



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

May 2011

TUNISIA & JAPAN	4
ケフィ・チュニジア共和国外務大臣の来日.....	4
松本外務大臣とケフィ・チュニジア共和国外務大臣との会談.....	4
民主国家建設に自信 資質あるとチュニジア外相.....	4
リビア人帰国へ国際支援強化を＝難民問題、欧州の対応期待－チュニジア外相.....	4
チュニジアからの支援物資の受け入れ.....	5
Tunisia sends humanitarian aid to Japan.....	5
Japan calls on international community to help Tunisia's democratic transition.....	5
JICA cooperation for the improvement of Tunisian enterprise's productivity.....	5
POLITICS	5
Prime Minister reacts to former Interior Minister Farhat Rajhi declarations that provoked public unrest.....	5
Military court kicks off investigation in case of deposed President and his security subordinates.....	7
Antiterrorism actions in Tunisia.....	7
High Independent Authority for Elections formed. Majority of members of the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition expresses attachment to the date of July 24 for the Constituent Assembly's election.....	8
High Authority for Elections suggests delaying vote to next October 16.....	9
Cabinet recommend to keep date of July 24 for National Constituent Assembly's election.....	9
High Independent Election Committee sticks to October 16 date.....	10
Delay of election date to October 16 dividing political parties.....	10
High Independent Authority for Elections accounts for reasons behind deferral of ballot.....	10
Constituent Assembly's election: Interim Government leaves door open for negotiations.....	11
Rached Ghannouchi: "postponing election date is abandoning consensus".....	11
Interim PM receives PDP Secretary-General : need to shorten as much as possible the transitory phase.....	11
FDTL describes as "reasonable" postponement of election date.....	11
Ettajdid's A. Ibrahim: "Controversy surrounding postponement of elections game of one-upmanship".....	11
Constitutional Assembly: 218 seats, 19 of which for Tunisians abroad.....	11
Constituent Assembly's election set for October 23.....	12
Total authorisations to political parties stand at 81.....	12
DIPLOMACY	13
Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kéfi pays working visit to France.....	13
French President's Envoy: "France willing to help Tunisia in every way possible".....	13
Large gathering in Tunis to support Palestinian cause.....	13
Tunisia calls for political and peaceful solution in Yemen.....	13
Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi receives French Interior Minister.....	13

Tunisia Newsletter

Interim President Foued Mebazaa receives Polish Senate Speaker	14
Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi visits France - President Sarkozy: France stands with Tunisia on road to democracy	14
Tunisia takes part in Arab League Council extraordinary interministerial meeting	15
Qatar's will to increase efforts of development and investment in Tunisia	16
China supports Tunisian people and transition process	16
Tunisia hails US efforts to mobilise international support for its benefit.....	16
UAE's full readiness to support Tunisia at political and economic levels and further strengthen co-operation	16
Qatar reasserts support to Tunisia at transition stage	17
Caretaker President receives Qatar's International Co-operation State Minister	17
Interim President receives written message from Emir of Kuwait.....	17
European Investment Bank steps up support to democratic transition in Tunisia	18
Tunisia takes part in Non-Aligned Movement 16th Ministerial Conference	18
British Minister for the Middle East and North Africa: "Tunisia has had the virtue of being the driving force of change in the Arab world"	18
Justice Minister receives Special UNO Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.....	19
Tunisia's participation in the G8 Summit.....	19
Request for UN aid to manage situation on borders and organise elections	19
Tunisia calls on G8 leaders to adopt plan of support to its revolution	20
Sarkozy: France to grant one-billion-euro aid to Egypt and Tunisia.....	20
Interim PM: Tunisia "not satisfied" but re-assured.....	21
G-8: "positive" promises that need to be delivered.....	21
UNDP's keenness to contribute in various development areas in Tunisia.....	22
Interim Prime Minister receives Dutch Foreign Minister	22
Foreign Minister briefs Caretaker President about outcome of working visits to brotherly and friendly states.....	22
Tunisia-Libya Border situation:	23
Dehiba: 100 mortar shells land in national territory	23
Tataouine: infiltration attempt by pro-Gaddafi forces foiled	23
Libyan officials cross Ras Jedir border point	23
Mortar shells fall again near Wazen-Dhehiba crossing from Libyan side of border	23
Two high-ranking Libyan officials on Tunisian territory.....	24
US humanitarian aid to refugees in Ras Jedir	24
WHO praises Tunisia's care for refugees fleeing Libya	24
UNHCR express appreciation for Tunisia's dealing with the massive flow of refugees fleeing Libya	25
Tunisia warns Libya over border shelling	25
Libyan car loaded with highly sophisticated telecommunication equipment intercepted in Djerba	25
Ras Jedir: Several Libyan politicians cross to Tunisia.....	25
BUSINESS & ECONOMY	25
"Two Hundred Manifesto" to support Tunisian economy on eve of G8 Summit	25
Services sector: Rise in FDI.....	26
Totally-exporting industrial project to be operational shortly in Jendouba	26
UTICA calls to restore security to save economy	26
Economists issue call to G8 to adopt road-map for Tunisia.....	26
FDI fell by 24.5% in first four months of 2011	27
Main economic indicators of this year's first 4 months.....	27
Tunisia's exports to Libya down 32%.....	27
Tunisia-South Korean shellfish farming project	27
Zoellick: 1 billion dollars for Tunisia in support for budget and investment projects	28
Forty-billion-dollar aid to "Arab Spring" countries	28
Tunisian economy remains strong despite impacts of Revolution and crisis in Libya	28

SOCIETY	29
Interim President addresses Tunisian people on Labour Day	29
Tunisian-European agreement on regionalisation and employment.....	30
Woman to chair Tunisian Judges Union	30
First "employment-training" cheques handed to 7 Tunisian firms.....	30
Rate of poverty estimated at 24.7%.....	30
Interim Government to initiate national consultation on economic and social programme	31
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT	31
British Gas "forced to shut down" if sit-ins in front of its plant go on.....	31
Tunisia to produce 244 MW from wind energy in 2012.....	31
WB ready to carry on funding environmental projects in Tunisia.....	32
TOURISM & CULTURE	32
Launching of first post-Revolution tourism campaign	32
Cruising: resumption confirmed	32
Tunisian tourism's new promotion campaign in Algeria	32
World Bank plan to promote eco-tourism in South Tunisia.....	33
Tourist project to be launched soon in Kerkennah.....	33
"Jasmine Village" exhibit in Paris May 21-22.....	33
About 70 French personalities visiting Tunisia for "Voyage du jasmin" on May 7-10	33
Tunisian cinema honoured.....	34
Albert Londres Prize Association chairwoman: "Tunisia's choice, this year, is a friendship and solidarity gesture".....	34
Cannes pays tribute to Tahar Cheriaa	34
Cannes Film Festival: Tunisian pavilion attracts foreign film directors and producers	34
Banderas hails "Tunisians' bravery".....	34
Tunisian Culture Days open in Tlemcen	35
Tunisia takes part in Islamic Cultural Week in Rome.....	35

TUNISIA & JAPAN

ケフィ・チュニジア共和国外務大臣の来日

外務省プレスリリース 平成 23 年 5 月 20 日

1. 5 月 21 日（土曜日）から 24 日（火曜日）の日程で、モハメド・ムルディ・ケフィ・チュニジア共和国外務大臣が、来日します。
2. ケフィ外務大臣は、滞在中、松本剛明外務大臣との会談を行う予定です。
3. 今回のケフィ外務大臣の訪日を通じて、我が国とチュニジア共和国との友好協力関係が一段と深まることと期待されます。

松本外務大臣とケフィ・チュニジア共和国外務大臣との会談

外務省プレスリリース 平成 23 年 5 月 23 日

本 23 日（月曜日）午後 2 時 30 分から約 45 分間、松本剛明外務大臣は、モハメド・ムルディ・ケフィ・チュニジア共和国外務大臣と、外務省において会談を行ったところ、概要以下のとおりです。

1. 東日本大震災
冒頭、松本大臣から、東日本大震災について、チュニジアからお見舞いや支援を頂いたことに対する心からの感謝の意を表明しました。これに対し、ケフィ大臣からは、今回の訪日の第一の目的は、日本政府及び国民に対するお見舞いの気持ちを伝えることであり、今回の大震災に関連するチュニジアからの支援は、50 年以上にわたる日本のチュニジアへの支援への感謝の気持ちの表れである旨の発言がありました。
2. 二国間関係
(1) ケフィ外相から、民主的体制への移行の早期実現に関するチュニジアの決意と、右実現に向けた日本を始めとする国際社会の支援の必要性について説明がありました。
(2) 松本大臣からは、我が国として、これまでの良好な二国間関係に基づき、チュニジアの安定的な体制移行と改革努力を支える支援を行っていく方針である旨述べました。また、今後行われるチュニジア政変後初の選挙となる制憲国民議会選挙が透明で公正なものとなるよう、我が国としてもミッションの派遣等により支援していきたい旨述べました。
3. 国際場裡における協力
ケフィ外相から、引き続き我が国の国連安保理常任理事国入りを支持している旨の発言がありました。

民主国家建設に自信 資質あるとチュニジア外相

2011 年 05 月 23 日

来日中のチュニジア暫定政府のケフィ外相が 23 日、都内で共同通信のインタビューに応じ、反政府デモでベンアリ政権を倒した 1 月の「ジャスミン革命」後に進む

民主国家建設に向けた移行プロセスについて、チュニジアには「民主主義の資質があり成功するだろう」と自信を示した。政変後、チュニジア閣僚の来日は初めて。

ケフィ氏は、チュニジアでは「女性に社会的地位があり、教育水準が高く、中間層が強い」ことなどを挙げ、民主化に必要な条件がそろっていると指摘。また「国民が成熟し民主化への準備ができていた」ことが他のアラブ諸国に先駆けて独裁政権を倒す素地となったと強調した。

