on the day commemorating the army's 37th anniversary.

The privilege is reserved for the Prime Minister and the AFM Commander, with the national salute accorded to the President as the highest official of the State.

Yet the junior minister insisted with Brig. Carmel Vassallo that he be given the salute of a Prime Minister, even though Lawrence Gonzi him-

self was attending the two parades on that day.

Asked for the reason behind his peculiar order, Abela initially declined to comment, but in an email sent hours later he denied he gave such an order.

"I suggest you contact Brig. Carmel Vassallo and he will explain better," he wrote.

Brig. Vassallo confirmed it was not usual to salute a parliamentary secretary but said it made sense in the context of an exclusively military ceremony.

"This wasn't a national day but army day, so it was a salute to the junior minister in charge of the army," Brig. Vassallo said, conceding that "maybe it seemed strange as it's never done on a national day."

One of the parades was held in front of St John's Co-Cathedral, the other at the Luqa Barracks, and in both of them the soldiers had to salute Abela as if he was Malta's Prime Minister.

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Anticipated cost of living increase not to exceed Lm1.50

THE Prime Minister is expected to announce a cost of living increase that will not exceed the Lm1.50. Unlike 2004 when VAT rate was raised from 15% to 18% the anticipated cost of living will be an obligation of the employer. The focus of tomorrow's budget will be the family most especially those with children under 16 years of age with the specific aim of incrementing purchasing power in this particular band.

BusinessToday will be publishing a special Tuesday edition focused on the budget.

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No miracles for Malta in Budapest Euro Qualifier
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