

# malta **today** every sunday



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# 2007

## Election race: Ready, steady, go

WITH LITTLE or no hints from the Prime Minister on whether the coming year will see a general election, 2007 is still inevitably bound to see an electoral campaign in full swing with the shadow of an election looming around the corner.

Implicit in the prime minister's reticence, the party machinery can be heard in full gear ahead of an election. In March, the Nationalist party will stand an important electoral test in some of its local strongholds, with the most contentious council election to be held in Mosta, where a repeat of this year's show in Rabat is very likely. A shift to a Labour majority would spell a massive defeat for the PN following a long negative campaign from the Opposition about the incomplete Mosta Square project and with the attacks on Edwin Vassallo promising a more or less similar fate to that suffered by Rabat's Tony Abela.

In Gzira, Labour may also have a try at securing a new majority, adding to its steady conversions at Pietà, Msida and San Gwann secured just this year,

### Electoral talks reveal political intrigue and subterfuge

THE AGREEMENT between the Labour party and Nationalist party over the electoral system has confirmed that both sides believe they will realistically attain less than 50% of all vote cast, reconfirming the worst fears for the Nationalists that it will be falling beneath the 50% threshold.

The talks, which excluded the Greens who were until recently participants to the discussions before being unceremoniously sidelined, con-

cerns the addition of seats in the eventuality of a relative majority and the question of the island-district of Gozo, recently dismembered due to its growing population being under-represented.

As things stand today, the electoral districts which were last amended by the Electoral Commission favour the Labour party, but the Nationalist HQ continue to believe they will win the day at the very end. **▶ page 4**

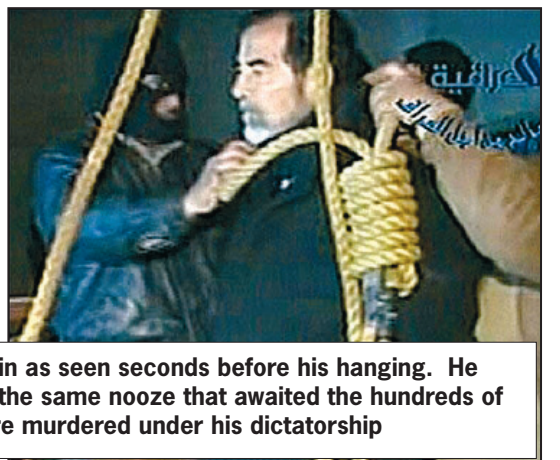
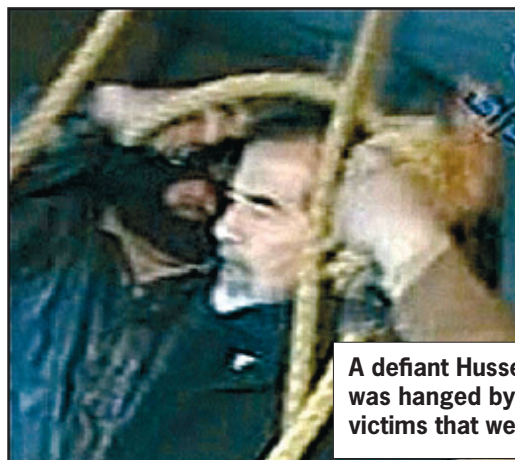
while H'Attard and Swieqi should theoretically be Alternattiva Demokratika's popularity testing grounds.

Whatever the outcome, perhaps the most important indicator in the coming round of local elections will be the actual voter turnout – the fewer the voters, the worse for the PN.

Possibly, the PN will downplay the local elections and let Labour take over as it did over the last two years, but that would leave Gonzi with not one single electoral victory since he took over as prime minister, leaving him to face a general election with only a record of failures.

The prime minister has much more serious stuff to think about. While he is expected to sprinkle some of the feel good factor on his birthday on 1 July – the date he set for himself to open the Mater Dei Hospital, which he had cheekily called "a gift to the Maltese people" – the same day will be indicative of Malta's progress on the Euro front. **▶ page 4**

## After Saddam: a region in the balance **▶ 14-15**



A defiant Hussein as seen seconds before his hanging. He was hanged by the same nooze that awaited the hundreds of victims that were murdered under his dictatorship

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