ケフィ氏によると、チュニジアでは現在 60 以上の政党が乱立。しかし、近く予定されている新憲法制定に向けた制憲議会選挙の前後には同じ理念を持つ政党が合併し、幾つかの中規模の政党などに落ち着くとの見通しを示した。

一定の影響力があるイスラム勢力については「市民の自由や女性の権利を尊重しており、民主化という現実に対応できる」と述べた。一方、国際テロ組織アルカイダ系勢力の支持者は「300～400 人程度にすぎない」と示した。

チュニジアの民主化プロセスは、7 月 24 日に制憲議会選挙が予定されているが、選挙管理当局は今月 22 日、準備不足から 10 月 16 日に延期するよう要請した。ケフィ氏はこれから決まるとしつつも、国民や国際社会への約束であり政府の信頼性が問われるとして「期日通り 7 月に実施したい」と語り、順調に進めば年内に憲法を制定できるとの見方を示した。（共同）

日本に再建支援求める 来日のチュニジア外相

2011 年 05 月 23 日

来日中のチュニジア暫定政府のケフィ外相が 23 日、東京都内で記者会見し、反政府デモでベンアリ政権を倒した 1 月の「ジャスミン革命」後、外国人観光客の減少などに伴って国内の失業者が急増、内戦状態の隣国リビアから多くの難民も流入しているとして国際社会に援助を訴えた。日本政府には同日、5 年間の国家再建計画を説明、支援を求めたという。政変後、チュニジア閣僚の来日は初めて。

観光業は人口約 1 千万人のチュニジアの国内総生産（GDP）の約 7% を占め、主要産業の一つ。ケフィ氏は政変後の混乱で観光業が打撃を受けたことなどにより、失業者が現在約 70 万人に上っていると指摘。リビアで職を失ったチュニジア人約 4 万人も帰国し、雇用状況が悪化していると述べた。

さらに、リビアから約 30 万人の難民がチュニジアに押し寄せ、うち約 16 万人が今もとどまっていると説明。リビア人難民は「帰国すれば殺される」ため、チュニジア国民全体で食料や避難所を提供していると訴え、財政支援とともにリビア情勢の安定化に向けた協力を求めた。

チュニジアの選挙管理当局が 22 日、新憲法制定に向け 7 月 24 日に予定されていた制憲議会選挙を準備不足から 10 月 16 日に延期するよう要請したことについて、ケフィ氏は選挙の期日は国民や国際社会への約束であるとしながらも「政党や世論、国際社会の声を聞いて見極めたい」と述べた。（共同）

リビア人帰国へ国際支援強化を＝難民問題、欧州の対応期待－チュニジア外相

(2011/05/23) チュニジアのケフィ外相は23日、都内で記者会見し、リビア情勢混乱で大量の同国国民が越境してチュニジアに押し寄せていることについて「現段階で16万人いる。帰還させれば（混乱の中で）殺害されてしまう」と指摘。帰国実現に向け、日本を含む国際社会がリビア安定化に向けた支援を強化するよう訴えた。

1月に政変が起きたチュニジアから職を求める若者らがイタリアなどに大量密航した問題では「欧州に渡ったのは2万人で、チュニジアがリビアから受け入れた数とはスケールが違う。人口はチュニジアが1000万人なのに対し、欧州は5億人で受け皿も大きい」と述べ、欧州側が自発的に受け入れを進めるべきだとの認識を示した。

一方、オバマ米大統領が演説で、イスラエルとパレスチナの国境を1967年の第3次中東戦争直前の境界線に基づいて決めるべきだとの見解を示したことを「世界のほかの人々と同様に歓迎し、称賛する」と語った。

(時事)

チュニジアからの支援物資の受け入れ

外務省プレスリリース 平成23年5月17日

1. 5月16日（月曜日）、東日本大震災を受けて、チュニジアからの支援物資であるツナ缶6万個が成田空港に到着しました。到着したツナ缶は、宮城県に供与される予定です。

2. チュニジア政府からは、地震発生後に、フアード・ムバッザア暫定大統領、ベジ・カイド・エセブシ首相、モハメド・ムルディ・ケフィ外務大臣等から哀悼の意とお見舞いが表されました。また、4月には、駐日チュニジア大使館により、石巻市に支援ミッションが派遣され、同市で救援物資の提供や炊き出しが行われました。

我が国政府として、チュニジア政府の協力に深く感謝します

Tunisia sends humanitarian aid to Japan

TUNIS, May 13, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisia's Foreign Ministry announced Friday that humanitarian aid will be dispatched to Japan after the earthquake and tsunami that hit the country last March, causing huge human and material damage.

This burst of solidarity decided by the Interim Government testifies to the close friendly ties, the strength of bilateral relations and the importance of solidarity which is deep-rooted in Tunisians' minds, says the Foreign Ministry communique.

Japan's Government is one of the first countries to have supported the Revolution of dignity and liberty in Tunisia, also reads the communique.

Japan calls on international community to help Tunisia's democratic transition

TUNIS May 23 2011 (TAP) - Japan's Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto called on the international community to help Tunisia in its democratic transition.

Receiving Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, on a visit in Japan, the head of Japanese diplomacy also stressed the excellent relations binding the two countries, specifies a Foreign Ministry's communique.

On this occasion, Japan's Foreign Minister extended thanks to Tunisia for its solidarity burst vis-à-vis Japan following the earthquake and the tsunami that hit the country last March 11.

Mr. Kéfi also had talks with Ms. Sadako Ogata, chairwoman of Japanese International Co-operation (JICA), who reasserted her support to Tunisia and JICA's commitment to carry on its job-creation projects, particularly in the underprivileged areas of the country.

Besides, Mr. Kéfi had a working session with Japanese MPs and met Mr. Yoshiro Mori, chairman of the Japan-Tunisia Parliamentary Friendship Association and former Prime Minister.

Tunisia's FM started his visit in Japan on Sunday by a meeting with members of the Tunisian expatriate community.

JICA cooperation for the improvement of Tunisian enterprise's productivity

TUNIS May 27, 2011 (TAP) - A seminar on: "Productivity Improvement: Pillar for the Enterprise's Sustainability" was organised on Friday in Tunis, at the initiative of the National Quality Improvement Programme's Management Unit (UGPQ) stemming from the Industry and Technology Ministry, in association with the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA).

The meeting aims to promote good Japanese practices in matters of improving productivity and modalities of their application by industrial enterprises.

As regards co-operation between Tunisia and Japan, UGPQ Director Amel Ben Frahat reviewed the components of the Tunisian-Japanese pilot co-operation project achieved by JICA and Japan's Productivity Centre (JPC).

The project targets 60 pilot firms operating in the electrical, mechanical industries and packaging sectors, and will help 20 experts from the Mechanical and Electrical Industries Technical Centre (CETIME) and the Technical Packaging Centre (PACKTEC) to make the most of the Japanese experience.

This project, which is expected to end in 2013, aims to improve human resources' capacities and consolidate the firm's added-value.

Mr. Takeshi Fujita, a Japanese expert in productivity improvement within JPC, specified that enterprises could improve their productivity through a fair sharing of profits, consolidation of productivity, encouragement of team work and co-operation between management and employees.

POLITICS

Prime Minister reacts to former Interior Minister Farhat Rajhi declarations that provoked public unrest

TUNIS, May 9, 2011 (TAP) - The recent declarations of former Interior Minister Farhat Rajhi are "dangerous and completely unfounded" and come from "a totally

irresponsible and treacherous person," said Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi .

Speaking at a TV debate Sunday, Mr. Caïd Essebsi affirmed that the accusations made by Rajhi about a "shadow Government" are "trivial and ungrounded," adding that "the only Government now ruling the country is the Interim Government" and warning that he did not allow anyone to interfere with his decisions as Prime Minister.

Explaining why Rajhi had been dismissed from the Interior Ministry, the Interim PM said that contrary to what the latter had claimed he had been replaced owing to his poor performance and his misappreciation of the machinery of the State.

Rajhi, he added, had appointed a Director General of the National Security Department without even seeking advice from the President of the Republic or the Prime Minister. "It is highly likely that Rajhi has been manipulated," the Interim PM reckoned, stressing that all his declarations confirm his ignorance notably when he spoke of a possible coup in case 'Ennahdha' Movement wins the elections and when he charged "people of the Sahel region" with keeping a stranglehold on power.

"These accusations are very dangerous and aim to stir up ill-feeling and sow discord in the country," he noted, affirming that justice should make a ruling about these declarations since the national Defence Ministry had decided to refer this case to justice.

The Interim PM also said that the declarations of Rajhi were made following the consensus reached by the Government and the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution objectives, Political Reform and Transition to Democracy on Article 15, which allows some doubt about his intentions and those of his partners.

As regards the recent security drift in the capital and in several other cities, Mr. Beji Caïd Essebsi explained that the security staff had felt "offended and affected " and were now suffering a psychological chock and a breakdown in trust, stating in this regard the decision made by the Interior Ministry to prosecute several policemen whose involvement had been confirmed in the violence against citizens and journalists during the demonstrations staged at the end of last week in Tunis .

With respect to prisons and their staff, the PM said they are also living through a crisis and carrying on professional and social claims, stressing that the Government is now unable to meet all these claims. The directors of some prisons, he added, had even demanded not to prosecute one of their colleagues accused of killing a prisoner, which is impossible "out of our commitment to the independence of justice and non-interference in its affairs."

Speaking of the developments of the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan borders, the PM declared that Tunisia had hosted Libyan brothers and provided them with the necessary medical care without exclusion, denying rumours that NATO had requested Tunisia to let it carry out land military operations in Libya.

As to the economic field, Mr. Beji Caïd Essebsi pointed up that the Interim Government had granted priority to inland areas in development plans and scheduled several large-scale projects for their benefit to provide employment.

