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Muscat's nod to Gonzi on Valletta irks party insiders

Muscat's 'unilateral' decision to back project ignores fundamental questions, Labour MPs say

JULIA FARRUGIA

LABOUR leader Joseph Muscat has hinted to Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi that he will support the Valletta regeneration project entrusted to world-renowned architect Renzo Piano, sources in Castille told MaltaToday.

But Muscat's nod to Gonzi was lukewarmly received inside the Labour party headquarters, stirring up internal criticism over Muscat's personal initiative.

"During a telephone conversation Joseph Muscat hinted to the Prime Minister that the PL won't oppose the Valletta project," an aide at the OPM said.

But as Labour insiders pointed out, Muscat's bid to wipe out the negative image of Labour as a 'party of dissension' was met with disapproval from party MPs.

Sources close to Muscat said he wanted to make "new politics and not be criticised as a 'no man'... it's a healthy approach since we've had an Opposition that immediately shot down any ideas suggested by the government."

But Muscat only elicited criticism from MPs and of-



Labour insiders are raising fundamental questions over the Valletta project being pushed by Gonzi and which Muscat is set to back, in a bid to wipe out Labour's negative image of dissension

ficials who described his move to support the Renzo Piano project as "unilateral" and a "one-man decision".

"We expected serious talks within the PL on this subject. Are Renzo Piano's proposals feasible? Does the country's current economical scenario permit us to un-

dergo such expenditure? There are so many questions that need to be discussed and answered," one junior Labour MP said.

The PL originally demanded a public consultation on the project, after the

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€128 million later... Mater Dei's first year

MATTHEW VELLA

SOCIAL policy minister John Dalli produced a breakdown of recurrent costs at Malta's national hospital, one year on since Mater Dei opened its doors to the public.

The state-of-the-art, multi-million hospital incurred €98

million in total costs between November 2007 and October this year.

The government incurred an additional €29 million in medicines and pharmaceutical products, bringing the total cost up to €128 million.

Costs were higher during January, April, and July, with an average of over €9 million

for the month. Elsewhere during the year, costs hovered at an average of €7-8 million.

The grand advertising campaign launched by government, boasting of the new hospital, did have a flipside: on 26 November 2007, a shocking 432 visitors entered emergency – a phenomenal influx compared to the average daily

250 making use of the same department, only exceptionally rising to 300.

By July 2008, government was launching a campaign telling people not to bother presenting themselves to the Emergency and Admissions Department, unless their ailment really is an emergency. Only 20% of the average 300

visitors every day were really emergencies.

The total cost to run Mater Dei's predecessor, St Luke's Hospital, between November 2006 and October 2007, was just over €86 million, while the medicines bill then totalled €20 million.

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