



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

December 2011

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TUNISIA-JAPAN



Tunisian-Japanese Joint Committee to meet in first term of 2012 in Japan

05 January 2012

TAP – Prime Minister Hammadi Jebali received, on Thursday in Tunis, Mr. Toshiyuki Taga, Japan's Ambassador in Tunis.

The Talk focused on means to develop bilateral relations and preparations for holding the Tunisian-Japanese Joint Committee's meeting, scheduled during the first term of 2012 in Japan, said a communiqué of the Prime Ministry.

Mr. Jabali commended the Japanese government's will to promote Japanese investment in Tunisia by means of encouraging such Japanese enterprises such as Yazaki group to settle in Tunisia.

He emphasized the co-operation opportunities which exist in the fields of culture, renewable energies, scientific exchanges between universities as well as the twinning of Tunisian and Japanese cities.

On this occasion, the Japanese diplomat reminded of the Japanese projects in Tunisia, including the Sfax-Gabès motorway and the Borj Cedria technopark.

Yazaki in Tunisia

04 January 2012

During a meeting with Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, January 3rd in Kasbah, Rudolph Horst, head of Yazaki Europe, confirmed that Yazaki will continue investing in the country as per their 2012 plans.

The Ambassador of Tunisia visits the University of Tsukuba

20 December 2011



<http://www.kokuren.tsukuba.ac.jp/Visitorsnew.html#111220>

The Ambassador of Tunisia to Japan, Mr. Eyles Kasri, visited the University of Tsukuba on 20 December 2011.

He had a meeting with Mr. Nobuhiro Yamada, President of the University of Tsukuba, which was an opportunity to review the positive development of the cooperation between the University of Tsukuba and Tunisia and discuss ways and means to strengthen this cooperation. Ambassador Kasri paid also a visit to the Japanese Alliance for Research on North Africa (ARENA), where he had a meeting with Dr. Mitsutoshi Nakajima, Director of ARENA.

The meeting permitted to discuss the importance of strengthening the role of the ARENA in supporting the scientific exchange between both countries, increasing the number of Tunisian researchers and students admitted to the University of Tsukuba and proliferating joint research projects.

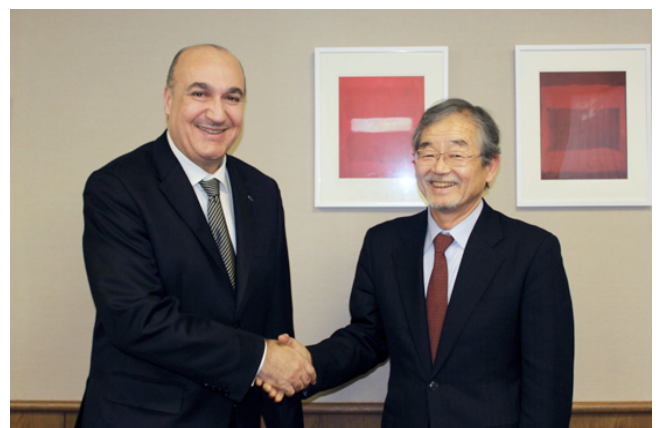
The talk also focused on the consolidation of bilateral cooperation within the framework of "Tunisian-Japan Symposium on Science, Society and Technology" (TJASSST). The last edition of TJASSST was held on 12 and 13 November 2011 in Tunisia.

During a seminar held the same day by the University of Tsukuba, Mr. Kasri gave a lecture entitled "Future prospects for the Tunisian-Japanese relations and cooperation".

In addition, the Ambassador of Tunisia had a meeting with the Tunisian researchers and students admitted to the University of Tsukuba.

Tunisian Ambassador visits the National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS)

20 December 2011



<http://www.nims.go.jp/eng/news/archive/2011/12/hdfqf1000000iw2v.html>

The Ambassador of Tunisia to Japan, Mr. Eyles Kasri, visited the NIMS on 20 December 2011.

Mr. Kasri met Mr. Sukekatsu Ushioda, NIMS President, to discuss means and ways to launch a collaborative relationship between the NIMS and Tunisia and future possibility of hosting Tunisian trainees at the NIMS.

After the meeting, Ambassador Kasri visited the laboratory of superconductive materials and listened eagerly to the explanation of the latest research and facilities made by Dr. Hiroaki Kumakura, Director of the laboratory.

Promoting Tunisian tourism in Japanese market

16 December 2011

TUNIS (TAP) - "In addition to Tunisia's cultural riches, the Saharan tourist product is likely to attract a large number of Japanese visitors," pointed out Mr. Jnichi Yamada, Director-General of the Middle East and Europe department at the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA).

The Trade and Tourism Ministry specified, in a communiqué released on Friday, that at the end of their mission in Tunisia dedicated to the promotion of Tunisian tourism in Japan, JICA experts held, on Friday at the Tourism Ministry, a working session co-chaired by Mr. Hassen Ghenia, senior official at the Trade and Tourism Ministry, and Mr. Yamada.