In case the security drift persists together with strikes, protests and professional and social claims nationwide, he said, " national economy will lose a lot," concluding that the Interim Government is resolutely committed to protect the people's revolution and gains.

Farhat Rajhi apologises to National Army

TUNIS, May 15, 2011 (TAP)- Mr. Farhat Rajhi, former Interior Minister, urged calm and called on the Tunisian people to return to schools and work to build the new Tunisia and revive its economy so as to ensure the success of the democratic process.

"It is also important to entrench freedoms, promote investment, create jobs and eradicate pockets of poverty," underlined Mr. Rajhi in a letter, a copy of which was received by TAP, following his remarks that caused a stir in the Tunisian street.

The former Interior Minister said these statements "are mere assumptions and personal conclusions," underlining that he was victim of a "maneuver aimed at harming the stability of Tunisia and undermining the National Army."

He apologised in this letter to the National Army and its senior officers for "the harm caused to them by the maneuvers and tendentious interpretations."

"I never intended to harm this national body that oversees the protection of the people, the country and the nation and largely contributes to the security prevailing now both within the country and at the national borders," he said.

Mr. Rajhi expressed, in this regard, his feelings of esteem and consideration to General Rachid Ammar, stressing the patriotic role he had played in the darkest moments of the Revolution.

The former Interior Minister had sparked a controversy following his statements posted on Facebook on the role of the National Army and Ennahdha party, in particular.

Higher Council of Judiciary rejects request to waive Judge Farhat Rajhi's immunity

TUNIS May 21 (TAP) - The Higher Council of the Judiciary rejected the request to waive the immunity of Judge Farhat Rajhi.

Waiver of the immunity "is limited to acts of a judge in the exercise of his duty and that are legally incriminated, said the council, which met on Saturday at the headquarters of the Justice Ministry.

Statements of Farhat Rajhi, it adds, are "mere assumptions considered as personal political analyses while assuming a political duty and consequently are considered only a breach of the obligation as to circumspection."

AMT satisfied at refusal to waive Judge Farhat Rajhi's immunity

TUNIS (TAP) - The Executive Board of Tunisian Judges' Association (AMT) voiced satisfaction at the Higher Judiciary Council's decision to reject the request to waive Judge Farhat Rajhi's immunity.

The AMT executive board pointed out that "solution to this crisis would prevent the devastating repercussions on

stability of the judicial system and the general situation in the country."

In a statement made public on Saturday, the Board said that the decision has given reason to "the judicious approach adopted by AMT in handling the crisis," wishing that this decision would help overcome once and for all this controversial issue.

Military court kicks off investigation in case of deposed President and his security subordinates

TUNIS, May 14, 2011 (TAP) - The investigating judge of the Tunis standing military court started enquiry into the case of ousted President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, his former Interior Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem, Police Officer retiree Jalel Boudriga and all persons whose involvement was evidenced by the inquest.

An authorised Military Justice source pointed out, on Saturday, that the investigating judge to whom this case was referred by the Tunis Court of Appeal, last May 11, started procedures at a sustained pace, in compliance with the case's requirements, in order to unveil truth and enlighten the public opinion in a reasonable time.

The same source adds, in a communiqué by the National Defence Ministry, that the investigating judge issued a committal against retired colonel major of the intervention units Jalel Boudriga after his arrest.

Moreover, committals were issued against former Public Security Director Superintendent General Lotfi Zouaoui and former Special Services Director Rachid Ben Abid who are also involved in the case.

The communiqué adds that the investigation will be conducted at a sustained pace, in compliance with the requirements of criminal justice, to identify and arrest those who committed crimes and to adopt the appropriate procedure, while respecting all legal guarantees.

Antiterrorism actions in Tunisia

Two terrorists arrested in Remada (Interior Ministry)

TUNIS, May 15, 2011 (TAP) - Units of the National Guard and Security of Remada, on Saturday, arrested two terrorists in the region of Douar Nekrif (delegation of Remada), announced the Interior Ministry.

In a communiqué released Sunday, the ministry said that one of the terrorists, aged 31, has an Algerian nationality and is nicknamed "Abu Muslim," while the second, aged 32, is of Libyan origin and is nicknamed "Abu Batin."

During the assault launched on the area where the terrorists were, one of them tried to throw a hand grenade on the units of the National Guard and Security but the grenade failed to detonate, adds the communiqué.

The second terrorist tried to activate an explosive belt but the units of the National Guard and Security prevented him in due time.

After interrogating both individuals, it appeared that one of the two terrorists had arrived in Tunisia last April 24 via the Jebel Khifouf, from Jebel El Maa Abyath (Algerian region of Bir Atir).

The second said he had visited Algeria in 2007 and received training in the Jebel Al Abyath before settling in the Tunisian territory 25 days ago.

The second terrorist confessed to having a Kalashnikov gun and 150 bullets hidden in one of the mountains of Medenine.

The Interior Ministry also said that National Guard and Security units had confiscated, during this assault, a geolocation device "GPS" as well as two mobile phones, in addition to a fake Libyan passport, European currency and Tunisian dinars.

The explosive belt was seized in co-ordination with the local military services before bringing the two terrorists arrested to the Division of Fight against Terrorism so as to continue the investigation into this matter.

It should be noted that the security authorities had recorded, during these last days, suspicious movements of two foreign nationals in the region of Ben Guedech (Medenine) who fled. Authorities had found a Libyan passport in their luggage.

According to other information collected by security authorities, individuals had entered the Tunisian territory from neighbour countries which requires increasing security vigilance.

Three killed in gun battle in Rouhia

SILIANA (TAP) - Two Maghreb nationals and a National Army officer were killed during a gun battle Wednesday in the northern city of Rouhia (Governorate of Siliana), security sources report.

Two other residents were also wounded in the clash and one of them was transferred to a Tunis hospital in a critical condition.

Eyewitnesses told TAP news agency correspondent that the two residents were heading to the taxi rank of the town of Rouhia carrying big suitcases, which drew the attention of passengers who swiftly informed the Army units.

Upon arrival of the Army, the two suspected persons fled and were chased by the Army and shot down.

They were carrying explosive belts. Their identity will be revealed by the explosive experts expected at the scene.

TAP news agency also learnt that helicopters are now flying over the area and the mountains located near the town of Rouhia.

Interior Ministry provides further details on Ruhia events

TUNIS, May 18, 2011 (TAP) - Special units of the National Army and Guard managed, on Wednesday at about 6:55 a.m., in collaboration with some local inhabitants, to identify a group of three terrorists in the locality of Ruhia, Siliana, the Interior Ministry reported in a communiqué released on Wednesday.

The communiqué said terrorists took refuge in a place located near Ruhia and started shooting on the Army Units and the National Guard, injuring three soldiers, including a senior officer who succumbed to his injuries. Two terrorists were killed on the spot and one escaped, it added.

The same source also said that these persons were intercepted thanks to the efforts made, a few days ago, by the Security Forces and the Army who were following individuals who had recently entered the Tunisian territory.

In this communiqué, the ministries of the Interior and National Defence called on all citizens, particularly public transportation drivers, as well as all road users to be vigilant, urging them to inform concerned services of any suspicious person so as to preserve the national territorial integrity.

PM offers condolences after martyrdom of two Tunisian servicemen

TUNIS May 19 (TAP) - Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi sent two condolences messages—one to National Defence Minister Abdelkrim Zbidi and another to Joint Chief of Staff of the Armies General Rachid Ammar—after martyrs Colonel Taher Ayari and Corporal Walid Hajji had given their lives to defend the homeland and the nation's territorial integrity and fight against the desperate terrorist attempts to shake the country's security and stability, sow chaos and hinder the democratic transition process.

The Prime Minister extended in his messages compassion and prayed Almighty God to bless the two martyrs with His infinite mercy.

Besides, he expressed wishes of prompt recovery to Sergeant Seghaïer Mbarki, extending gratefulness to all National Army units for their patriotic sense, constant vigilance and efforts to protect the Tunisian people's Revolution.

The Prime Minister also sent two condolences and compassion cables to the families of the two martyrs.

High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives condemns Ruhia events

BARDO May 20 (TAP) - The High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives held a meeting on Thursday in Bardo, in the wake of the serious events that took place in Ruhia, Siliana.

Members of the Authority condemned in a statement the criminal aggressions endangering the country's security.

They praised the heroic role of the national Army and security forces.

After paying tribute to the memory of the martyrs who sacrificed themselves to defend the homeland during the Ruhia events, members of the High Authority condemned the criminal attacks that jeopardise the democratic transition process.

They called on the Interim Government to ensure best conditions to assume their mission in defending the homeland in these delicate circumstances.

The High Authority urges all active forces, parties, organisations, associations and media to play their part and tighten the ranks in the face of foreign threats that seek to undermine the national unity and the unanimous will of Tunisians to move forward on the path of building their democratic institutions.

The Authority calls on Tunisians to be watchful and help the different institutions defending the country, citing, for

instance, the exemplary patriotic sense shown by citizens of Ruhia during events that had taken place last Wednesday to preserve the invulnerability of the homeland at economic and social levels.

Higher Islamic Council condemns terrorist acts in Rouhia

TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia's Higher Islamic Council condemned last Wednesday's terrorist acts which had taken place in the Rouhia delegation, Siliana governorate, with the "intent of upsetting the country's unity, thwarting its Revolution and impeding the democratic transition process."

In a communiqué made public on Saturday, the Council extends condolences to the families of martyrs Colonel Tahar Ayari and Corporal Walid Hajji, killed during that terrorist act as they were defending the homeland's integrity.

The Council points out that "such vile acts are explicitly banned by the Koran and rejected by all humanitarian, moral and legal standards."

Besides, Council members pay tribute to the efforts and vigilance of the National Army and interior security forces and citizens of the border areas to preserve security.

They call on parties, associations and organisations to close ranks, to defend the homeland and help unveil all those who are bent on undermining the country's stability and pushing it into a cycle of violence.

