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Government's experts urge "caution" over beleaguered Mater Dei bidder

Matthew Vella

THE BRITISH firm short-listed to provide Mater Dei's IT system, iSoft, has had its ratings revised downwards by industry experts Gartner, the same consultants government chose to assist the committees evaluating the offers from tenderers.

This hiccup risks delaying the opening date for Mater Dei. iSoft's beleaguered financial situation and MaltaToday's probing have been featured in the London Financial Times this week.

Issued as recently as 28 July, Gartner revised its rating of iSoft downwards from "promising" to "caution" since the troubled IT firm landed itself in a financial hole after a change in accounting policy and two profit warnings in April.

But since issuing its previous financial rating in April, Gartner are now stating that iSoft's reduced profitability could impair its ability to accelerate work on an IT project for the UK's national health service.

Gartner are the experts which the finance ministry's evaluation

committee would be relying upon when assessing the solidity of the tenderers for the provision of Mater Dei's integrated health information system.

Since April, iSoft has been facing negative press in the UK after the value of its shares were slashed by 90 per cent.

The finance ministry has stated the evaluation committee "prefer to rely on the official and professional advice of (Gartner) than on that dispensed by any other sources," referring to reports in the British press over the uncertain future of iSoft.

Mater Dei's crucial IT system has to be in place by December 2006 if Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi wants to cut the inauguration ribbon on 1 July, 2007, his fifty-fourth birthday.

The decision on the crucial contract is now expected to be taken shortly after iSoft and AME consortium presented their final offers earlier this week. The consortium – Austrian firm AME, Intercomp and Italian firm Inso SpA, the suppliers of Mater Dei's medical equipment – presented a EUR29,133,600

bid. iSoft presented a higher price at EUR29,630,153.

But in its most recent rating update, experts Gartner confirmed that "recent events have led us to adjust our rating of iSoft downward from Promising to Caution" after iSoft issued a second profit warning back in April. iSoft is also facing an investigation into possible accounting irregularities, and has delayed its full-year results indefinitely. It is also in negotiations with banks to amend its banking covenants. ▶ page 8

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MALTANOW & FREE FOOD RECIPE



Four MPs or quits says Vassallo

Karl Schembri

IT'S EITHER three to four MPs elected on the Green ticket or else he'll resign.

The chairman of Alternattiva Demokratika, Harry Vassallo, declares in an interview today that he will resign unless his party gets elected to parliament in the next election.

Vassallo says his target is "three or four people in parliament".

"I think this is going to be the best election we'll ever have," Vassallo says. "If we don't get into parliament next time round I would resign."

In the last general election, AD got 0.7 per cent of the national vote but it rocked the political spectrum in the 2004 European Parliament elections when its candidate, Arnold Cassola, garnered 9 per cent, although he failed to get elected. ▶ page 2

Former heavyweights slam MLP

FORMER MLP heavyweights George Abela and Jimmy Magro, have shot down the Labour party as a credible alternative to government in their analysis of voters' disenchantment right now.

Speaking to MaltaToday, former MLP Deputy Leader George Abela described the Opposition as a party that is "anchored in its negativity campaigns" that was steering voters away from it.

"The lack of positive thinking from the leadership, the lack of ideas, counter proposals to government, show that the MLP is still stuck in rhetoric, and still doesn't offer itself as a credible alternative as a government in waiting," Abela said. "The MLP is passive, distracted, unprepared and poor in thought".

Former Secretary General Jimmy Magro said the MLP was "repeatedly failing to be the alternative to government" although he forecasts a Labour victory by default in the next election.



George Abela and Jimmy Magro

"The leadership keeps missing on all opportunities to prove itself as a credible alternative to the current administration," Magro said. "The people are disgusted at the way the MLP is handling the pensions issue, and will not be taken for a ride about it."

Even Abela agreed that Labour was failing its supporters and the electorate on pensions.

"The fact that the MLP still has no position over the pensions issue is enough to scare many

Maltese, and this is damaging the party's credibility," Abela said. "Moreover, the MLP seems to have abandoned its grassroots, mainly the ordinary worker, and has left them defenceless facing a series of issues that are hitting them directly. All this because the MLP has no clear policy about the issues, or rather it is distracted with too many frivolous matters".

No hope for the disenchanted voter – page 7

Marlene's castle included in new schemes

James Debono

JUST A month prior to the proposal for a rationalisation of development boundaries, Labour candidate Marlene Pullicino presented

a planning application for the restoration of the Torri tal-Kaptan in Qrendi, which she is planning to purchase.

The new Labour candidate is planning to add a small bedroom

adjacent to the tower, and is currently concluding the purchase of this property from the owners of the historical building.

The castle has been included in the revised scheme but Pullicino claims

she was surprised to learn that this property and the surrounding garden have been included.

"I had only learned of the inclusion of this property from other people after it was ▶ page 2

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