The two sides, according to the communiqué, agreed to start several promotional operations, including the organization in Tokyo of a seminar on Tunisian tourism, the setting up of a training cycle in Japanese language for the benefit of the Tunisian tourist guides, sending in Tunisia of Japanese trainers in Japanese gastronomy and printing of special leaflets on the Tunisian south festivals and study the opening of a Tunisian tourism bureau in Japan. All these steps will be the focus, according to the communiqué, of an action plan to be confirmed, next February, following another JICA mission in Tunisia.

Celebration in Tunis of the Emperor of Japan's Birthday

13 December 2011

Japanese Emperor Akihito's birthday was celebrated by approximately 600 diplomatic guests, over 12 of whom were Ambassadors, at a reception hosted by Japanese Ambassador Toshiyuki Taga on December 9th. Emperor Akihito will turn 78 on December 23rd. His birthday is a national holiday in Japan.

In his remarks, Taga reflected on 2011 as a profound year for both the Tunisian and Japanese people. He paid tribute to the people of Tunisia, as well as the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the Tunisian Revolution that overthrew the regime of former President Zine El-Abdine Ben Ali in January. He cited a mission of Japanese election observers, sent in October, as an example of Japanese-Tunisian friendship. The Ambassador pledged Japan's continued support for Tunisia's democratic reform process.

Before Tunisia's October 23rd Constituent Assembly elections the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) also conducted seminars on political finance, political party development, and training seminars for Tunisian journalists to cover the elections.

According to Ambassador Taga, 2011 has been a particularly hard year for the Japanese people. The March 11th Tohoku earthquake, which read 9.0 on the Richter Scale, and subsequent tsunami caused the deaths of more than 15,000 Japanese people. The disaster caused devastating damage to many Japanese communities. In Japan's darkest hour, and just two months after the Tunisian Revolution, the government of Tunisia sent 60,000 tins of Tuna to the devastated areas of Japan.

Taga fondly recalled a day soon after the tsunami when a group of Tunisians demonstrated outside the Japanese Embassy. He wondered what they were doing, and was shocked to discover that they simply wanted to show support for the Japanese people in the wake of their national tragedy.

The Japanese Ambassador promised that the Government of Japan will continue to provide aid to the Tunisian Government for the development of the country. 350 million Tunisian Dinars will be donated by the government of Japan for the construction of a highway between Mednine and Gabes.

Japan will also assist Tunisia with the development of infrastructure to provide healthy drinking water. The loan program is waiting for a new Tunisian government to sign and finalize the agreement. 32 medium sized cities covering 20 governorates will benefit from the program

Tunisia-Japan Cooperation: Sexual and Reproductive Health Trainings

12 December 2011

A series of training sessions entitled "Change of Behavior in Regards to Sexual and Reproductive Health: Focus on Maternal and Child Health" had been launched on Monday, December 12, in the National Office of Family and Population (ONFP). The event, organized with the cooperation of the Japanese Agency of International Cooperation (JICA), will last until December 29th.

The program brings together around 20 trainers representing several Francophone African countries and aims to strengthen the participants' skills in the design, planning, and evaluation of plans and strategies of communication in the field of sexual and reproductive health. It is also an opportunity for participants to exchange experiences and best practices in developing the sexual and reproductive health behavior. As part of

the program, training sessions will also be offered at selected ONFP regional headquarters, such as Gabes and Sousse.

At the opening ceremony, Ryuichi Tomizawa, Director and Representative of JICA in Tunisia, reminded the audience that according to a recent United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, Tunisia is one of the few countries that has achieved the UN's Millennium Development Goals before 2015, including those of maternal and child health. The director also reiterated his hope for this training to contribute to the advancement and promotion of healthy behaviors in African countries.

POLITICS

Mohamed Moncef Marzouki elected President of the Republic

12 December 2011

TAP - Mr. Mohamed Moncef Marzouki was elected President of the Republic by the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) with the majority of 153 votes.

Mr. Marzouki President of the Congress for the Republic Party (CPR) is the candidate of the tripartite coalition formed just after the elections of the NCA, last October 23, by the Ennahdha Movement Party (89 seats), CPR party (29 seats) and Ettakattol party (20 seats).

The New Government of the Republic of Tunisia sworn in on 24th December 2011

25 December 2011

On Friday, December 23rd, 154 out of 217 members of the Constituent Assembly were present to give the new government a vote of confidence. 38 members voted against the vote of confidence, 11 members abstained, and 105 voted to approve the new government. The government is composed of members from the parties that make up the ruling coalition: Ennahdha, CPR and Ettakatol, as well as a few independents.