High Independent Authority for Elections formed. Majority of members of the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition expresses attachment to the date of July 24 for the Constituent Assembly's election

TUNIS, May 10, 2011 (TAP) - The Council of the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Democratic Transition and Political Reform voted, on Monday afternoon, to choose 13 members of the High Independent Authority for Elections.

Here are the results of the vote in which 126 members out of 161 took part :

- Boubaker Belthabet** of the Bar (103 votes),
- Mohamed Fadhel Mahfoudh** of the Bar (96 votes),
- Ridha Torkhani** of the Bar (87 votes),
- Sami Ben Slama** of the National Association of Solicitors' Chambers (103 votes),
- Nabil Bafoun** of the National Association of Bailiffs (80votes),
- Anouar Ben Hassan** of the National Association of Chartered Accountants (65 votes),
- Larbi Chouikha** of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists (72 votes),
- Kamel Jendoubi**, representative of Tunisian expatriates (112 votes),
- Abderrahman Hedhili** of the Tunisian Federation of Human Rights (90 votes),

- Monia Abed** of the Tunisian Association of Women lawyers (40 votes),
- Zaki Rahmouni**, computer science expert (67 votes),
- Souad Kaley Triki**, representative of women university professors (70 votes),
- Mohamed Seghaier Achouri**, representative of men university professors (46 votes).

The High Independent Authority for Elections is made up of 16 members but only 13 of them have been elected since the association of Tunisian Judges and the Union of Tunisian Magistrates have not presented candidates.

In accordance with the last section of Article 8 of the relevant Government decree and in case no candidacies have been presented in time, the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition appoints members among those who fulfill the conditions defined by the decree .

BARDO, May 17, 2011 (TAP) - The High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, on Monday, went on examining the make-up of the Independent High Elections Authority, in light of the Tunisian Judges Association's refusal to field candidates for the Authority.

Seven judges are candidates for the Independent High Elections Authority.

Elections are scheduled for Tuesday to choose three members and complete the Authority's final line-up.

The majority of the High Authority members expressed attachment to the date of July 24 for the Constituent Assembly's election, arguing that they shoulder no responsibility in the postponement of this major electoral event.

High Authority for Elections suggests delaying vote to next October 16

TUNIS May 22 (TAP)- The High Authority for Elections, on Sunday, suggested delaying elections of the Constituent Assembly to next October 16, Mr. Kamel Jendoubi, Chairman of the Authority, announced at a press briefing.

He said this proposal is explained by the lack of adequate conditions for organising elections on July 24 as planned.

He said the authority proposed delaying elections of the Constituent Assembly to October 16 after making certain of the difficulty to join necessary conditions to organise credible and transparent election on that date.

He listed, in this regard, a set of technical operations that should be made to ensure a good preparation for these elections such as establishment of the central committee of the authority, an administrative, financial and technical device as well as regional sections of the authority.

Registration centres also need to be identified along with preparation of training programmes for executives to be tasked with monitoring the electoral process and preparation and implementation of information and awareness campaigns for the start of the electoral process, he also said.

These different operations, he added, require considerable time and the authority, after holding many consultations with Tunisian and foreign experts and examining experiences of several countries in this area,

concluded that the date of July 24 for the election of the Constituent Assembly could not ensure credible and democratic elections, in accordance with standards and rules set in the decree-laws n°27 and 35 of the year 2011.

Mr. Kamel Jendoubi emphasised the independence and neutrality of the independent High Authority for Elections and its keenness to ensure that the electoral process take place in transparency and in a democratic atmosphere.

He also said that co-ordination with the administration is possible and that a reflection has started to establish a cell for this purpose.

Cabinet recommend to keep date of July 24 for National Constituent Assembly's election

TUNIS May 24 (TAP) - The Cabinet meeting recommended, during its regular meeting on Tuesday under Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa's chairmanship, to keep the date of July 24, 2011 for the election of the National Constituent Assembly.

After its works, Cabinet spokesman Taieb Baccouche said that the meeting had released a communiqué on the Constituent Assembly's election.

Here follows the text of this statement:

"Following the news conference held, on Sunday May 22, by the Independent Higher Authority for the Elections during which Mr. Kamel Jendoubi, chairman of the Authority, suggested to postpone the election of the National Constituent Assembly from July 24 to October 16, 2011, for procedural and security reasons, the Government specifies what follows:

1 - The present government has been committed, since the day when it took office, to hold the National Constituent Assembly's election on July 24, 2011, and the Interim President announced this in his March 3, 2011 speech, after consultation and national consensus.

2 - The Interim Government pledged itself in favour of neutrality and that no one of its members will run for this election, and it agreed on the principle of its organisation, its supervision and its monitoring by an independent authority, in accordance with what has been provided for in the draft decree-law submitted by the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, as well as it defined its make-up and its prerogatives, in compliance with decree-Act n°27 of the year 2011, dated April 18, 2011, pertaining to setting up the Independent High Authority for the Elections.

Its members have been elected by the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition and they have begun fulfilling their mission on May 18, 2011.

The Interim Prime Minister committed himself, during his meetings with the political parties and structures of the civil society, to provide all material, human, administrative and technical means to guarantee success to this Authority's assignment and to the organisation of the elections on the agreed-on date.

The Prime Minister reasserted this pledge during his meeting with the chairman of the Independent High Authority for the Elections and members of its Board, on

May 19, 2011, as well as his commitment that the elections take place on July 24, 2011.

3 - In compliance with the provisions of Article 30 of the Decree-Act n°35 of the year 2011, dated May 10, 2011, calling on voters to elect the National Constituent Assembly on July 24, 2011, the Caretaker President ratified it on Friday, May 20, 2011 and published it in the Official Gazette of the Tunisian Republic, on Tuesday May 24, 2011, which is in complete conformity with the fixed date.

The Cabinet discussed lengthily the Independent Higher Authority for the Elections' proposal and recommended to respect the Government's and President's commitment to hold these elections next July 24, while endeavouring to honour the pledge of providing the Authority with all State's means to organise this poll.

In this regard, the Cabinet recommended to multiply consultations with the various political or civil society's stakeholders, in order to make of these elections a success.

High Independent Election Committee sticks to October 16 date

Friday, May 27, 2011 10:26

TUNIS (TAP) - Election Committee President Kamel Jendoubi reaffirmed on Thursday afternoon that the election of the Constituent Assembly will take place next October 16.

Addressing an audience of national and international media representatives, he also denied rumours about his resignation saying that "this issue has not been raised either within the committee or outside it."

He went on saying that the committee will carry on its mission as scheduled to organize free and democratic elections.

Besides, he declared that the committee had met on Thursday morning with most of the political parties to announce them the decision about the election date and listen to their comments and questions about that.

Kamel Jendoubi outpointed that there is no time left to have the elections next July 24 in view of many problems such as voting cards and recruiting and training of the necessary staff.

He reckoned for instance that 400 000 Tunisians hold old national identity cards, which prevents them for voting, stressing the risk of forging these cards .

Renew old identity cards, he explained, is long and costly and the equipment used by the Interior Ministry can only issue 3000 cards a day.

Delay of election date to October 16 dividing political parties

TUNIS (TAP) - The members of the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Transition to Democracy, meeting here on Thursday, have been divided over delaying or keeping the date for the Elections of the Constituent Assembly.

Most of them were in favour of the delay, reckoning that the Independent Election Committee is an elected

authority working independently of the government and political parties and thus in total legitimacy.

The committee has, they said, a free hand to organize the elections in compliance with international standards and according to the financial, technical and logistics resources available to secure free and transparent voting.

They also believe that the Interim Government should respect the independence of the committee and not interfere in its decisions, warning that keeping the date of July 24 is a major risk for the results of the elections .

They reaffirmed the need to carry on debates over this decision to reach a compromise between the Election Committee and the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives and the Caretaker President.

For those who are against the delay, this decision can by no means benefit the country's interest in view of the social instability, security drift and precarious situation on frontiers. So it is urgent to find a solution to the legitimacy crisis of government institutions in order to take up challenges. They also denounced the "unilateral and arbitrary decision" made by the Election Committee, which can only, according to them, break off national consensus.

They reckoned as well that this committee had been elected to organize elections and not to change their date, urging it to clarify on what basis the decision was made and to publish a declaration to this end.

Answering the different questions, High Authority President Yadh Ben Achour said that the date of July 24 had been set by the Government of Ghannouchi to hold Presidential elections on the basis of the old Constitution and not to hold elections for the Constituent Assembly, which makes it possible to change or delay the election date .

High Independent Authority for Elections accounts for reasons behind deferral of ballot

BARDO (TAP) - "In accordance with the decree-laws n°27 and 35 of 2011, the High Independent Authority for the Elections enjoys legitimacy, independence and neutrality which help it put into effect its prerogatives pertaining to setting the electoral schedule, and notably the date of the ballot," Authority Chairman Kamel Jendoubi stressed.

During a meeting of the Authority members with the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, Mr. Jendoubi said that he presented the election calendar to the Caretaker President and the Interim PM and informed most of the parties of the decisions to defer the date of the elections, in order to consecrate the principle of consultation and preserve national concord.

In this connection, he explained that the Authority's decision to postpone the National Constituent Assembly's election to October 16, 2011, is based on objective and legal considerations, essentially related to the fact that the conditions, i.e. the financial, technical, human and logistic needs, are not combined for holding transparent, credible and pluralistic elections in conformity with the international standards.

Mr. Jendoubi added that the High Independent Authority for the Elections has set a calendar defining the necessary period for the different electoral stages.

In this connection, he stressed keenness to work within the framework of consultation and dialogue with the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, and with the other political sides, and in first place, the political parties, organisations and the Interim Government.

In turn, members of the High Independent Authority for the Elections underscored the need to be in possession of a structural, technical, financial, human and administrative arsenal that guarantees optimum conditions for the different stages of the election.

