

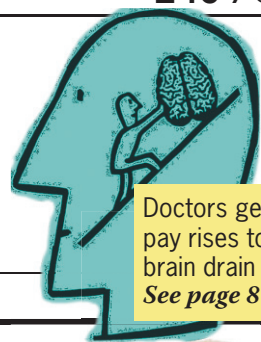
maltatoday

RUGBY

Mike Turner's reports of yesterday's games
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FREE CLASSIFIEDS

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Doctors get big pay rises to fight brain drain
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Neck and neck despite a 'generous budget'

JAMES DEBONO

LABOUR is enjoying a hair-line lead of just 0.4% over the Nationalist party despite the government's budget being judged as generous by 63% of respondents in a MaltaToday survey.

The PN's failure to build a lead on the MLP after a positive budget has probably influenced the Prime Minister's decision not



to go for an election this year. Nonetheless the PN has come a long way from its poor showing in polls taken earlier in the year by MaltaToday.

Lawrence Gonzi has had to assess whether the PN has more to gain by waiting another few months until the people start feeling the budget's benefits directly in their pockets, or to call an election early in 2008 knowing that things can only get worse with soaring oil and cereal prices, and teething problems after the introduction of the euro.

In his campaign, Lawrence Gonzi will bank on convincing undecided voters that he is a 'safer pair of hands' than Opposition leader Alfred Sant.

But Gonzi could also rely on a February election after a feel-good Christmas season fuelled by a boom in retail sales as people spend their undeclared cash on consumer

VOTING INTENTIONS (%)

MLP	3	0.5
PN	3	0.1
AD	2	5
AN	0	9
Not voting	5	2
Don't know	1	4.9
No reply	1	5.9

goods before Malta joins the Euro on 1 January.

Despite Gonzi's budget bonanza, in the past month Labour managed to recoup 4.5 points to return to the same level of support it enjoyed before Alfred Sant's "Goonzi" blunder at an Independence Day rally.

It's an indication that Sant has managed to recover his standing among Labour-inclined voters after rising up to the occasion in his parliamentary reply to the Prime Minister's budget in parliament.

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PN strategy group meets to discuss polls

The PN strategy group met on Friday and was presented with a detailed survey of the latest opinion polls. The polls were compared to surveys carried out before previous elections. The strategy group focused its discussion on the prevalence of undecided voters, who appear to be mainly in the higher economic bracket. Interestingly the role of the 'independent'

media and its impact on this particular electoral segment was also debated. Though the percentage of undecided voters has declined, it remains of serious concern to the Nationalist party. At the meeting, the PN strategy group, which includes Rev. Prof. Peter Serracino Inglott and Richard Cachia Caruana, also discussed the date for the election that now will definitely be held in 2008.

Cases of Legionnaire's Disease in Malta

2001	4
2002	0
2003	10
2004	14
2005	5
2006	5
2007	16
Total	54

Killer microbe infects two 'secret' hotels

IN the first 10 months of the year, the Legionella microbe, which thrives in cooling towers, hot tubs, jacuzzis and water tanks, has killed two Maltese residents and infected another 14.

Five of those infected by the killer microbe were tourists spending their holidays in Malta, but the health authorities would not reveal

the names of the hotels where the they contracted the disease.

According to the Health Department, two Maltese hotels experienced an outbreak of the infection and at least two tourists in each hotel contracted the disease. Luckily neither of the tourists infected by the microbe died.

Legionnaire's is a very serious dis-

ease which can lead to death. Infection is caused by inhaling small droplets of water suspended in the air which contain the Legionella bacterium.

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WE STAND BY OUR STORY

Sgarbi: I'm in the middle of the desert and I haven't read the story... I was only read the headline



KARL SCHEMBRI

GOING out of his way to rubbish MaltaToday's story published last Sunday – The Great Caravaggio Swindle – Heritage Malta Chairman Mario Tabone has skewed comments made to third parties by celebrity art critic Vittorio Sgarbi.

According to Tabone's version, Sgarbi would have told the state heritage agency in a telephone interview that MaltaToday's report was "grotesque" and the story was "a storm in a teacup".

Tabone made his claims in a widely reported press conference Friday, to which MaltaToday was

not even invited. He even filed a judicial protest against this newspaper, claiming damages.

Yet a MaltaToday investigation revealed that Sgarbi was not even contacted by Heritage Malta, and that the art critic had not read the report, as he was "in the middle of the African desert".

Sgarbi was in fact called by notorious Italian impresario Roberto Celli of RomArtificio, who just read him the headline and misled him to believing that he had been quoted out of context as having said the exhibition was a swindle.

RomArtificio is the company subcontracted by Heritage Malta through Renaissance Promotions,

headed by Anton Tabone – a relative of Mario Tabone.

In fact, however, Sgarbi was only quoted in the context of the controversial attribution of a number of paintings to Caravaggio.

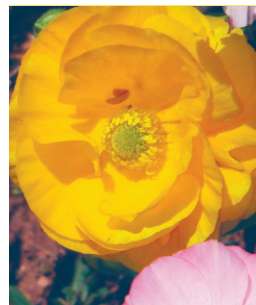
"It is clear there are only a few Caravaggios there," Sgarbi said. "All the paintings are of course great and beautiful masterpieces, but they're the works of other Caravaggio contemporaries."

And in another interview with MaltaToday last Friday, Sgarbi reiterated his statements, even as Tabone was using his name during his press conference in an attempt to discredit the story.

Sgarbi said: "When ► page 4

GARDENING

Maurice Mizzi joins MaltaToday with his column A Greener Shade of Green
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