This is the composition of the new Government sworn in on 24th December 2011 :

- Prime Minister:

Mr. Hamadi JEBALI

- Minister of Justice:

Mr. Noureddine BHIRI

- Minister of National Defense:

Mr. Abdelkrim ZBIDI

- Minister of Interior:

Mr. Ali LAARAIKH

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Interior in charge of Reform:

Mr. Said MECHICHI

- Minister of Foreign Affairs:

Mr. Rafik ABDESSALEM

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in charge

of the Arab World and Africa:

Mr. Abdallah TRIKI

- Secretary of State to the Foreign Minister in charge of European Affairs:

Mr. Touhami ABDOULI

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in charge of the Americas and Asia:

Mr. Hedi BEN ABBES

- Minister of Finance:

Mr. Houcine DIMASSI

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Finance:

Mr. Slim BESBES

- Minister of Industry and Trade:

Mr. Mohamed Lamine CHAKHARI

- Minister Delegate to the Minister of Industry and Trade in charge of Trade:

Mr. Bechir ZAAFOURI

- Minister of Social Affairs:

Mr. Khalil EZZAOUIA

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Social Affairs in charge of Immigration and Tunisian Expatriates:

Mr. Houcine JAZIRI

- Minister of Investment and International Cooperation:

Mr. Riadh BETTAIEB

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Investment and International Cooperation:

Mr. Aleya BETTAIEB

- Minister of Regional Development and Planning:

Mr. Jameleddine GHARBI

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Regional Development in charge of Planning:

Mr. Lamine DOGHRI

- Minister of Education:

Mr. Abdellatif ABID

- Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research:

Mr. Moncef BEN SALEM

- Minister of Culture:

Mr. Mehdi MABROUK

- Minister of Agriculture:

Mr. Mohamed BEN SALEM

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Agriculture:
Mr. Habib JEMLI

- Minister of Environment:
Mrs. Mamiya EL BANNA

- Minister of Human Rights and Transitional Justice,
and official spokesperson of the Government:
Mr. Samir DILOU

- Minister of Women and Family Affairs:
Mrs. Sihem BADI

- Minister of Health:
Mr. Abdellatif MEKKI

- Minister of Religious Affairs:
Mr. Noureddine KHADEMI

- Minister of Equipment:
Mr. Mohamed SALMANE

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Equipment
in charge of Housing:
Mrs. Chahida BEN FRAJ Bouraoui

- Minister of Transportation:
Mr. Karim HAROUNI

- Minister of Public Property and Estate:
Mr. Slim BEN HMDANE

- Minister of Employment and Vocational Training:
Mr. Abdelwaheb MAATAR

- Minister of Information and Communication
Technologies:
Mr. Mongi MARZOUK

- Minister of Youth and Sports:
Mr. Tarek DHIAB

- Secretary of State to the Minister of Youth and Sports
in charge of Youth:
Mr. Hichem BEN JAMEE

- Minister of Tourism :
Mr. Elyes FAKHFAKH

- Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of Relations with
the National Constituent Assembly:
Mr. Abderrazak KILANI

- Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of Economic
Affairs :
Mr. Ridha SAIDI

- Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of Administrative
Reform:
Mr. Mohamed ABBOU

- Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of Governance
and Fight against Corruption:
Mr. Abderahmane LADGHAM

DIPLOMACY

German FM visits Tunisia (8-9 January)

09 January 2012

Foreign Affairs Minister in the German Federal Republic, Guido Westerwelle paid a working visit to Tunisia from January 8 to 9.

The visit, the second of the German Federal Minister to Tunisia since the Revolution of January 14, is part of the relations of friendship and co-operation and the new strategic partnership between the two countries, a press release of the Foreign Ministry said.

In addition to the talks he will hold with Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem, Mr. Westerwelle was received by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the National Constituent Assembly.

The German FM was accompanied by a delegation of businessmen in the health and renewable energy sectors.

Italian Foreign Minister visits Tunisia (5-6 January)

07 January 2012

The establishment of future balanced relations as part of a mutually beneficial partnership and expanding bridges of communication between the two shores of the Mediterranean on the basis of shared civilizational values, were the focus of a talk held on January 6th, 2011 between Speaker of the National Constituent Assembly and Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi di Sant' Agata, who paid a working visit to Tunisia on January 5-6, 2012.

During his visit, Italy's FM had also a meeting with Mr. Rafik Abdessalem, Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Giulio Terzi di Sant' Agata said that the talk had turned on the convening of a meeting of 5+5 Group.

On a bilateral level, he said that he and Mr. Abdessalem had reviewed the means for developing relations between the two countries and also between Tunisia and the European Union (EU) which, he explained, are important factors for peace and stability in the Mediterranean region, especially as Tunisia is a leading country in the Arab region.

Italy, he went on saying, is a strong advocate of financing the European commitment in terms of means, tools and initiatives.

