

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CABINET
BY THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

PROPOSAL BY MR BARZILAY FOR DEVELOPING
THE MARSA INTO A FIRST CLASS RACE TRACK

A proposal has been submitted by Mr Ralph Barzilay for the development of the Marsa into a first class race track. Mr Barzilay, who states that he is prepared to invest about £5m. in the project, envisages a development which would include a European style race track, a hurdle race course, a galloping horse course, a trotting track under floodlights, a paddock, a grandstand and club, stables, tote betting facilities, a trotting training track, a galloping training track and a speedway circuit.

2. The promoter of this project, whose architect is the Honourable Mr D. Mintoff, is anxious to know at an early date whether the Government is prepared to give him a firm undertaking for him to go ahead with his project, the working plans of which would take about three months to draw up. From the information made available, the promoter would first require to know how much land at the Marsa will be available to him. He is apparently at present thinking in terms of about two-thirds of the total area, including the Gormi side of the Marsa, occupied by the United Services Sports Club, the polo grounds and the golf course, and also including the race track on the perimeter. The area envisaged by him would also encroach to some extent on the playing fields at present held by the British Services. His insistence is on an unobstructed view of the racing, and for this purpose, the existing clubhouse would have to be demolished and re-erected elsewhere, but the surrounding trees would only have to be thinned out somewhat in order to give an intermittent view of the horses. Depending on the amount of land made available, it might be possible to preserve the polo grounds and the golf course, but it would have to be accepted that it might be necessary to sacrifice some of these amenities for the sake of the project.

3. In a preliminary expression of views, both Hon. M.J.P.A. and Hon. M.E.C.T. rightly felt that the Barzilay project must be viewed against plans for the development of the Marsa as a whole as a Sports Centre. Hon. M.J.P.A. feels that, apart from this, Mr Barzilay's project is undoubtedly attractive and deserving of further consideration, pointing out that the main source of income of a commercially run race course is the betting and that Government should consider whether and to what extent it should participate in the takings.

4. Meantime, a plan for the development of the Marsa as a Sports Centre, prepared by Architect Vitellozzi of the Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano, has been received. (It is available for perusal with the Secretary to Cabinet). The plan envisages the development of the Trunk Road side of the Marsa, and virtually covers the area at present occupied by the stadium and playing fields still held by the British Services, and taking up, in addition, one of the polo grounds. Inter alia, the plan provides for a National Stadium, a sports palace to cater for tennis, volley ball, basket-ball, boxing, etc., an indoor and outdoor swimming pool, outdoor tennis courts and a basket ball ground, and car parks. The plan has yet to be the subject of detailed comment by the Ministry responsible for sport and of eventual consideration by the Cabinet, but it is relevant to point out at this stage that no funds are provided in the forthcoming 5-Year Plan for this project, and that there is very little chance of a large and as yet unknown amount being raised to finance it.

5. It would seem that in order to deal expeditiously with the Barzilay project, Government must come to a fairly quick decision on the Vitellozzi plan, even if only to take a decision that the area covered by this plan should be earmarked in its entirety for this purpose. On the other hand, it is fairly certain that this would leave much less land available than Barzilay appears to expect. In fact, his architect is aware of Government's intentions to erect a national stadium in the area and is assuming that Government would only wish to earmark enough land to provide for a stadium alone.

6. These are the salient points of the matter, which Ministers may wish to consider. It only remains to point out that the lands at present occupied by the U.S.S.C., including the polo grounds and the golf course, etc. are held on a 99-year lease, formerly from the War Department, which lease lapses in 2001, while the Malta Racing Club simply holds the race track and enclosure on a year-to-year lease. Legal advice is that it would be difficult to terminate the lease of the U.S.S.C., and some arrangement would have to be arrived at with the Club, conceivably by Barzilay if he is given the green light to go ahead with his plans. Government would naturally first have to accept formal surrender of these land from the British authorities. The remaining half of the Marsa is still held by the British authorities who insist that they need the playing fields there to provide recreation facilities for British forces here. At official level, the British authorities have been told that there are no grounds to justify the retention by them of that area as a defence establishment, but they did not accept this and said that if they agreed to leave, it would only be against re-provisioning by the Government of similar facilities. In the meantime, agreement has been reached for greater civilian use of these playing fields.