

Engine smoke delays plane's take-off

Massimo Farrugia

An Alitalia plane bound for Milan was delayed in Malta yesterday after smoke was seen belching out of one of its engines minutes before take-off.

Witnesses said the aircraft, a McDonnell Douglas MD-82, was sitting on the airport's apron nine, exactly beneath the airport's waving gallery, when smoke started to billow from the engine on the starboard side.

Sources said the incident took place at about 11.50 a.m. immediately after the aircraft operating Alitalia flight AZ885 was granted permission to start taxiing.

Within minutes, three fire engines surrounded the aircraft. The 38 passengers on board were asked to disembark as a precautionary measure while fire fighters hosed the engine close to the aircraft's tail.

The plane left Malta at about 1 p.m. for Milan's Malpensa airport after checks were made to ensure it could fly safely.

The sources said the smoke could have been caused by a "compressor surge" in the aircraft's engine. This is a disruption of the airflow that can be caused by engine deterioration, ingestion of foreign material, or an internal component failure such as a broken blade.



The Alitalia plane on the apron after fire fighters hosed the engine, yesterday.

In some cases, excess fuel in the engine's combustor due to a fuel control fault can result in flames extending from the engine's exhaust pipe.

"As alarming as this may appear, the engine itself would not

actually be on fire. An oil release can also cause an oily mist. But such occurrences do not necessarily indicate an unsafe condition," the sources said.

Aviation records show the MD-82, called Modena, was

purchased by Alitalia in April 1995.

The Malta International Airport said nothing about the incident and the Alitalia office at the MIA refused to give any information when contacted yesterday.

Man dies in fall at Gozo

A 53-year-old Gozitan died when he fell off a balcony while carrying out construction work in Marsalforn Road, Xaghra, yesterday afternoon, the police said.

The accident happened at about 1 p.m. and the man, from Xewkija, died on his way to hospital.

Magistrate Tonio Micallef Trigona held an on-site inquiry and appointed experts to assist him.

The Gozo district police are investigating.

Prisoner escapes from hospital

Nagib El Hadi Mezoughi, a 30-year-old Libyan prison inmate, escaped from St Luke's Hospital yesterday morning, the police said.

El Mezoughi, who was in hospital for a check-up and was being escorted by two policemen, managed to escape through a window on the fourth floor.

TALKING POINT

A death sentence to the independent mayor?

Twelve years ago, the government had introduced local councils on an experimental basis. Today, it is a fact that these were successful and are here to stay. The government is now considering reviewing the law and one major change is the way in which the mayor is elected.

During the public discussions held before the local councils were introduced, I had expressed myself on how at the time it was planned that the mayor would be elected since it could have created conflicts among councillors who have to work together for at least three years. I was and still am of the opinion that the mayor should be elected directly by the local voters. However, I cannot agree that the mayor must be from the party that wins the majority of votes and I shall explain why.

I have no intention to contest the local elections again but I am expressing myself in consideration of those individual citizens who would like to contribute their time, experience and efforts towards their hometown for the benefit of their fellow citizens. Why should anyone be forced to join a political party? Don't we already have enough politics in all that we do? Do we need more?

We already have too much political involvement in many areas of our daily life. Do we really need to strengthen the position of the two political parties and eliminate any chance of an independent citizen ever becoming a mayor of the community s/he loves? Given the way the



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amendments to the law are planned, only candidates contesting the elections with the two main political parties will have such a chance.

The mayors should be those candidates who win the highest number of votes irrespective of the political party they contest with. Should the candidate obtaining the most votes decline the position of a mayor for one reason or another then this post would be offered to the runner up. One has to keep in mind that not every person has the talent to be a leader or the time to dedicate for free to the community given such a responsible role.

Partisan politics should have never interfered with local councils. The Malta Labour Party was against such political involvement but later decided to contest as a party because the Nationalist government was adamant to keep the party involved. The main objectives of the local councils should be to improve the qual-

ity of life of the local community and to improve the upkeep of the infrastructure.

Political parties should not use the local councils in a partisan way as their barometer for general elections or as a propaganda machine to provide extended awareness of their political agenda. A look at those local councils where partisan politics are not involved quickly shows a smoother operation with a better team effort for the benefit of all the local citizens.

When I was mayor of Naxxar for two terms as an independent councillor between 1994 and 2000 everyone had noticed the stark contrast with those councils where political parties were behind their councillors. I had never allowed political speeches during the council's meetings and all the councillors had worked hand in hand as a team for the benefit of the local community.

We need to offer equal opportunities to the local citizens to contest the local elec-

tions and if they prove to be capable and are prepared to dedicate a substantial amount of their time then let them be free to become mayors.

What is wrong with having an independent mayor? This is a question which requires an answer if the political parties continue to insist on electing the mayor from among their elected councillors only. Furthermore, what would happen if one of the main political parties were to refrain from participating in the elections as a party? And what if a third major political party is formed in the future?

The fruit which the Naxxar community benefited from during my two terms as mayor resulted from the collective team effort which I managed to maintain. Naturally my leadership qualities and my experience in management together with the long hours put in also helped to achieve success. Being a mayor is no pleasure cruise, neither is it a winning ticket in a lottery. The remuneration definitely does not do justice to the extra efforts one has to put in. Being a mayor means you have to sacrifice part of your free time and working time for the benefit of your fellow citizens.

My appeal to the government is to reconsider the proposal in a way so as to allow an equal opportunity for any individual to become the mayor of the community s/he so loves. We have too much politics, it is an intrinsic part of us; let us concentrate on results and not on power.