The meeting also turned on the relations between Italy and Libya. Mr. di Sant' Agata specified, in this regard, that he had informed his Tunisian counterpart of the road map that he had already worked out with the Libyan authorities on ways to revive the friendship and co-operation ties binding Italy and Libya. He added that strengthening Italian-Libyan relations would be beneficial to the Tunisian economic environment as "it is strongly bound with the Libyan reality."

Other issues were also reviewed in the talks, notably immigration, cultural co-operation and higher-education.

Tunisia Joins United Nations Fund for Democracy

08 January 2012

Tunisia became a member of the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) for the period of 2012-2013 after the decision made by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

The fund includes only six countries, donor countries as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The UNDEF has been invited to define general policies and issue directives for financing projects of NGOs aiming at the reinforcement and consolidation of democracy.

The membership of Tunisia in UNDEF translates recognition by the international community of Tunisia's commitment to the democratic process, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental liberties.

French Foreign Minister Juppé visits Tunisia (January 5-6)

07 January 2012

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé paid a working visit to Tunisia on January 5-6, 2012.

Mr. Juppé, who is visiting Tunisia for the second time since the Revolution, met President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki, Premier Hamadi Jebali and Constituent Assembly Speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar.

He also met with his Tunisian counterpart, Mr. Rafik Abdessalem, as well as officials from the economic circles, civil society and members of the French community in Tunisia.

Juppé and Abdessalem expressed their countries' common will to develop partnership in all fields.

At the end of their meeting, which was followed by a working session notably attended by Tourism Minister Elyes Fakhfakh, Mr. Juppé expressed his country's delight at the outcome of the elections and progress recorded by the democratic process in Tunisia.

He also voiced satisfaction at the shared will driving the two sides to strengthen their friendship ties, specifying that France will provide full support to materialize democracy in Tunisia.

In this regard, he recalled that his country had raised the assistance granted to Tunisia by the French Development Agency and incited Europe to do so.

Besides, Mr. Juppé announced that an action plan had been devised to assist Tunisia in its economic development.

"We urge French investors to take interest in Tunisia and our fellow citizens to visit this attractive country which presently provides all conditions of stability and security," he pointed out.

The French FM added that Tunisia and France share the same values of attachment to democratic, public and private freedoms.

For his part, Mr. Rafik Abdessalem said that the consecration of democracy guarantees stability and development.

He pointed out that the meeting had been an occasion to discuss the prospects of partnership between the two countries, voicing satisfaction at the two sides' common vision and the absence of disagreement between them on all the issues that had been looked at.

American Senators visit Tunisia (5-7 January)

06 January 2012

A delegation of American senators, headed by Senator Daniel Inouye, is visiting Tunisia from January 5 - 7.

The delegation consists of Senator Daniel Inouye (serves as the Chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations as well as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee), Senator Thad Cochran (is the Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and has previously chaired the Senate Committee on Agriculture from 2003-2005) and Senator Barbara Mikulski (was appointed as a member of several Subcommittees of the Senate Appropriations Committee including the Subcommittee on Defense and the Subcommittee on State Foreign Operations, and Related Programs).

At the end of his talk, on 6th January in Tunis, with Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem, Mr. Inouye pointed out, during a press briefing, that after having reviewed the situation with the Tunisian officials, on Friday, he was convinced that this revolution will achieve its objectives.

On the American assistance to Tunisia, "especially in the context of the present world economic crisis," he underlined that "as Chairman of the Appropriations Committee of the Senate, I will strive to achieve the assistance promises."

The meeting with FM Rafik Abdessalem provided the occasion to review progress of the Tunisian-American bilateral relations and means to hoist them to the highest level in all fields.

Mr. Abdessalem stressed that the visit is a new testimony to the U.S. firm commitment to accompany Tunisia during this transition period marked by important challenges, highlighting the strategic dimension of the Tunisian-American partnership.

He also invited the American officials to incite all the American sides to materialise this pledge for the benefit of the two friendly peoples.

In turn, the American delegation underlined that the American authorities are called on to seize this historical opportunity to show to the Tunisian people their support.

Members of the senatorial delegation asserted their determination to strive with a view to providing a concrete assistance to the democratic transition process and meeting Tunisia's development.

President Marzouki's visit to Libya – A milestone for stronger Inter-Maghreb Unity

05 January 2012

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki concluded his visit to neighboring Libya today. Marzouki announced that his next foreign visits will include Algeria and Morocco, in an effort to reinforce relations among the Arab Maghreb.

Marzouki indicated on Monday in Tripoli that his visit to Libya was intended to be a milestone in bilateral relations based on positive economic, political, and social exchange. He added that his visit will be followed by a visit from Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali in the days to come, which will serve to further strengthen the relations between the two countries. These relations, Marzouki asserts, have long fluctuated depending on "the moods of the two countries' old leaders." For this reason Marzouki emphasized the need for patience on the part of both the Libyan and the Tunisian people.

