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Election not in March but May



Timing is of the essence for the Four Horsemen of the Election Apocalypse - Lawrence Gonzi (PN), Alfred Sant (MLP), Harry Vassallo (AD) and Josie Muscat (AN).

A DECISION to miss out on last Monday's Cabinet meeting because of what sources said was an "organisational and logistical" consideration, led the editor of an English-language newspaper last Sunday to conclude, erroneously, that the election would be held in early March.

"He is wrong, and the Prime Minister will not be making any announcement tonight," was the curt reply by one of the Prime Minister's closest aides on Monday morning.

It continues to confirm that in these circumstances, Lawrence Gonzi is looking at May as his best bet for an election date.

It will serve as a respite for those candidates who are still lagging behind in their campaign trails.

The February option was ruled out last December after Alfred Sant underwent surgery for a malignant tumour in the colon. The sudden illness afflicting Sant, long considered by the Nationalist Party as their electoral trump card, led Nationalist strategists to rethink their strategy and rule out an early election date.

The strategy group has now set its sights on May as an option.

Last month's polls gave a clear advantage to Labour, although it remains to be seen whether

Sant's illness has added a new dimension to the way voters intend to swing their preferences.

In a clear sign that the election campaign is hotting up, media representatives from the so-called "independent" media have been attending informal meetings with PN strategists.

In the meetings, suggested interviews with new "faces" in the PN have been put to them. Even coffee table magazine editors have been entertained with these proposals.

In Labour quarters, the momentum of its plethora of political proposals has been suddenly stalled by Sant's illness, but last

Monday's press conference was an attempt to put an end to rumours about Alfred Sant's future.

A lot is however expected at the next party conference, where Sant is expected to rekindle some party spirit and show the party delegates that he is still in the running for his 14-year-old dream to become Malta's "once and future" prime minister.

Once again, proposals and issues seem to be playing a very small part in the electoral campaigns of the big parties, and much hinges on the performance of party leaders in what is

gearing up to be a presidential-style campaign.

In the forgotten world of the third parties, the Greens have started to raise the role of Alternattiva Demokratika in a coalition, whilst at the same time focussing excessively on the Gozo constituency.

As for the new far-right party, Azzjoni Nazzjonali continues to seek partnerships with disgruntled voting groups, namely the hundreds of hunters and trappers who according to EU rules should theoretically consider 2008 as their last year of trapping and the last time for any hunting in spring.

OVER-PRICED MEDICINES:

WHO'S PAYING FOR THE ABUSE?

Diabetes tablets over-priced by 38%

KURT SANSONE

OFFICIAL investigations have led to a forced reduction in the price of seven more medicines, suggesting that some pharmaceutical companies and medicines importers may have had it good for quite a while.

After the forced reduction in the price of 38 medicinals last year the Consumer and Competition Division yesterday published a further list of seven

more medicines whose selling price was higher than the European level.

The price reductions announced yesterday range from a mere three per cent to a whopping 38 per cent for a drug used by diabetes patients.

A packet of 20 Daonil 5mg tablets, which are used by diabetes patients, used to sell at €4.75 deemed to be 38 per cent higher than the average European level. The price of these tablets has now been revised downwards to

€2.94.

The market authorisation granted by the Medicines Authority for Daonil rests with Aventis Pharma (Greece).

However, the press statement issued by the Ministry for Competitiveness under whose wing falls the Consumer and Competition Division made absolutely no reference to the market authorisation holders or importers who represent the foreign companies.

Similar hefty price ▶ page 5

JUVENILE PRISON: IT'S NOT FOR GIRLS

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

A 13-year-old girl recently sentenced to seven days' detention in Corradino prison - from where she was transferred to Mount Carmel Hospital, after it turned out there were no facilities for females under 16 - was released yesterday after serving out her full term.

She leaves in her wake a trail of unanswered questions about Malta's justice system and its correctional facilities; in particular, about YOURS (Young

Offenders Unit Rehabilitation Services), which - like the notorious chocolate it sounds like so much - is evidently "not for girls".

The case goes back to March of last year, when three girls aged between 13 and 14 were prosecuted for their part in a fight with another group of similarly aged girls in Valletta. All three were found guilty by Magistrate Antonio Vella of verbal abuse, and one of causing slight injury to one of the other girls, apparently by pulling her hair. They were sentenced to ▶ page 3

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