

GHAJNSIELEM



The installation of new arch-priest Fr Frankie Bajada culminated a week of activities in Ghajnsielem, in which the whole village came alive, as BARBARA BODE reports.

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INTERVIEW

MALCOLM J. NAUDI talks to Mr Speaker, Anton Tabone, who is not only the longest-serving Speaker of the House, but also currently the longest-serving MP, having been first elected 40 years ago.



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PLUS

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UHM welcomes extension of family-friendly measures

by Natalino Fenech

THE *Union Haddiema Maghqudin* yesterday welcomed Government's commitment to extend family-friendly measures in the civil service to the whole public sector.

The *Times* last week revealed that in a circular sent to all permanent secretaries, the principal permanent secretary, Godwin Grima, said all family-friendly measures in the civil service were applicable to the public sector with immediate effect unless there were very good reasons to justify a temporary delay.

Permanent secretaries were requested to bring this policy decision to the attention of all heads of public entities.

Dr Grima referred to the Budget Speech for 2007 in which the prime minister announced that Government had decided to extend family-friendly measures currently available to public officers to the entire public sector.

One of the most important family-friendly measures that has been adopted in the civil service, but which has been resisted in some public sector entities, is that employees can opt to work reduced hours and can choose between working 20, 25 or 30 hours a week to look after children under the age of 12.

In some entities reduced hours can only be availed of by employees whose children are under four or six years old.

Dr Grima also informed permanent secretaries that where serious difficulties existed for the implementation of this measure, the Management and

Personnel Office at the Office of the Prime Minister would discuss the matter with the entity concerned, taking into account the period when the respective collective agreement would be coming up for review.

"All collective agreements, currently being negotiated, however, must include a provision in which all current measures are also made applicable to public sector entities," Dr Grima concluded.

UHM secretary general Gejtu Vella said: "This is an important step in the right direction. The UHM is pleased that the government has now accepted our proposal. It reinforces the importance of workers' rights and family-friendly policies in a flexible labour market, which in return can successfully compete in the global economy."

Mr Vella said those resisting these measures were either short-sighted or did not want to bother to organise themselves for them.

"Statistics show that where such family-friendly measures were introduced in Europe, there was an increase in productivity and efficiency while staff morale and motivation improved," Mr Vella said.

"Even management-staff relations improved. Data from the European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions speak clearly about this.

"All economic players and private sector entrepreneurs should take the initiative to introduce family-friendly policies. No public entity should try to hide behind the excuse of autonomy or independence from the government.

"By trying to harmonise the family-friendly measures, the government is in no way interfering with their independence or autonomy.

"After all, these agencies should keep in mind that their board of directors is appointed by the government and it is public funds they are dealing with."

Education's 'real' problems not being tackled – Sant

THE COUNTRY should be focusing more on how to solve problems in the education system rather than looking at changing structures, Opposition Leader Alfred Sant said.

Speaking at the close of a seminar organised by the Mikiel Anton Vassalli Foundation on secondary education, Dr Sant said he feared that the same mistakes in other sectors, such as tourism, were being repeated in education, where attention was focused on structures rather than on the real problems.

Dr Sant argued that a number of students were leaving school without proper knowledge of Maltese, English and mathematics, and even basic life skills.

Many were also leaving school without strong values of respect for others and social solidarity,

and this was being reflected in cases of bullying and lack of discipline.

But it was not only the schools that were to blame, because there were a number of other elements that were having a negative impact on youths.

Dr Sant called for more resources for education, a greater use of technology, full implementation of a curriculum on which there was agreement, and benchmarking of the teaching that was given.

He insisted that students needed to do well in primary school so as to overcome the hurdles of secondary school. For this purpose the MLP was proposing the addition of a reception class between the kindergarten and primary levels for a stronger foundation for children's education.



THE two vehicles involved in the incident at L-Iklin

Youth stabbed in road rage incident

A 25-YEAR-OLD youth from Cospicua was stabbed yesterday at about 3 p.m. in an argument with a 22-year-old youth from Hamrun in Triq Gużè Galea, L-Iklin.

According to a police report the two were involved in an argument which ensued after they were driving a Toyota delivery van and a Hyundai Accent. In the argument, the 25-year-old was stabbed with a flick-knife and was rushed to hospital in an ambulance, where he was found to be suffering from slight injuries. The other youth was also slightly injured in the incident.

Duty Magistrate Jacqueline Padovani Grima appointed a number of experts to help her in her inquiry. Police investigations are still going on, and the Hamrun youth is expected to be arraigned in court this morning at 10.30, according to the police statement.

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