Marzouki also discussed, during the same meeting, the conditions Tunisia has put in place for the extradition of Libyan former Prime Minister Baghdadi Mahmoudi. Marzouki likened the Libyan people's desire for the extradition of Mahmoudi to that of the Tunisian people's desire to extradite ousted Tunisian President Zine El Abddine Ben Ali from Saudi Arabia.

The Tunisian President announced that a number of prisoners in Tunisia will be granted amnesties on January 14, 2012, the anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution, including many Libyans who have been imprisoned in Tunisia for minor offences. Likewise, Libyan National Transitional Council President Mustapha Abdeljalil expressed his regret regarding the recent incidents along the border with Tunisia. Abdeljalil emphasized that the transgressions only reflect poorly on the individuals who committed them, rather than on the entire Libyan people.

Marzouki also met with a number of officials from various Arab diplomatic missions in Libya, who congratulated him on his recent election.

On his second day in Libya, Marzouki visited Misrata with Abdeljalil. During this visit, he held a meeting with the employees of the "Siderurgique" complex in Misrata - a Libyan enterprise employing a large number of workers tasked with the reconstruction of the city, after the destruction Gaddafi's militias inflicted on Misrata.

Marzouki further reiterated the importance of cooperation between the two countries during this event.

Marzouki's last day in Libya was spent in Benghazi. Issues discussed during the meeting among Marzouki, Abdeljalil, and delegates from Libyan civil society included security along the border and the possibility of Tunisians assisting Libyans in the organization of Libya's democratic transition.

On the fringes of the Presidential visit, a working session was held, on Wednesday in Tripoli, between Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem and Libya's Foreign and Co-operation Minister Achour Ben Khyal.

The two sides agreed to strengthen consultation and co-ordination on the bilateral files and issues pertaining to the Maghreb and Arab regions, as well as the regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Mr. Abdessalem presented to his Libyan counterpart the priority fields of bilateral co-operation, namely employment, trade exchanges, development in the border areas, as well as reviewing of the legal framework ruling bilateral relations and the exchange of visits between the two countries' officials and experts.

In turn, Mr. Achour Ben Khyal voiced Libya's high consideration to Tunisia for its noble and constant stand in favour of the Libyan people, pointing out that his country will never forget Tunisia's support and its generous assistance to the Libyan Revolution.

Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem receives U.S. Ambassador in Tunis

04 January 2012

The Minister of Foreign Affairs reiterated, on the occasion, Tunisia's gratitude for "the support shown by the United States to the country since the Revolution," pointing out that Tunisia is "firmly engaged on the path of democracy, respect of human rights and pluralism."

He added that Tunisia is determined to strengthen its relations with all sisterly and friendly countries, among which the United States, a country "sharing with it the same values of tolerance and moderation," a Foreign Ministry's statement points out.

For his part, the American Ambassador congratulated the Tunisian people on "the success of the National Constituent Assembly elections," extending wishes of success for the current government, according to the same source.

Mr. Gray highlighted Tunisia's strategic importance for U.S.A. after the January 14 Revolution, laying emphasis on his country's will to assist the country in its democratic transition.

He said that "the success of this Revolution is a message of hope to all peoples across the world."

The meeting was an occasion to review the development of Tunisian-American relations and means to "hoist them to the highest level in the various co-operation fields, in addition to the exchange views on the different regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Tunisia Granted Membership to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

04 January 2012

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) announced yesterday, January 4, that Tunisia has been afforded membership to the Bank.

Through a press release, EBRD asserted that Tunisia is developing into a target country for the Bank's investors.

The Bank declared that it currently has the capacity to invest 2.5 Billion Euros each year in the eastern and southern Mediterranean.

It was simultaneously announced that Jordan was also granted membership. Both Jordan and Tunisia sought membership to the bank since 2011, seeing it as opportunity to facilitate economic reform and gain funding for a number of critical developmental initiatives.

The EBRD was established in 1991 to assist Eastern European and former Soviet Union countries transition to open market economies. The EBRD currently operates in 29 different countries, and receives funding from 61 countries and 2 intergovernmental organizations. The bank primarily provides funding to projects within the private sector in an effort to support transition to market economies and "pluralistic democratic societies."

Hamas Leader Ismail Haniyeh Visits Tunisia

04 January 2012

Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas Prime Minister of Gaza is visiting Tunisia on January 5th. Haneya who is making his first official trip abroad since his Islamist movement took over the Gaza Strip in 2007 has already been welcomed in

Turkey and Egypt and is scheduled to visit Qatar, Bahrain and Iran after Tunisia.

Haniyeh's is scheduled to stay in Tunisia for four days. "The government will host him only for one day. The rest of his trip will be hosted by civil society organizations and political parties," stated Lotfi Zitoun, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali's political adviser.

