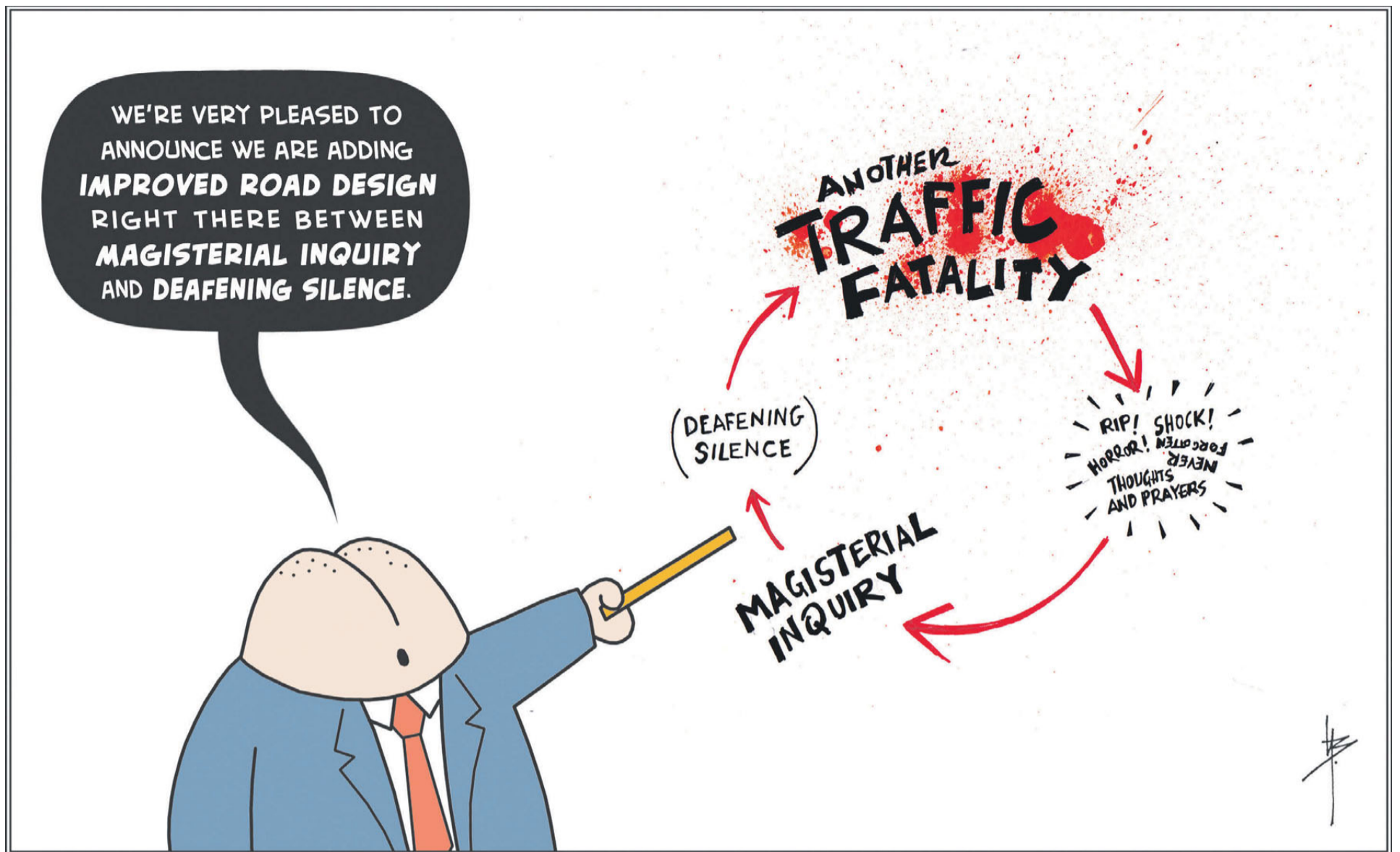


OPINION AND LETTERS



We're a nation of dilettantes



DANIEL XERRI

It is the same old story every year. A substantial proportion of the population gets all hyped up about the latest piece of mediocrity that is sent to represent the country in the Eurovision, only for Malta to perform dismally once again.

The humiliated performers come back to a hero's welcome and those who allow such a disgraceful lowering of standards to happen on an annual basis are incentivised further to perpetuate the cycle of failure.

Why is it that we seem to struggle to learn from our mistakes?

Why is it that we keep peddling our cheap wares while fully convinced of their superior quality?

As a nation, our relationship with mediocrity has a long history. Our insularity has long made us believe we are the world's omphalos.

Despite how enriching travel can be, it still seems powerless to cure the mis-

conceptions that many Maltese people labour under.

That is why we seem incapable of being critical of our compatriots' performance when they participate in international events, whether they be in music, sport or other fields. As a nation, we seem predisposed to accept mediocrity from our peers or even refrain to recognise it as such.

We keep wallowing in our amateurishness, all the while believing we are victims of a gross injustice. It is as if the entire world is against us; no one seems to appreciate the unique talent



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that swells from this tiny rock in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

It need not be this way, though. If something is rubbish, bin it. By refusing to call a spade a spade, we merely persist in adopting the same dilettantish attitude to things. By refusing to insist on higher standards of quality from those who represent us on the international stage, we will keep being made a fool of as a country.

By acknowledging that our national pride is, at times, farcical and our sense of self-importance, despite our minute size, is overly inflated, we would be in a better position to understand our collective myopia.

No wonder that one of the buffoons we enjoy laughing at is a severely short-sighted character who refuses to admit he cannot see properly every time he bungles things up: *Mela hsibtni ma narax?* [Do you think I can't see?] Vinnie is a good reflection of our Maltese character, a nation of fools who refuse to see how bad things are.

Not just in terms of our catastrophic performance in an international song contest, mind you. There are far more momentous issues that we are not properly directing our energies to resolving. Instead, we are blindly trusting a bunch of amateurs who strive to hide the fact

that they are motivated by self-interest. Just consider the stupid sense of loyalty of those people who refuse to question their views even when confronted with the blatant abuse of power of those who lead them. They turn a blind eye to iniquity and trounce anyone who dare express themselves critically.

Or consider the ugliness that construction moguls have plunged us into while driven by greed and a disregard of aesthetics. Or the anarchic traffic that the authorities ignore while it chokes our roads, damages our minds and bodies and destroys the lives of victims and their families. Or the litter and shabbiness that is transforming our towns and villages into unsightly places that are occasionally visited by some incompetent minister inaugurating a public toilet or stretch of pavement.

We feebly complain about these realities but lack the guts to do something tangible about them. It is as if we are so used to letting things slide that it does not matter much if we let them slide even more.

Hence, those who can, will feel fully entitled to walk roughshod all over us and whip us with their dilettantism. And, maybe, they are right to do so given that we let them.

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