They also reasserted commitment of the High Independent Authority for the Election to show impartiality and neutrality vis-à-vis all political players and potential candidates, as well as to preserve their rights and lend a listening ear to all opinions and proposals on the way of holding the ballot.

Additionally, they voiced confidence that the Tunisian citizens are aware and mature enough to understand the motives that dictated on the Authority to decide this deferral.

Constituent Assembly's election: Interim Government leaves door open for negotiations

May 29, 2001 TUNIS (TAP) - The Interim Government says "it leaves the door open for negotiations and consultations to ensure success to the most important electoral event since Tunisia's independence and establish the foundations of democracy and pluralism in the country."

Mr. Moez Sinaoui, Communication Officer at the Prime Ministry, told TAP on Sunday that: "the date of July 24 is a roadmap and a position of principle to prepare this important political event."

The Interim Government, he said, is "today anxious to arrive at a consensus between the High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, the High Independent Authority for Elections and different political forces to set the date for the election of the Constituent Assembly."

Rached Ghannouchi: "postponing election date is abandoning consensus"

TUNIS May 31 (TAP) - "The postponement of the National Constituent Assembly's election date is an abandonment of the legitimacy of consensus," said "Ennahdha" Movement Chairman Rached Ghannouchi.

After the talk he had, on Tuesday, with Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi, Mr. Ghannouchi expressed the "Ennahdha" Movement's rejection of the idea of changing the date of the election which, he said, was behind suspending its membership in the High Authority for Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political reform and Democratic Transition.

In this connection, he called on the High Independent Authority for the Election to choose the path of consensus which, he said, "represents the unique legitimacy in the country after the Revolution," pointing out, in this respect, that this authority "has considered itself as a higher and absolute authority."

Interim PM receives PDP Secretary-General : need to shorten as much as possible the transitory phase

TUNIS (TAP) - The controversy around election of the National Constituent Assembly was at the centre of the talk held, on Tuesday, between Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi and Secretary-General of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) Mrs. Maya Jeribi and the party's politburo member Ahmed Nejib Chebbi.

After the meeting, the Secretary-General of PDP told TAP news agency that her party "agrees with the Government on the need to shorten as much as possible the transitory phase so that the State institutions recover their legitimacy through the choice of the people who have the first and last say."

She said that this consultation meeting is necessary in this "vague and uncertain stage," calling to secure all possible guarantees to reach a consensual solution involving all parties.

FDTL describes as "reasonable" postponement of election date

DJERBA May 29 (TAP)- Secretary-General of the Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms (FDTL) Mustapha Ben Jaafar said, on Sunday in Djerba, that his party is working to prepare its programme and proposals that meet the aspirations of Tunisia.

The FDTL, he said, believes that postponing the election date for next October 16 is "reasonable," and is a guarantor for free, democratic and transparent elections.

This would help build a new Tunisia that embodies the will of the people and provides equal opportunities for all, he said.

Ettajdid's A. Ibrahim: "Controversy surrounding postponement of elections game of one-upmanship"

SFAX (TAP)- "The controversy surrounding the postponement of the Constituent Assembly's election is a game of one-upmanship," said First Secretary of the "Ettajdid" Movement Ahmed Ibrahim who added that "this debate has been intentionally premeditated."

Speaking at a rally held Saturday in Sfax, Mr. Ibrahim said protagonists of this debate should discuss the various stages of this election, define principles and criteria for organising the election and examine the proposal of the High Independent Authority for Elections.

He also reminded of the initiative of the "Ettajdid" movement for the creation of a "modernist democratic pole," as a front to lay the foundations of a modernist national project to fight unemployment, poverty and destitution and establish a climate of solidarity and justice.

The creation of this pole, he said, will be officially announced in the coming days after having won unanimity from most of the parties and national associations and several independent personalities.

Constitutional Assembly: 218 seats, 19 of which for Tunisians abroad

BARDO (TAP) - The High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Transition to Democracy held a meeting on Tuesday and

adopted the decree on distribution of constituencies and seats for the next constituent assembly's election.

The assembly will have 218 seats, including 19 for expatriates, and the constituencies number 33, including 6 abroad. Besides two commissions were set up: the first will be tasked with drafting a new republican pact and the second will be in charge of listing inelegible candidates.

Some members of the Authority Council called for the participation of the Tunisian community abroad, including the expatriates in North and South America, Australia and Japan, whose number do not exceed 29 000. They urged, in this regard, not to adopt the rule of one seat for 60 000 people provided for in the Government decree on elections and suggested to include Tunisian expatriates in these regions of the world in constituencies in Europe.

Some other members stressed the need to inquire into the situation of expatriates in Libya who have not yet returned home. The latter are estimated, according to statistics, at 80 000.

Constituent Assembly's election set for October 23

TUNIS June 8 (TAP) - The date of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA)'s election was set for next October 23, Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi announced.

He pledged to work to ensure success of democratic transition and organise free and transparent elections, on the basis of a consensus between all political parties, the Government and the civil society.

Speaking at a meeting held on Wednesday in Tunis, Mr. Caïd Essebsi recalled that the Interim Government had initially chosen July 24 as the date of these election, a date that is according to the High Independent Authority for Elections, can not be complied with, given the time constraints and material, technical and logistic conditions needed to hold free and transparent elections, proposing next October 16 instead.

The election date is not sacred, he said, adding that the most important thing is to reach a consensus around this event, provide conditions for their success and establish a climate of security and stability in the country.

In this regard, Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi called on political parties and the national media to support the Interim Government's efforts in this difficult phase in the history of Tunisia. He also called on them to contribute to deepen collective awareness and guidance of the public opinion, particularly facing the continuation of strikes and protests and their negative impact on the national economy.

He also spoke about the difficult security conditions the country is living through, due to the situation in border regions and the events in the town of Metlaoui because of tribal conflicts.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi paid tribute to the interior security forces and the National Army for their efforts to restore security, defend the homeland and protect the citizens.

Regarding the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan border, the Interim Prime Minister recalled that Tunisia has so far hosted 471,000 refugees of all nationalities coming from Libya, praising the hospitality of citizens from the border regions.

Mr. Essebsi voiced satisfaction at Tunisia's success in laying the foundations of a democratic system, thanks to the maturity of its people and the role of women in public life.

He stressed the Government's keenness to establish the principle of parity in the National Constituent Assembly which, he described, as a first in the world.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi asserted that the Caretaker Government has endeavoured to comply with the previous government's decisions and commitments, notably regarding the creation of three independent commissions.

He pointed out, in this connection, that the Fact-Finding Commission on Corruption and Embezzlement has so far looked into 7,700 files, and the Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses has already received 1,500 complaints.

He went on reminding that the Political Reform Commission, renamed the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, has made important decisions, notably those pertaining to the Electoral Code and devising a roadmap for the next political stage which the Government is seeing to implement in totally consensual legitimacy.

The events which have followed the Revolution, the Prime Minister recalled, have seriously impacted the national economy, tourism and foreign investment, more particularly and weighed heavily on the budget of the State which is striving to carry on subsidising basic consumer goods and fuel.

He highlighted that the Government is compelled, in the meantime, take up a number of other key challenges, such as: wage increases, compensations to be offered to 281 enterprises affected by the crisis and hiring of 700,000 jobless people".

These objectives could not be achieved overnight. They require time, patience and joining of efforts," he explained.

In another connection, Mr. Caïd Essebsi pointed out that his recent participation in the Deauville G8 Summit had provided the opportunity to reassert the Caretaker Government's determination to ensure success of the democratic process and to establish a civil state, especially as the Tunisian Revolution was the spark for the whole region and such a fresh breath that the world has coined the phrase of "Arab Spring."

The Caretaker Prime Minister concluded by urging the attending representatives of political parties and civil society, the media and national figures, to support the Government's efforts, to trust it, not to doubt its intentions and go beyond limited personal considerations, to contribute to the achievement of hoped-for objectives, with the respect of the opposite view and in the service of the nation's higher interest.

Total authorisations to political parties stand at 81

TUNIS May 27 (TAP) - An informed source from the Interior Ministry said, on Friday, that 81 political parties have so far been granted legal authorisations.

DIPLOMACY

Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kéfi pays working visit to France

TUNIS, May 13, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister in the Interim Government Mouldi Kéfi paid a working visit to France on May 9-11, at the invitation of the France-Tunisia Friendship Group in the French National Assembly.

He was received, on Wednesday, by French Minister of State for Foreign and European Affairs Alain Juppé.

The talk "reviewed the excellent relations between the two countries and the broad convergence of views on regional and international issues," said a communiqué from the Foreign Ministry.

The two Ministers reviewed the invitation extended to Tunisia to attend the G8 Summit in Deauville (next May 26-27), which will provide "a propitious opportunity to present the Tunisian economic revival plan."

Mr. Alain Juppé reiterated "commitments made by France in favour of Tunisia," which he had announced during his visit to Tunisia on April 20 and 21, namely loans worth 350 million euros "to restore confidence and revive the national economy."

Moreover, Mr. Mouldi Kéfi was received at the French National Assembly by Messrs. Axel Poniatowski, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Dino Cinieri, Chairman of the France-Tunisia Friendship Group.

Mr. Kéfi addressed members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and MPs of the friendship group, saying "in the new context Tunisia is living through since the January 14 Revolution, it remains committed to fostering the friendship and co-operation ties with its first partner, France."

He also conferred with French National Assembly Speaker Bernard Accoyer. This talk focused on progress of reforms and the political agenda in Tunisia.

During this visit, the Foreign Minister also met with the former Prime Minister and current Vice-President of the French Senate Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Minister in charge of European Affairs Laurent Wauquiez and Secretary of State for Foreign Trade Pierre Lellouche.

