



Cruise terminal expected to be completed within three years

The waterfront plaza, the main attraction of the Lm10 million Valletta cruise terminal project, could be ready by the end of this year if talks between the government and the selected consortium are concluded relatively quickly.

The waterfront plaza, which forms part of phase one of the project, includes facilities such as *al fresco* dining in front of the restored Pinto and Forni stores, an amphitheatre, water taxis and traditional boat services, bus, horse carriage and taxi services, and family recreational areas.

Negotiations between the government and the Viset consortium started yesterday, just one day after the government announced that it had accepted a steering committee recommendation to start discussions with this consortium.

Phase one of the project also includes the building of one of the two terminals, a road, a ground-level car park and the restoration of Pinto and Forni stores together with the chapel.

The whole project, which is divided into three phases, is expected to be completed within three years.

Viset consortium's major shareholders are M. Demajo Holdings Ltd and AX Holdings Ltd.

Angelo Xuereb and Joe Demajo told *The Times* yesterday that Valletta Investment Bank had just confirmed it would form part of the consortium. The consortium has also received a letter of interest from the Air Malta Group.

They said 40 per cent of the consortium would be taken up by foreign investors who specialise in areas directly related to the cruise business.

For instance, Port Developers LC USA are a leading cruise marketing company and would be able to market the terminal in the US. Aldeasa of Spain is one of the leading international duty free and retailing companies.

Other international companies include Moniflor SA, of France,

Jesmond Bonello

and Slopform Engineering 2000 Ltd of Hong Kong.

The second phase of the project would include the building of the second terminal and the renovation of the power station so that it would house retail outlets.

The third phase would concentrate on work related to the development behind the bastion walls, including the development of an oceanarium, an auditorium and a three-storey car park.

Mr Joe Demajo, chairman of Demajo Group, said that if negotiations were not lengthy the consortium was planning to announce the project internationally between March 9 and 12, during the International Sea Trade Convention. This is an international specialist fair of cruise liners being held in the US.

"We must start immediately,

literally not to miss the boat," Mr Demajo said.

He explained that significant developments were taking place in the cruise industry and that contracts were already being signed for the coming years.

He emphasised that Malta needed to be marketed as a cruise destination now.

The consortium, he said, would prefer to conclude an agreement before the US fair.

Mr Xuereb emphasised that when completed, the cruise terminal was expected to be one of the "nicest in the world and also one of the most efficient".

He said that as opposed to most Mediterranean terminals, which are located in industrial areas, Malta's terminal would have a unique historical backdrop.

The cruise and ferry terminal buildings are expected to include easy access for passenger transfer from the ship to the dockside and state-of-the-art facilities for baggage handling and control.

The cruise terminal is also being designed to have facilities for meetings, exhibitions and conferences.

The terminal would also have design flexibility enabling it to be used for both port of call and home port operations.

The Pinto and Forni stores rehabilitation would include an artisan centre and souvenir outlets, local and foreign speciality restaurants, coffee and wine bars, leisure and entertainment facilities, tourist information and audio visual representations for tourists.

The harbour and berthing facility would include quay facilities along a total length of 700m, and a short and direct road link to the airport.

At the moment the cruise liner industry is booming, with local figures reaching 140,000 passengers a year. The planned terminal would be able to take up to 500,000 passengers a year.

It is estimated that 20 per cent of all the passengers who visit for the day visit again as regular tourists.

Nurses' union says it cannot guarantee patients' health

Nurses at St Luke's Hospital were being hindered in carrying out their professional duties because they did not have enough time to keep up with the high number of patients in medical wards, and the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses said.

The union said that wards equipped to handle 30 patients were taking up to 50. In these circumstances, the health of patients could not be guaranteed by nurses.

It said that while it appreciated Health Department initiatives to take short-term measures, it noted that the measures

Health department asks hospital staff to be more flexible

were sadly not having the expected results.

It was satisfied that the department was considering ways to reduce the number of social cases, including the transfer of such patients to private hospitals. But this was not enough to solve the acute problem at St Luke's.

The MUMN is requesting a meeting with the chief government medical officer.

In a counter-statement, the Health Department said that the

Rosanne Zammit

wave of respiratory tract infections was continuing despite the measures it had taken to try and curb it.

A total of 1,000 patients were handled by the hospital's medical department over the past two weeks, representing a 25 per cent increase on its average load.

At the same time, members of the medical staff, nurses and

paramedics were also ill with the same infection.

The department and the Social Policy Ministry were seeking both short- and long-term solutions.

The department wanted greater flexibility so that staff in wards with a low workload could be temporarily transferred to help their colleagues keep up with work in other wards or departments.

It would be helpful if this could be done without objections

from the staff or their representatives, it said.

The relatives of some of the elderly in hospital were refusing to take their relatives home even though the patients had been able to cope with a bit of support.

The department said it had also embarked on talks aimed at strengthening primary health care services, as a number of patients sent to hospital could be treated in their own homes or at nearby health centres.

The department said it wanted to hear the MUMN's long-term practical suggestions during a meeting on Thursday.