Zoubair Chhoudi, Ennahda's spokesperson said that Haneveh's trip will include visits to different Tunisian regions. "His agenda will consist of visiting Kairouan, Sidi Bouzid and maybe attending the celebration of the Revolution's first anniversary in Kasserine," explained Zoubair Chhoudi.

Some Tunisian organizations have recently invited a group of high ranking Hamas officials to Tunisia on the occasion of the anniversary of the Israeli war against the Gaza Strip.

Senator Joe Lieberman - United States Supports New Government

29 December 2011

Today Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT) announced the U.S. Government's support for the change in Tunisia's Government at the American Embassy in Tunis.

Lieberman praised the leadership of the new Tunisian government for acting to provide the country with stability and for moving forward in the process of rewriting the country's constitution.

"Although in my meetings with the President and Prime Minister they expressed that they did not think we have done everything we could do, I give my firm commitment that our support has been all we can provide now," Lieberman declared, after reiterating that the U.S. Congress passed \$30 million in loan guarantees as well as \$20 million for a U.S.-Tunisia Enterprise fund to promote increased American private sector investment in Tunisia.

The recent visit of Ennahda's leader Sheikh Rachid Ghannouchi to Washington DC was hailed as widely successful by Lieberman. During his visit Ghannouchi reassured the officials he met with that there is no inconsistency between Islamism and protecting the rights of women and minorities.

"When we talk about Islamism in the U.S. and around the western world, we have to be careful, because that covers a wide spectrum... Ennahda can do a tremendous service to the entire world by demonstrating that there is no inconsistency between moderation and Islamism," Lieberman said.

Lieberman also reiterated that there are no forces in Congress against US support for Tunisia's transition. However, he stated that the one barrier holding back greater US monetary support for Tunisia is the American federal government's current budgetary problems.

He reiterated that he would like to work towards a US-Tunisian Free Trade Agreement in the long term, which would strengthen economic ties between business communities in both the United States and Tunisia

Tunisia deposits OIC charter ratification documents

26 December 2011

Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, received on Wednesday 21 December 2011 Ambassador Najib Mnif, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to Riyadh and Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the OIC, who came to deposit Tunisia' ratification instrument for the OIC Charter.

On the occasion the Secretary General on his own behalf and that of the OIC once again congratulated the Tunisian Ambassador and people over the democratic process that followed the blessed revolution which resulted in the election of the Constituent National Council and of Dr Mohamed Moncef Marzouki as president through a free and transparent democratic process. He also congratulated them on the unveiling of a new government which run the country during the upcoming constituent period.

The Secretary General reiterated the solidarity of the OIC with the Republic of Tunisia assuring it of the Organisation's support to achieve the objectives of the revolution and the aspirations of the Tunisian people for the entrenchment of the principles of pluralism, human rights, good governance, democracy, the rule of law and institutions to bring about security, stability, progress and prosperity for the country.

The Secretary General noted that the Republic of Tunisia's lodgement of its ratification instruments for the OIC Charter, reiterates Tunisia's role and effective presence in the OIC. It is also a statement of its full commitment to supporting joint Islamic action and its participation in all of the Organisation's activities in various fields.

NCA speaker confers with President of Women's Parliamentary Network in APF

12 December 2011

BARDO (TAP) - National Constituent Assembly (NCA) speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar conferred, on Monday morning in the NCA seat, with President of the Women's Parliamentary Network in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie (APF) Françoise Parisot, as well as the delegation accompanying her.

Mr. Mustapha Ben Jaafar underlined the role played, henceforth, by women in the Tunisian parliamentary life, through their representation, on the qualitative and quantitative level, in the NCA which enables them to participate efficiently in political life, particularly, in the elaboration of the new constitution of the country to meet the aspirations and the expectation of the Tunisian people.

In turn, the Francophonie parliamentary delegation voiced admiration for the democratic transition experience in Tunisia, reasserting confidence in the capacity of Tunisian women to accomplish their mission in this legislative authority.

The delegation asserted readiness to boost co-operation with Tunisia by presenting their experience in this field, commending the diversity of belongings of the NCA, which materialises the riches of the new parliamentary life in Tunisia.

Besides, President of Women's Parliamentary Network in the APF and the delegation accompanying her had a working session with a women delegation represented in the NCA, which turned on the role of women in the parliamentary councils and in political life, in general, as well as on means to promote their performance and intensify exchange of experiences and expertise.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Meeting in Tripoli to achieve economic complementarity

08 January 2012

About 80 Tunisian businessmen operating in various sectors attended on 8 January 2012 in Tripoli a Tunisian-Libyan meeting on the following subject "For an Effective Economic Complementarity".

Held by the Confederation of Tunisia's Socially-Aware Enterprises Connect, in close cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Tripoli and the Libyan Businessmen's Club, this meeting, attended by about 100 Libyan investors and businessmen, is part of efforts to boost bilateral cooperation and the development process in the two neighbouring countries while seeing to establish new business relations.