French President's Envoy: "France willing to help Tunisia in every way possible"

TUNIS, May 14, 2011 (TAP) - Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi conferred, on Saturday in Tunis, with French President Nicolas Sarkozy's Special Adviser and Special Envoy to Tunisia Henri Guaino.

After the meeting, Mr. Guaino told TAP news agency that he had discussed with the Prime Minister "the best way for France to help Tunisia meet the challenges" it faces.

The meeting takes place in preparation for Mr. Caïd Essebsi's forthcoming participation in the G8 meeting, said Mr. Guaino. It reviewed "what the G8 can propose to Tunisia" to help it "deal with the difficulties it faces." "France is ready to help Tunisia by all means," he underlined.

The Prime Minister will fly for Paris next May 17 to meet with Nicolas Sarkozy, whose country has taken over the presidency of the G8 since last January.

The G8 Summit is scheduled for next May 26-27 in Deauville.

Large gathering in Tunis to support Palestinian cause

TUNIS, May 15, 2011 (TAP)- A large gathering was held Sunday in Tunis on the 63rd anniversary of "Nakba" (May 15, 1948), the date of the proclamation of the State of Israel.

The gathering was organised by the National Committee for Support of Arab Resistance and Struggle against Normalisation and Zionism.

Participants in this event chanted slogans calling for the liberation of Palestine and unity of the Arab peoples.

"There is no Arab freedom as long as Palestine is not free," said Ahmed Kahlaoui, one of the organisers of the gathering.

Participants also argued that the great Arab Revolution, which began in Tunisia to shake the foundations of dictatorship in several Arab countries, "is the only voice for freedom, unity and building of a democratic and socialist State."

"The liberation of Palestinian territories is a component of the Arab unity project," they emphasised, saying that the right of return is an inalienable and imperceptible right. "It is a natural and legitimate right that cannot be erased by colonisation or any agreement or convention," they argued.

The gathering was followed by a peaceful march that toured the main streets of the capital.

Tunisia calls for political and peaceful solution in Yemen

TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia deplores the human and financial damage suffered by the brotherly people of Yemen and calls for a political and peaceful solution to meet the people's legitimate claims, which is likely to put an end to the squandering of human lives and gains as well as to security threats in the Arab Gulf region, the Foreign Ministry underlines in a communiqué published Monday.

Tunisia, which is following up with deep concern the painful events in brotherly Yemen, deplores the rise in the number of victims in view of the excessive use of force against unarmed citizens in several regions of the country, adds the communiqué.

Tunisia urges all the influential parties in Yemen to redouble efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of this serious crisis so as to enable Yemen's people to restore their security and stability, fulfil their legitimate aspirations and preserve their national unity, territorial security and sovereignty, concludes the communiqué.

Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi receives French Interior Minister

EL KASBAH, May 17, 2011 (TAP) - Caretaker Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi received, on Monday, France's Interior Minister Claude Guéant.

"We are ready to assist Tunisia on its path to freedom and democracy, and in all fields of public life," Mr. Guéant said in a news conference.

On his first visit to Tunisia, the French Interior Minister, who is also to meet with his Tunisian opposite number, asserted that "security is one co-operation field between the two countries and we side with Tunisia in all steps which it chooses to undertake, insofar as democracy needs security."

The French people and Government, "who were taken aback by revolution in Tunisia," he pointed out, "are following with enthusiasm and great interest what is happening in Tunisia."

The French Interior Minister has come to Tunisia on the eve of Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi's visit to France, as of May 17, where he is expected to meet with his French counterpart and President Nicolas Sarkozy.

TUNIS May 18 (TAP) - French Interior Minister Claude Guéant said, on Tuesday in Tunis, that "illegal immigration is a failure for all sides: for the emigration country and the hosting country, as well as for the illegal immigrant himself."

Reasserting the position of France which refused all illegal migration flows on its territory, Mr. Guéant said, during a news conference at the end of his working visit in Tunisia, that the Tunisian illegal immigrants "will be repatriated in good conditions, with a possibility of granting them an assistance upon return".

"France is not a country closed to immigration," the French Minister asserted, reminding that France hosted last year some 200,000 immigrants. He also specified that 180,000 Tunisians are presently living in France, including 13,000 students." France, he went on saying, favours "regular and legal immigration" as part of the bilateral agreement signed in April 2008.

On the political level, Mr. Guéant commended the Tunisian Revolution. "France supports Tunisians' wish of emancipation," he stressed, a support which is illustrated by the French President's invitation to Tunisia to attend the G8 Summit in Deauville, in order to favour "an international mobilisation to accompany Tunisia in its progress towards democracy and a job-creating economic development," he insisted.

During his two-day visit to Tunisia, the French Interior Minister signed a civil defence agreement. Two conventions were also signed between the two countries: the first one on the improvement of the training apparatus of the Mediterranean Sea Crafts Institute, the second is related to the creation of a military vocational training centre in the Gafsa region.

President Foued Mebazaa receives Bundestag delegation

CARTHAGE May 17, 2011 (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa received, on Monday afternoon, a German Parliamentary delegation representing the different political trends in the Bundestag, Germany's Federal Parliament, and led by Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ruprecht Polenz. The talk focused on development of the Tunisian-German relations, prospects for boosting bilateral co-operation and the support

Germany could bring to Tunisia during the forthcoming G8 Summit.

The meeting also reviewed Tunisia's efforts to join best conditions of success to the transition process, in order to meet the Tunisian people's aspirations for freedom, dignity and prosperity.

During this meeting, Mr. Polenz voiced admiration for the Tunisian Revolution which, he said, was a model for the whole region, stressing the German delegation's keenness to ensure that the first Arab country they visit be Tunisia in tribute to the Tunisian people's Revolution.

The composition of the delegation, he said, is a strong signal of the collective commitment of all political parties in Germany to support Tunisia and help it at this crucial stage, particularly in its efforts to ensure success to political transition and the elections of the Constituent Assembly scheduled for next July 24, and boost the regional development process.

Interim President Foued Mebazaa receives Polish Senate Speaker

CARTHAGE (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa received, on Monday afternoon, Polish Senate Speaker Bogdan Borusewicz, who is on an official visit in Tunisia.

Mr. Mebazaa voiced consideration for Poland's interest in the Tunisian Revolution and the democratic transition process in the country, reminding of the recent visit of former Polish President and Nobel Prize winner Lech Walesa.

He also reviewed the steps made on the path of the democratic transition process and preparations for next July 24 Constituent Assembly's elections, in addition to the efforts exerted to boost development in the country's different regions.

In a statement to Tunis-Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, Polish Senate Speaker Bogdan Borusewicz voiced admiration for the Tunisian Revolution which, he said, is "a model in the region."

"We support these changes and we hope they will succeed," Mr. Borusewicz said, reasserting Poland's support to the Tunisian people and Government.

Poland, which assumes as of next July the European Union's rotating Presidency, has set as a priority of its tenure support to changes in North Africa and in the Arab world, the Polish official asserted.

This assistance, he specified, will be both political and economic, underscoring the imperative to draw lessons from similar experiences in different regions of the world.

Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi visits France - President Sarkozy: France stands with Tunisia on road to democracy

PARIS May 17 (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi arrived, on Tuesday afternoon in Paris, for an official two-day visit.

The Prime Minister was seen in at Orly Airport by Culture and Communication Minister Frédéric Mitterrand.

Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi had been invited by French President Nicolas Sarkozy to a working lunch, on Wednesday in the Elysée.

He is also to have talks with Prime Minister François Fillon, French Senate Speaker Gérard Larcher and Mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoë.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi is escorted, during his visit by Secretary of State to the Foreign Minister and Adviser to the Caretaker Government Radhouane Nouisser.

French PM hosts dinner in honour of Tunisia's Interim PM

PARIS (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi attended Tuesday in Paris a dinner hosted in his honour by French Prime Minister François Fillon.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi, who is on a two-day official visit in France, is expected to hold talks Wednesday with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Senate Speaker Gérard Larcher and Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë.

"Tunisia deserves commitment," Béji Caïd Essebsi tells Europe 1

TUNIS (TAP) - "Tunisia deserves commitment. It is establishing a democratic process with all its ingredients," Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi, who is paying a visit to France, told French Europe 1 radio station.

He made this statement in the wake of the call launched by 21 economists to adopt an economic plan to support democratic transition in Tunisia. According to the call, the failure of such democratic process in Tunisia would mean "a victory of all dictatorships in the region and a severe defeat for democracy."

Interviewed by radio host Jean-Pierre Elkabbach on the democratic process in Tunisia, Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi said that "Tunisia has always been exemplary, including in the democratic process. We will work harder to go as fast as possible on this path."

Answering a question on his feelings about France's reaction at the beginning of the Tunisian Revolution, the PM replied: "I'm a man who looks to the future. I was not aware of what had happened before I took office."

Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi is on a two-day official visit to France at the invitation of his French counterpart François Fillon.

The visit comes eight days before the G8 Summit to be held on May 26 and 27 in Deauville.

France stands with Tunisia on road to democracy, says President Sarkozy

PARIS (TAP) - "France wishes more than ever to stand with Tunisia on the road to democracy chosen by the Tunisian people," French President Nicolas Sarkozy said during his talk with Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi.

Receiving on Wednesday afternoon in the Elysée Mr. Caïd Essebsi at the end of his official visit in Paris (May 17-18), President Sarkozy said France's support to Tunisia covers all fields, particularly the economic and social ones.

Emphasis was placed, in this regard, on the invitation extended to Tunisia to attend the G8 meeting scheduled for next May 26-27 in Deauville, France, which will help Tunisia meet major donors.

Ways to bring closer the two countries' civil societies and improve exchanges between rule of law institutions were also looked at during the meeting.

The two sides also reviewed the issue of Tunisian illegal immigrants in France, stressing the possibilities offered to address it as part of openness and humanitarian values.

They expressed their willingness to further strengthen bilateral relations which "are extremely confident and open."

