

The *fait accompli* of a golf course at ix-Xaghra I-Ħamra as presented by the Prime Minister bemused all, and to all except Roamer, it appears as a quick *manoeuvre* to abscond from the legitimate opposition that it was likely to create, as in fact it did, from NGO's and the majority of the Maltese intelligentsia. Certainly credibility will be lost by the Government and the stakeholder(s) over the issue which seems decided not only without the usual bureaucracy but alarmingly without rationale.

For firstly how can a golf course be considered let alone afforded by the Maltese economy at this moment in time, bogged down as it is with the hotchpotch of a hospital super-structure, frenzied road works, stagnant harbour works, waste systemisation, etc? What with the added burdens of an unsustainable welfare state compounded by problems of illegal immigrants.

Then, has the opportunity cost of the project been carefully studied, by way that nothing more important, more crucial for the nation exists before the golf course? The Opera House/Kings Gate option springs to mind with parts of the ceiling of the gate also falling on the heads of locals and tourists alike until recently. It has been on the books for ages now, topical forever, and certainly merits priority, besides other projects likewise equally more nationally important than a golf course.

Not much mention was made of viability, although a feasibility study has been propounded, although it escapes me who commissioned it to whom? Logically it should have come from the MEPA list, but it did not. But to keep track, is it viable to have a second golf-course at Xaghra I-Ħamra? Considerations here have to include many aspects like accessibility, environment, aesthetics, climate, maintenance and impact among others. But let us concentrate on the flagrant aspects of climate and maintenance. I read on The Independent on Sunday of London dated 17th July 2005 that "Golf courses are not lush and green by accident. For every day of play about 10,000 litres of water are expended on keeping the course green and pleasant." This is England, where the climate is much wetter and colder, and the article treated the diminishing reserves of water that England is experiencing.

What with Malta, and precisely ix-Xaghra I-Ħamra, a promontory so exposed to the prevailing winds and blistering sun that nature itself has over the ages managed a stranglehold only with a specialised ecosystem that is unique. Where will presumably much more than 10,000 litres of water daily come from, and at what cost? Nightly sprinkling will not be enough as the greens need frequent fresh water during the day to prevent it turning brown during summer, also due to the wind factor. Not only will any other system fail in the conditions prevailing there in spite of all the water in the world, but imagine how many wild dogs and Englishmen remain to take the mid-day sun in summer and the biting wind in winter at ix-Xaghra. Unless that is, a high wall is built on the cliff edge!

The leader of The Times of the 25th July 2005 carried the rationale that the Prime Minister would do well to emulate before bulldozing the garigue irreparably at ix-Xaghra I-Ħamra. Over the past few weeks enough food for

thought has been spread out on The Times and The Sunday Times and other media for the Prime Minister to rationalise the issue.

The proposal expounded by Lino Bugeja, president of the Ramblers' Association of Malta, for a state-of-the-art golf course at Maghtab, deserves consideration if only for the facts: that the place is in shambles, with the existing mound being flattened aimlessly, and requires a purpose; the site is more suitably accessible to a greater number of hotels in the Sliema, Bugibba and Valletta areas; wind exposure is minimal in comparison, allowing more frequent and better playing conditions, less water requirement and better tree-growth prospects; the investment has started already and will be significantly smaller, killing the proverbial two birds with one stone; environmentally the location can only, and will, be improved; aesthetically the impact will not be horrendously imposing as at ix-Xaghra.

More importantly a white elephant will not be conceived, and a vast tract of nature remains unspoilt and for all Maltese to enjoy at leisure, and for better Maltese prospects of ecotourism when it dawns on the authorities to appreciate its importance.