Tunisia adopts 2012 budget: 4.5% GDP growth in 2012

03 January 2012

Tunisia approved a nearly 23 billion dinar budget last Friday (December 30th), a 7.5% increase over a year ago, with the majority of the expenditures set aside for social development.

Constituent Assembly Speaker Mustapha Ben Jaâfer said the process was dictated by circumstances prevailing in the country and the size of the challenges, pointing out that the major share of the budget was allocated to wages, amounting to 37%.

Finance Minister Houcine Dimassi said that the budget seeks "to respond, to the maximum extent possible, to the aspirations of the people, especially employment and disadvantaged areas and groups, despite the difficulties and challenges that are expected to affect 2012 budget revenues". Dimassi said the European economic crisis, social unrest and on-going sit-ins will have a negative impact on the nation's budget. Europe is Tunisia's largest trading partner.

"The conditions for successful implementation of this budget are stabilisation of the security situation in the country, achieving social harmony between the political and social sides, and acceptance by different groups of sacrifice to overcome this difficult year," the minister said. He called for avoiding "over-indebtedness so that the state is not financially dependent on the outside".

Regional Development Minister Jameleddine Gharbi stressed the need for concerted efforts by all parties to contribute to the development and success of slated projects, pointing out that the biggest problems in Tunisia are the large disparity between areas, along with unemployment and the efficacy of the economic system.

The social and development sector accounted for the greatest share of expenses in the state's draft budget for the year 2012. Approximately 55 million dinars were earmarked for improving living conditions and creating jobs in inland and disadvantaged areas. On the other hand, the government backed down on an amendment of fuel subsidy expenditures, which will remain in the range of 1.365 billion dinars next year.

The 2012 budget also aims to achieve 4.5% GDP growth and roughly 75,000 new jobs. Forty-per cent of the budget will be dedicated to underdeveloped regions, according to Gharbi.

According to the latest statistics, the unemployment rate is around 18% and the poverty rate is at 24%, while the economic growth rate has not exceeded 0% over the past three years and foreign investment declined by 31.9%.

As a way out of this crisis and to achieve the set of goals put forth in the draft budget for the current year, the government approved austerity measures in public expenditures.

"We will be austere in budget expenditure at all levels, from the presidency to government agencies, ministries,

offices and public companies," Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali said.

Tunisia Ranked Second Internationally in Therapeutic Tourism

02 January 2012

Tunisia ranked second in thalassotherapy tourism for another consecutive year, despite a 60 % regression in the medical-tourism sector in 2011. Thalassotherapy is a therapeutic skin-treatment method, where mineral elements present in sea-water are believed to have health-related benefits when absorbed through the skin.

By combining the comfort of luxury hotels with the rejuvenation of natural mineral-therapy treatments, Tunisia has attracted an increasing number of tourists who flock to the balmy shores of the Mediterranean to enjoy a relaxing vacation in one of the country's lavish thalassic hotels.

Touristic health-resorts have experienced rapid growth in Tunisia, with state-of-the-art clinics emerging in Sousse, Hammamet, Djerba, and Gammarth. The practices of these centers are regulated strictly under international standards to ensure their authenticity.

The country's relative head start in therapeutic tourism, which was initiated in 1994, and the presence of numerous high-quality medical resorts are believed to be factors that account for the recent success of this sector.

The health-tourism sector attracts approximately 150 thousand international tourists and ten thousand Tunisians annually.

CULTURE

Tunisia Celebrates Its Sense of Humor With Comedy Festival

02 January 2012

To jump-start the new year, Tunisia is holding its fourth annual comedy festival, "Tunis Fait sa Comédie," (Tunis makes its comedy). The event began on December 31st at the municipal theater on Avenue Habib Bourgiba in Tunis, and is expected to conclude on April 9th.

This year's festivities were organized by the Tunisian telecommunications agency – Telecom – in collaboration with the French Tunisian Institute (FTI). Seven comedy shows have been scheduled.

Among the comedy shows planned for this year are: "The Amazons" – to be performed on January 18th. The performance is directed by Jean Pierre Dravel and Olivier Macé, and stars Sonia Dubois, Michéle Garcia, and Fiona Gelini. The second show will begin on February 28th, with "It All Stays in the Family" – a comedy produced by Bernard Granger and directed by Maurice Risch.

"My Dear Colleagues," will be performed on March 22nd. Directed by Jean Yves Girin, this performance stars the Tunisian humorist Farid Omri.

Two comedic plays are to be performed in the Tunisian-Arabic dialect during the festival: "The Clan of the Divorced" (March 8th), directed by Alil Vardar, and "Turkey Couscous" (April 19th), directed by Mathieu and Aicha Lebru. These comedies will be performed by Tunisia's Ferid Omri and France's Odd Lénard.