Following the meeting, Mr. Beji Caïd Essebsi said that his visit had been part of the excellent and intensive relations between Tunisia and France and had followed the invitation extended to Tunisia to attend the G8 Summit.

"We will present, in this context, a very important project, unique in its kind, which will deeply change the economic reality in the country."

"We have sufficient commitments from the G8 and the French President will be a champion of Tunisia," said Mr. Caïd Essebsi, adding that "the economists were right" in reference to the call launched by 21 economists to the G8 for the adoption of an economic plan to support democratic transition in Tunisia.

Earlier in the morning, the Interim Prime Minister had two talks with Mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoë and President of the French senate Gérard Larcher.

The two French officials expressed admiration and consideration for the Tunisian people and their Government and their total support to Tunisia in its action of democratic transition.

Tunisia takes part in Arab League Council extraordinary interministerial meeting

TUNIS (TAP) - Interim Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi led Tunisia's delegation to the extraordinary interministerial meeting of the Arab League Council, held Sunday in Cairo.

During this meeting, Egypt's Foreign Minister Nabil Arabi was appointed as Secretary General of the Arab League to succeed Amr Moussa.

In the address he delivered to this meeting, Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kefi stressed the efforts exerted by the Interim Government to reinforce the democratic process in Tunisia, pointing out that the Revolution of dignity and freedom in Tunisia and Egypt will certainly contribute to boosting Arab joint action.

He also congratulated the new Secretary General of the Arab League, wishing him success in his new mission, and extended thanks to outgoing Secretary General Amr Moussa for his efforts at the helm of the League in the service of Arab causes and unity of Arab ranks.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the FM conferred with a number of his counterparts; Talks turned essentially on means to strengthen inter-Arab relations in light of the prospects opened up by the Revolution of dignity.

These meetings allowed as well to review the developments of the situation in the region and several other issues of mutual interest.

The Maghreb Foreign Ministers had previously held a coordination meeting to discuss the situation in the Maghreb region, in light of the last events.

Qatar's will to increase efforts of development and investment in Tunisia

TUNIS; May 18; 2011 (TAP) - Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Ibn Khalifa Al-Thani received on Monday Interim Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi who conveyed to him the fraternal regards of the Caretaker President and Prime Minister.

He also voiced Tunisia's gratitude to the Emir and people of Qatar for their support to the Tunisian Revolution and the Interim Government in achieving democratic transition and fulfilling the objectives of this Revolution.

He hailed as well the generous efforts and contribution of Qatar to the humanitarian aid dispatched to the Tunisian-Libyan borders and the assistance to refugees fleeing Libya.

Sheikh Hamad Ibn Khalifa Al-Thani paid, for his part, special tribute to Tunisian people for their Revolution, stressing Qatar's will to back up Tunisia so that its Revolution might reach the shores of safety.

As far as bilateral co-operation is concerned, the Emir of Qatar stressed his country's commitment to invest in new projects likely to reinforce development efforts in Tunisia and implement the projects agreed upon.

The FM also had talks with Sheikh Hamad Ibn Jassim Ibn Jabr Al- Thani, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, on means to speed up the achievement of the projects provided for in bilateral co-operation agreements and contribute to the revival of Tunisian economy.

The Qatari Prime Minister stressed, in this context, his country's commitment to recruit Tunisian skills and workforce.

Both sides agreed to send very shortly a team of experts to Tunisia to carry on consultations with their Tunisian counterparts over mechanisms to implement bilateral co-operation agreements.

China supports Tunisian people and transition process

TUNIS, May 20 (TAP) - Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping reasserted his country's esteem and respect to the Tunisian people and support to Tunisia's transition process.

The Chinese Vice-President who received, on Friday in Beijing Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi on his working visit in China, on May 19-21, extended regards to Tunisia's Caretaker President, Interim Prime Minister and people, reiterating his thanks to Tunisia for the assistance it had provided to Chinese citizens during their evacuation from Libya.

Besides, a working session, under the co-chairmanship of Tunisian FM and his Chinese opposite number Yang Jiechi, provided the occasion to examine means to

develop economic relations and boost co-ordination on regional issues of mutual interest.

On this occasion, Mr. Mouldi Kéfi called on China to further support Tunisia at this stage, by inviting the large Chinese enterprises to invest in Tunisia, particularly in the interior and underprivileged regions.

He proposed various large-scale projects, job-creating ones for those regions.

The Chinese side voiced readiness to look into these projects and to carry on backing up Tunisia at all levels.

The FM's visit is part of the co-operation relations binding the two countries and bilateral consultation on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Tunisia hails US efforts to mobilise international support for its benefit

TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia's Government hailed, on Thursday, the will of Washington to effectively contribute to mobilising political, economic and financial support for the benefit of Tunisia in the stage to come, whether at the G8 Summit, at the level of international financial institutions or through boosting bilateral economic relations and trade exchanges.

The Foreign Ministry affirms, in a statement, that it followed up with great care the speech of President Barack Obama on Thursday, hailing the clear stand of the US President who reiterated his tribute to the Revolution of liberty and dignity of the Tunisian people. This stand reaffirms the historic importance of this Revolution for Tunisia and the whole region and highlights the US readiness to support the Tunisian people in this transition to democracy, says the statement.

The Tunisian Government extends thanks to the United States for its support to Tunisia, affirming commitment to strengthen friendship ties between the two countries and peoples.

Moreover, the Tunisian Government stresses the major importance of the role played by the US to reach a fair and lasting settlement of the Mideast issue.

The statement expresses the hope of the Tunisian Government that the decision of the US President to revive the Middle East peace process will be the actual start to achieve effective and concrete progress to reach a fair solution enabling the brotherly Palestinian people to recover their legitimate national rights and build up an independent State on their national land, in accordance with the resolutions of international law.

UAE's full readiness to support Tunisia at political and economic levels and further strengthen co-operation

TUNIS (TAP) - Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, the Foreign Affairs Minister and special envoy of Interim President Foued Mebazaa to the President of the United Arab Emirates, expressed Tunisia's hope to see the State of the Emirates support the project to be submitted by the Tunisian Government to the G8 Summit, due next May 26 and 27 in Deauville, France, to mobilise economic and financial support in this transitory period.

The special envoy of the Interim President, who was received Wednesday in Dubai, by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed al-Maktum, Vice-President of the State of the Emirates, Prime Minister and Governor of the Emirate of Dubai, handed a written message from Mr. Foued Mebazaa to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, President of the UAE.

The Minister praised the stands of the Emirates in favour of the Tunisian Revolution and their efforts to contribute to humanitarian aid on the Tunisian-Libyan border by setting up refugee camps and supplying assistance and medical supplies.

Mr. Kéfi voiced hope to see the UAE contribute, alongside sister countries and economic partners of Tunisia, to supporting efforts made by Tunisia at the economic, political and development levels to ensure democratic transition.

He emphasised the importance of boosting bilateral co-operation in the area of technical co-operation and in hiring Tunisian skills and attracting Emirati investments in mega-projects to ensure recovery of growth.

He also stressed the will to continue political consultations, further strengthen the relations of bilateral co-operation and broaden its prospects.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed al-Maktum reiterated the support of the leadership, government and people of the UAE to the Tunisian people at this stage full of challenges, reasserting his country's full readiness to support Tunisia at both political and economic levels and further strengthen the co-operation relations to serve mutual interests.

Qatar reasserts support to Tunisia at transition stage

Wednesday, May 25, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa received, on Wednesday morning, ambassador of Qatar in Tunis Saâd Naceur Al-Hmidi who handed him a written message from Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani.

On this occasion, the Interim President commended progress of the Tunisian-Qatari close relations, expressing consideration to Qatar for its support to Tunisia at this delicate transitory stage and to the Tunisian government's effort to achieve the January 14 Revolution objectives.

The Tunisian revolution for dignity and freedom, he underlined, came to place as priorities for the government, employment, economic development, stability and achievement of democratic transition.

Tunisia, he went on saying, counts on the support of its sister countries to bolster its efforts aiming to meet people's aspirations.

The Caretaker President also voiced thanks to the state of Qatar which spared no effort to back up Tunisia in its efforts aimed to contain the flow of refugees fleeing Libya because of the deteriorating security situation in that sister country.

In turn, the ambassador of Qatar reasserted his country's support to Tunisia and the Tunisian people at this transitional stage.

In this connection, he announced that Qatar's Minister of State of International Co-operation will have, in the two

coming days, a meeting with several Tunisian senior officials to examine means to boost bilateral co-operation and diversify its fields, in the service of the excellent relations binding the two countries.

Following the meeting, the Qatari diplomat said he had handed Mr. Foued Mebazaa a written message from Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani in response to a message which had been handed to him by the National Defence Minister last April.

This message, which turned on evolution of the relations between the two countries, comes to reaffirm Qatar's constant support to Tunisia, he specified.

Caretaker President receives Qatar's International Co-operation State Minister

CARTHAGE May 27 (TAP) - Looking into means to develop the excellent co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Qatar, notably in the economic field, and boosting investment and technical co-operation were the focus of the talk held, on Friday morning, between Interim President Foued Mebazaa and Qatar's International Co-operation State Minister, Dr. Khaled ibn Mohamed al Attiyah.

On this occasion, Mr. Foued Mebazaa stressed the efforts exerted by Tunisia to combine the best conditions to guarantee success to the transitory period and overcome difficulties, notably the economic ones, by energising development efforts in the different regions. He emphasised the importance of the sisterly countries' support at this delicate stage by means of promoting direct investments and launching new projects.

Mr. Mebazaa voiced gratitude and high consideration to the State of Qatar for its generous supportive efforts to Tunisia's action in hosting refugees fleeing Libya following deterioration of the security situation in that sisterly country.

The Interim President entrusted Qatar's State Minister with extending his high consideration to Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad ibn Khalifa al Thani and to the brotherly Qatari people for their support to Tunisia at this difficult period.

