



# FOUR YEARS FOR A CATARACT OPERATION

In 10 years, staff at the ophthalmology department remained constant, while demand for cataract extractions soared, ministry figures reveal

**MATTHEW VELLA**

A 1998 manpower plan for the hospital's ophthalmology department earmarked the need for 19 doctors to satisfy the increasing demand for cataract operations, but this plan will only be fully implement-

ed this year when the number of doctors appointed will satisfy the requirements of the plan.

Yesterday the burgeoning demand for cataract operations and the long waiting list at Mater Dei was given a human face by a 70-year-old woman who told MaltaToday she waited four months for

an operation to be fixed, only to be told she was facing a four-year queue.

Only last year, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi specifically stated that cataract waiting lists would be cut down within three years at Mater Dei – although ostensibly the four-year waiting list is still a

reality.

The woman said she visited the hospital in February and was told she would be informed of an appointment for her cataract operation within four months.

After not receiving any news from the hospital, last week she called Mater Dei to enquire about

the operation. She was asked to present herself personally at the hospital, since the information could not be communicated to her by phone.

The next day, she was told she faced a four-year wait for her operation due to the long waiting list.

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## Spy on thy neighbour

MLP document exposes political vigilantism

**RAPHAEL VASSALLO**

IT sounds like something out of Maoist China: "Information about non-Labourite families can be researched from Labour supporters in the vicinity. Try and gather as much information as you can, this could be useful..."

This is a quote from a strategy document, published internally in 2000 by the Malta Labour Party, which instructs party officials and candidates on how to collect, process and store personal information about different households in any local-

ity: sometimes without their knowledge (still less their consent).

The information requested takes the form of personal details such as one's political allegiance, whether there are disabled members in the family, and even the habitual movements of individual family members, among other sensitive details.

Entitled "Charter 2000", the document reads more like a handbook of political espionage, with two chapters dealing specifically with information gathering for the express purpose of building up a database on a Local Area Network (LAN).

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## Energy surcharge shoots up to 95%

THE power surcharge has been raised to 95%, the ministry for infrastructure, transport and communications announced yesterday.

The surcharge was fixed at 50% for the past eight months. Minister Austin Gatt hinted in parliament on Monday that the surcharge was expected to hover around the 115% mark. With international oil prices reaching an unprecedented record €143 per barrel, Gatt said the real rate of the surcharge, taking into consideration the price of oil at which Enemalta had purchased it, would have stood at 160% without hedging.

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