'Birth of Arab Spring' Celebrated in Tozeur

30 December 2011

The International Oasis Festival of Tozeur, which began on December the 28th, is expected to conclude later today. The theme of this year's celebration was defined by the phrase, "Here the Arab Spring was born," commemorating the wave of popular democratic uprisings in the Arabic-speaking world.

Talented artists gathered in the southern-Tunisian city from Iran, Egypt, Indonesia and Tunisia. The festival offered spectacular artistic performances, and creatively choreographed presentations to their audience. More than 7000 spectators gathered from all over Tunisia to attend the event.

The festival consisted of various artistic presentations, which included poetry, traditional crafts, dramatic performances, and diverse music. The atmosphere was characterized by cheery festiveness, celebrating the Tunisian Revolution and honoring Tunisia's martyrs.

One of the more memorable scenes of the festival involved a performance by a troupe of miners. The mine workers mounted the stage waving flags of various Arab countries, while a group of young people filed into the front row brandishing Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan flags. The presentation was concluded with the oration of a poem recalling the birth of the Arab Spring.

Patriotic symbolism emanated from nearly every artistic work. One performance, involving a group of young Tunisian dancers, traced the journey of each dancer to unfasten the chains shackling them - personifying Tunisians' struggles to free themselves from the burden of oppression. The scene concluded with the group joining in

solidarity, symbolizing the civic unity that defined the Tunisian Revolution

The closing ceremony of the festival is expected to present an optimistic image for the future of a free Tunisia.

Tunisian Fashion Designers Shine Abroad

24 December 2011

Tunisian designers have not only influenced fashion trends in Tunisia, but on the international-level as well. Several Tunisian designers have stood out prominently in recent years, and their products have received international acclaim on the covers of fashion magazines, in exhibitions, and on the runway.

Haythem Bouhamed, a 37 year old Tunisian fashion designer, has gained significant notoriety abroad, particularly in the Arab Gulf. His label "Haythem Bouhamed," of Haute Couture lines, includes accessories, ready-to-wear items, and even wedding gowns. Bouhamed discovered his passion at the School of Fashion Design in Tunisia. The skills he developed during his education led him to win a New York fashion competition, which opened doors to a future of endless possibilities. Inspired by Tunisian culture, and his artistic parents, this outstanding designer is currently concentrating his efforts on the high fashion markets in both Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

Another distinguished Tunisian fashion designer is Azzedine Alaya, a 71 year old couturier and shoe designer. In spite of his humble beginnings in Tunisia, Alaya has designed dresses worn by America's First, Lady Michelle Obama, and France's First Lady, Carla Bruni. Early in his career, Alaya worked under the tutelage of famous French designers such as Christian Dior, and Guy Laroche. French fashion magazines promoted a number of his designs, which were later sold in New York and throughout the world. Celebrities including Madonna, Janet Jackson, and Tina Turner have also donned a number of his creations. After working with Prada, and various other highly regarded brands, Alaya won several Academy and Fashion Awards. He has subsequently been honored by celebrities and government officials alike.

Sulaika Zarrouk and Max Azria are among other Tunisian designers who have helped to shape Tunisia's reputation as producer of fashion success stories.

Former Finance Minister performs in Washington DC Kennedy Center

27 December 2011

Jaloul Ayed, Tunisia's previous Minister of Finance, will be performing in a concert at the Performing Arts Center in

the Kennedy Center, Washington D.C., on January 9, 2012.

Jaloul Ayed will be performing his symphony, titled "Hannibal Barca," in honor of the one year anniversary of the Tunisian uprisings." The symphony was first performed on February 19th, 2009, in Casablanca by Morocco's Philharmonic Orchestra to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Moroccan Bank of External Commerce (BMCE).

The symphony highlights the life of the Tunisian historic legend, Hannibal, in three parts: The Carthage Pride, The Long Trip, and The Glorious March.

His other works of art include, "Touch of Life," a piano concerto that was performed by Morocco's Philharmonic Orchestra, and "Mogador," which was performed in Morocco by Morocco's Philharmonic Orchestra and in Tunisia by the Tunisian Symphonic Orchestra in May 2008.

Jaloul Ayed performed several times in Tunisia and Morocco.

Tunisian blogger activist awarded Rome Prize for Peace and Human Action

23 December 2011

TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisian Blogger and activist Lina Ben M'henni, better known as "Tunisian Girl" on her blog, was awarded on Thursday the Rome Prize for Peace and Human Action.

At the prize awarding ceremony, held by the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome Mayor said that the prize was awarded to the Tunisian blogger to testify to the importance of popular movements which are capable of bringing about huge historical changes by peaceful means, and "only with the power of ideas."

It is worth reminding that this prize, created in 1994, had been awarded to such important figures and organisations like Mother Theresa, Muhammad Yunus, Medecins sans frontiE res, Khady Keita, etc.