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ANALYSISElectoral 'freeze' for property market *See pages 8-9 ►***NEWS**Lidl supermarket to open first outlets amid controversy *See page 4 ►*

Abela to hold mass rally in red hot Bormla

KARL SCHEMBRI

A defiant George Abela will be going to the traditional Labour bastion of Bormla next Sunday to address the crowds in his first mass rally in the run-up to the leadership election.

Against the backdrop of Dock No. 1 and metres away from the Cottonera marina that brought down the Labour government in 1998, Abela will be speaking to delegates, members and the public in "an open rally" to be held at the Bormla Regatta Club at Xatt ir-Rizq.

The place itself is suggestive of the party's historic highs and lows – from the momentous Mintoff speeches rallying the crowds, to Sant's sensational denunciation of *il-perit* as "a traitor".

It will be the first in a series of Sunday morning events Abela will be organising until the first week of

June, when the party gets together to elect its leader.

"I'm full of courage thanks to the feedback I'm getting from delegates, members, MPs and candidates," Abela said yesterday. "My first rally will be in Bormla, I will go back to the core to listen and discuss, and I want to this out in the open."

The event, which will start at 10.30am, will be held following a week of daily meetings Abela is expected to hold in Labour clubs around the islands launching his campaign.

Last Wednesday, Abela told MaltaToday Midweek he was determined to push forward his name in the leadership contest in what is turning into a veritable obstacle race for the former MLP deputy leader for party affairs.

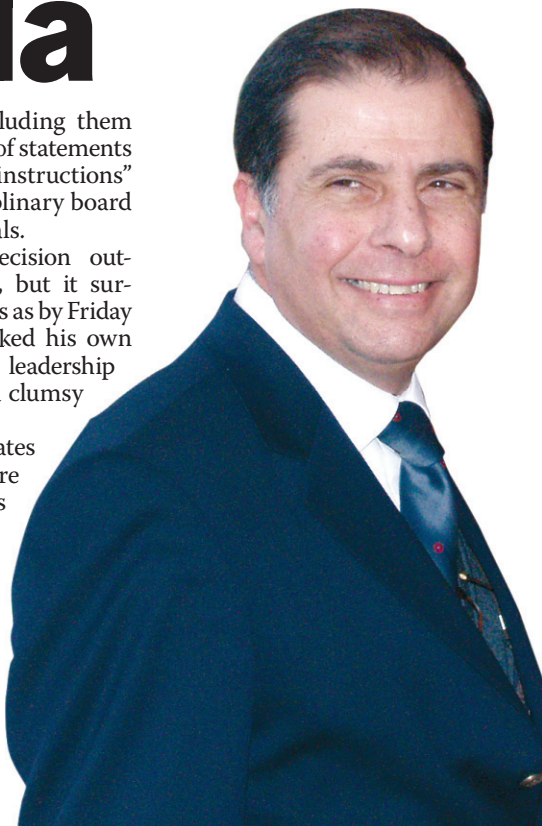
The day after, the party's electoral commission, headed by Joe Falzon, informed him and the other declared contenders that there was a

total media ban precluding them from making any sort of statements to the press following "instructions" from the party's disciplinary board and the board of appeals.

The inexplicable decision outraged the contenders, but it survived less than 24 hours as by Friday morning, Falzon revoked his own decision turning the leadership election process into a clumsy public show.

Meanwhile delegates and party members are collecting signatures calling for an extraordinary general conference with a view to opening the leadership vote to all members, beyond the 900 delegates.

"I'm meeting lots of people who want the party to open up **pg 6 ►**



Lija under threat

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TOP SECRET: Illiterate voters' figures

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BLUEPRINT FOR MEPA'S REFORM

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YOU'RE UNBELIEVABLE

Before the election 58% of Nationalists believed him. Now, that figure has dropped to only 24%

JAMES DEBONO

THE number of Nationalists believing that Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando was saying the truth about the Mistra spin valley disco has fallen from 58% before the election, to just 24% now, a MaltaToday survey reveals.

The surveys confirms that Pullicino Orlando, who shed tears in public to prove his innocence and later stormed into a PBS studio to confront Alfred Sant, had succeeded in convincing a majority of Nationalist voters before the election.



But after the publication of a damning MEPA Audit Office report decrying various illegalities in the permit issued for the proposed disco, as well as a pending police investigation, Pullicino

Pullicino Orlando to resign from parliament, while 24% want him to resign if found guilty of corruption.

Survey pages 10 – 11 ►

Orlando seems to have lost the electorate's trust.

Among the general population only 12% believe that Pullicino Orlando was saying the truth before the election. Nearly half – 46% – now want Jeffrey

Farrugia's far-out claims: Vote-buying in bars frequented by drug addicts

JAMES DEBONO

LABOUR MP and potential leadership contender Anglu Farrugia alleged that an organised criminal racket was involved in the buying of votes of Labour supporters.

"The system works like this," he said in an exclusive interview with MaltaToday. "One would need one or two million Euros to buy votes. This money is divided among a number of agents. Each agent engages the services of runners – the foot soldiers who actually buy the votes. The runners visit bars frequented by drug addicts and people who are more interested in having some

cash than in voting..."

Coming in the wake of an election won by 1,500 votes, Farrugia's allegations are potentially explosive. But if Farrugia's revelations fall flat, Farrugia's credibility as a responsible politician will be on thin ice.

Farrugia refrains from blaming the PN for these alleged irregularities, but insists that all cases mentioned in a three-page report he presented to the police commissioner last week involved potential Labour voters who were paid to vote for the Nationalist Party.

He even claims to be in possession of a video as evidence of the irregularities. "Yes I have a video... I have **pg 6 ►**

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