



Frattini hits back at PM's 'disgusted' comment



Mifsud Bonnici exploits Italy's Libyan accord to forcefully repatriate migrants, UNHCR Chief Guterres 'cancels' meeting while Italy's foreign minister Franco Frattini uses MsF report to hit out at Lawrence Gonzi

KARL STAGNO-NAVARRA

CONFUSION reigns supreme in Malta's relations with Italy, as both governments seem to be losing the "perfect tandem" announced last Sunday by Home Affairs minister Carm Mifsud Bonnici.

A 'surprise' attempt by Rome last Monday to disembark 69 migrants in Malta after being rescued off Lampedusa by an Italian frigate, triggered more tensions, even though the issue was retracted by Rome a few hours after and downplayed by the Maltese government. But the 'perfect tandem' was

further shattered by comments made by Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini in yesterday's influential 'Corriere della Sera' who was quoted as hitting back at Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi's "disgust" at Italy's alleged intransigence to saving migrant lives at sea. Franco Frattini – who just two

weeks ago expressed his intent of working closely with Malta on the issue of migration – lifted a copy of Médecins Sans Frontières and was quoted by the Corriere: "I am in possession of this report about the detention centres in Malta. It speaks about 'inhuman treatment', and includes photographs. They are

prisons with bars. Chicken pens. As for children, they eat in a pig sty. This report is not Berlusconi's, it's MsF" he said. Frattini's remarks are reported to have irked Castille, while a senior Foreign Office official told this paper that Minister Tonio Borg "has no intention of replying." **page 2 ▶**

Pope visits Jesus' birthplace today, but it won't feel like home

KARL SCHEMBRI

JUST like Jesus is believed to have been born in a manger, rejected by his immediate neighbours, Pope Benedict XVI is likely to be following a somehow similar rebuff by the very core of people that matter when he comes to Bethlehem today.

While the Bethlehem Municipality and Palestinians in general welcome the pontiff in their belief that he will bring with him the world's attention to their plight, the dwindling number of Palestinian Christians are among the most aggrieved from this pilgrimage which with every step he makes resembles more like a perilous act of tightrope walking. **page 4 ▶**



IT AIN'T OVER...
Chiara survives shaky start to secure a place in Saturday's Eurovision final in Moscow

special feature



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