

National

# Water seepage is damaging underground war tunnels

Kim Dalli

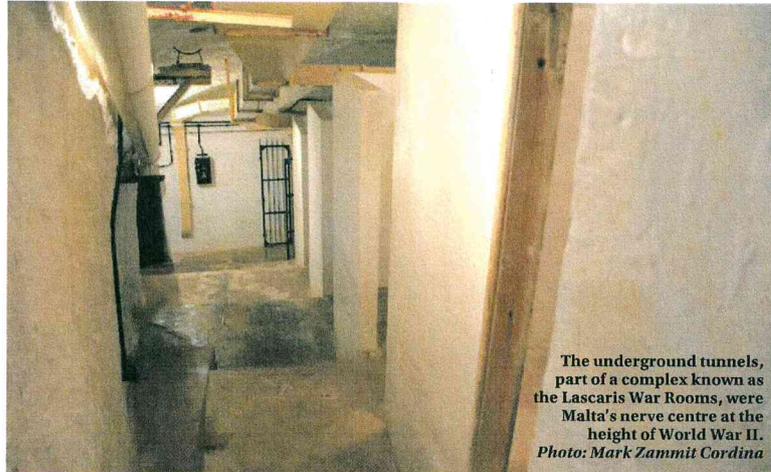
The irrigation of the landscaped Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta is leading to water seeping into the underground tunnels of the former War Headquarters below, causing "extensive damage", according to *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna*.

Foundation chairman Mario Farrugia said flowering plants required a lot of watering and that a change in the irrigation regime had resulted in a lot of water seepage.

The tunnels, part of a complex known as the Lascaris War Rooms, are administered by the foundation. They were Malta's nerve centre at the height of World War II and were first opened to the public last year during their €1.7 million restoration.

"We've already solved seven leaks so far but the problem erupted again some two weeks ago," he said.

The damage has been made worse by the humidity inherent in underground tunnels. Since the tunnels are gas proof, the complex is installed with forced ventilation



The underground tunnels, part of a complex known as the Lascaris War Rooms, were Malta's nerve centre at the height of World War II. Photo: Mark Zammit Cordina

to prevent the air from getting stale. Yet the percolating water has wreaked havoc on the ventilation system, necessitating an overhaul. The lighting system also needed to be changed due to water damage, Mr Farrugia said.

While restoration works have been carried out on the complex of tunnels and chambers beneath the gardens, the interpretation boards and projectors have still not been installed due to the water seepage problem.

"We've been insisting on a change towards different types of plants which require less water. Landscaping is changed every year."

However, this was only a short-term solution, he said, adding that

a longer-term solution necessitated flower beds being put into tanks, which would involve placing a membrane below the soil, effectively waterproofing the rock and preventing the over saturation of the substrata overlying the tunnels.

Asked for a reaction, the general manager of the Environmental Landscapes Consortium, Ronald Cuschieri, said that the ELC was contracted to look after the garden's landscaping and obeyed the instructions of the overseeing monitoring board. The consortium always cooperated with the NGO, he added.

The HQ, from which the British coordinated the island's defence during the ferocious Battle of Malta, was in action between early 1940 and February 1943.

The main tunnel was originally excavated by the Knights of St John and used to link a communication gallery running from Battery Street to St Peter and St Paul Counterguard. During the British period it was expanded and a number of operation rooms were excavated.

The tunnels will be open to the public tomorrow.

# Governor spearheading solidarity fund proposal

Ivan Camilleri

Central Bank Governor Josef Bonnici is spearheading a proposal to create voluntary solidarity funds on an international level as a financial vehicle to help alleviate social inequality.

The idea, which is still in an embryonic stage, is being discussed through the Fondazione Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice, based in the Vatican City, which has the purpose of contributing to the diffusion of human, ethical, social and Christian values.

The foundation is currently holding a consultation meeting in Malta. Prof. Bonnici, who is a member of the foundation's scientific committee, yesterday told a press conference that the solidarity funds would not be a specific financial instrument but would enable individuals to contribute on a regular basis.

He said no decisions had yet been taken on who would be administering the funds and what distribution criteria would be used but a formal proposal was expected to be made later this year when the foundation holds an international conference at Vatican City.

The international consultation in Malta is a continuation of the ongoing dialogue initiated by the Dublin Group on financial reform and the common good, according to the foundation's president, Domingo Sugranyes Bickel, and former Bank of Valletta chairman Joe Zahra, a member of the advisory board.

The Dublin Group is tasked with formulating recommendations on directing finance in the service of the common good, as defined by Catholic social teaching.

The discussion in Malta is about the need for an ethical dimension to financial reform and on sustainable solutions to the growing inequality worldwide.



Central Bank Governor Josef Bonnici. Photo: Chris Sant Fourmier



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CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8				9		
10				11		
		12	13			
	14					
15				16	17	18
19				20		
21				22		

- ACROSS**
- 1 Small unit of measurement
  - 5 Secret agent
  - 8 Leftover, part of an apple
  - 9 Thing a man wears around his neck
  - 10 Special period of time
  - 11 Your mother's sister
  - 12 Common fishing bait
  - 14 How to reach the top of a mountain
  - 15 Piece of metal used to hold wood
  - 16 Not a little
  - 19 Old-fashioned hotel
  - 20 Not there, but \_\_\_\_\_
  - 21 What a beggar does
  - 22 Thought
- DOWN**
- 1 Frozen water
  - 2 Neither, \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 A baby moves by \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 Not she, but \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 When you lost your balance but didn't fall, you \_\_\_\_\_
  - 6 \_\_\_\_\_ and needles
  - 7 Still, \_\_\_\_\_
  - 11 What connects your hand to your body
  - 13 Liquid used in cooking
  - 14 Curved stick used by old people
  - 15 Tip for a pen
  - 17 Earth that is dug in a mine for gold, etc
  - 18 Hot drink
  - 20 Hello

hotspot

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