Mr. Al Attiyah conveyed to the Caretaker President Emir of Qatar's regards and high consideration, underlining Sheikh Hamad ibn Khalifa al Thani's interest in the situation in Tunisia and his keenness to provide the necessary support.

He highlighted the positive results of his talks with the Tunisian officials, which help, he said, identify Tunisia's needs, notably the immediate ones.

He said that his country is ready to invest in Tunisia, by launching development projects, particularly in such inland regions as the mining basin, and to strive to raise Tunisia's quotas in recruitment by Qatar as part of technical co-operation.

The talk was attended by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Qatar's Ambassador in Tunis.

Interim President receives written message from Emir of Kuwait

Wednesday, May 26, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa received a written message from Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, handed to him, on Wednesday, by Kuwait's Ambassador in Tunis, Mr. Fahd Ahmed Al-Awadhi.

During the meeting, Mr. Mebazaa laid emphasis on the privileged nature of the fraternal relations binding the two countries and the importance of hoisting them to the highest levels, boosting bilateral co-operation and diversifying its fields, in service of the two brotherly peoples' interests.

The meeting was an opportunity to review specifics of the transitional phase Tunisia is living through, the challenges it is facing at this sensitive stage and the steps made at various levels on the path of meeting the Tunisian people's aspirations, those which had sparked off their Revolution.

Kuwait's Ambassador asserted, on the occasion, his country's readiness to support Tunisia in this difficult period, and notably during the G8 Summit, with a view to helping it gather the attributes of economic relaunch and energise development in the various regions.

"I was honoured by meeting the Interim President, to whom I handed a written message from the Emir of Kuwait, an answer to the President of the Republic's message recently extended to him by the Foreign Minister," Kuwait's Ambassador in Tunis said to journalists after the meeting.

He specified that the message expresses "the pride of Kuwait and Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah at the long-standing fraternity relations binding the two countries and peoples, and reasserts Kuwait's support to Tunisia, Government and people, to respond to the requirements of the current transitional stage, notably restoration of security and stability, relaunching the economy and boosting investment."

European Investment Bank steps up support to democratic transition in Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP) - In the aftermath of the January 14 Revolution, the European Investment Bank (EIB) launched, in agreement with the new authorities, a set of projects in favour of employment, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), micro-credit, modernisation of infrastructure and transportation and expansion of energy production and distribution in Tunisia.

Out of a total of 600 million Euros of EIB's new funding announced in 2011 for Tunisia, 300 million Euros have already been approved to meet the country's priority needs.

They will be operational by July 2011, EIB announces in a communiqué released on Thursday.

Being the first multilateral financial investor in the Mediterranean, the bank works to strengthen its support for democratic, economic and social transition in the region, with the allocation of additional resources of up to 6 billion Euros by 2013, the EIB said.

It added that facing the present and future prospects and challenges resulting from the Arab Spring, the bank has decided to focus its action by 2013, on three priority axes, namely: supporting job-creating projects, developing

entrepreneurial culture by backing up SME and encouraging research-development and innovation.

Moreover, EIB will also support economic and social integration to promote remote areas lacking infrastructure and communication facilities.

EIB Chairman Philippe Maysdat said: "our goal is to permanently take root in society. Democracy must be based on economic and social growth and on a development policy capable of providing young generation with new future prospects."

In another connection, EIB will propose to Mediterranean and European ministers, who will meet next July 12 in Brussels, to hold a regional conference on financing small- and medium-sized enterprises later this year in Tunis.

Tunisia takes part in Non-Aligned Movement 16th Ministerial Conference

May 26, 2011 BALI (TAP) - Tunisia is taking part in the 16th Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), held on May 25-27 in Bali, Indonesia.

Foreign Minister Mouldi Kefi, on Monday, delivered an address to the general debate session, stressing the historic contribution of Tunisia as founding member of the Movement.

Commenting on the Tunisian Revolution and the democratic transition process after twenty-three years of a totalitarian regime, Mr. Kefi reminded that, after the January 14 Revolution, Tunisia has adhered to international instruments related to human rights.

On the sidelines of his participation in the 16th conference of the Movement, Mr. Kéfi conferred, on Wednesday, with Mr. Marty Natalegawa, Indonesian Foreign Minister.

The Tunisian FM praised the role of Indonesia, founding member of the Movement and country that had hosted the historic conference of Bandung (1955), in promoting ideals and objectives of the Movement and strengthening its role on the international scene.

Tunisia is committed to strengthen its co-operation with Indonesia in many fields, he said.

The Indonesian Minister described as "strong" the Tunisian-Indonesian relations, reiterating his country's will to enlarge bilateral co-operation and side with Tunisia in this transitory stage.

Mr. Natalegawa also extended the Indonesian Government's thanks to Tunisia for its assistance to Indonesian nationals who fled Libya.

On the fringes of the 16th Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, Mr. Kefi met with his Austrian, Serbian, Brazilian, Australian and Sri Lankan counterparts with whom he discussed issues of mutual interest.

British Minister for the Middle East and North Africa: "Tunisia has had the virtue of being the driving force of change in the Arab world"

May 26, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - British Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Alistair Burt said that "Tunisia has had the virtue of being the driving force of change in the Arab world."

At the end of his talks on Thursday with Minister in the Interim Prime Minister's office Rafea Ben Achour, he declared that the meeting had provided the opportunity to confirm the care of the United Kingdom to keep on supporting the process of transition to democracy in Tunisia.

He also affirmed that he had perceived on the occasion the will of the Interim Government "to build-up a strong democratic state through securing the success of the elections and carrying out economic reforms."

"What happened in Tunisia has been possible thanks to the will of its people," Mr. Alistair Brut told TAP news agency reporter, stressing that "any aid of the G8 or other European partners should take into account the aspirations of the Tunisian people."

The British Minister went on saying that the support of the United Kingdom to Tunisia will focus on two main fields: bilateral co-operation through the availability of its expertise and skills in political and economic matters and the necessary financial support on the long term which his country intends to provide to Tunisia in co-ordination with its European partners.

Justice Minister receives Special UNO Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

Importance of guaranteeing independence of justice and reviewing laws which restrict freedoms and harm human rights

TUNIS (TAP) - Justice Minister Lazhar Karoui Chebbi received Thursday in Tunis a United Nations delegation led by Mr. Martin Scheinin, Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and Fight Against Terrorism.

During the meeting, the Justice Minister pointed out that the Interim Government had adopted, on February 19, 2011, the UN Convention against Torture and joined the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court for the protection of all persons against enforced disappearance.

In turn, Special UNO Rapporteur on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights commended the Tunisian Interim Government's commitment to respect human rights, underlining its decision to release prisoners condemned by virtue of the 2003 law on terrorism.

In this connection, Mr. Martin Scheinin stressed the importance to adapt law on terrorism to the international conventions, especially as Tunisia is concerned by this phenomenon. He also placed emphasis on the importance to guarantee independence of justice and review laws which restrict freedoms and harm human rights.

Tunisia's participation in the G8 Summit

Request for UN aid to manage situation on borders and organise elections

Deauville (TAP) - Tunisia has requested in Deauville (France), a UN aid to organize the elections of the Constituent Assembly and manage the situation on its borders with Libya, scene of an uprising for some months.

This request has been made by Interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi during his meeting on Thursday afternoon with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The stress was put on the technical and financial aid the UNO could provide to the Independent election Committee to prepare and manage the elections for the Constituent Assembly, said Rafea Ben Achour, Minister in the Prime Minister's office.

As regards the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan borders, Tunisia asked the UN and the International Community for the use of part of the Libyan assets freezed in western countries to finance the supply of Libya's people in basic products.

The point is, Ben Achour said, to implement the UN resolutions in this field. Tunisia is one of the main transit points for goods to Libya.

Tunisia's request also turned on means to manage the "disastrous" situation of some refugees in the south of the country to evacuate them to other countries. Since the start of the uprising in Libya, Tunisia has hosted about 420 000 refugees and some 60 000 Libyans are still in Tunisia.

Besides, Caid Essebsi , who is leading Tunisia's delegation to the G8 Summit (May 26-27) had Thursday talks with the international monetary fund deputy director general John Lipsky, Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi and German chancellor Angela Merkel.

The talks turned notably on the economic plan submitted by Tunisia to the G8 and needing a contribution of 25 billion dollars (about 34,5 billion dinars), including 5 billion dollars (6.9 billion dinars) on the short term.

The German chancellor voiced satisfaction at the democratic transition started in Tunisia and her country's support to this process.

Tunisia's delegation to the G8 meeting includes notably the Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs as well as the Central Bank Governor.

Deauville (TAP) - Tunisia has requested in Deauville (France), a UN aid to organize the elections of the Constituent Assembly and manage the situation on its borders with Libya, scene of an uprising for some months.

This request has been made by Interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi during his meeting on Thursday afternoon with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The stress was put on the technical and financial aid the UNO could provide to the Independent election Committee to prepare and manage the elections for the Constituent Assembly, said Rafea Ben Achour, Minister in the Prime Minister's office.

As regards the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan borders, Tunisia asked the UN and the International Community for the use of part of the Libyan assets freezed in western countries to finance the supply of Libya's people in basic products.

The point is, Ben Achour said, to implement the UN resolutions in this field. Tunisia is one of the main transit points for goods to Libya.

Tunisia's request also turned on means to manage the "disastrous" situation of some refugees in the south of the country to evacuate them to other countries. Since the start of the uprising in Libya, Tunisia has hosted about

420 000 refugees and some 60 000 Libyans are still in Tunisia.

Besides, Caid Essebsi, who is leading Tunisia's delegation to the G8 Summit (May 26-27) had Thursday talks with the international monetary fund deputy director general John Lipsky, Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi and German chancellor Angela Merkel.

The talks turned notably on the economic plan submitted by Tunisia to the G8 and needing a contribution of 25 billion dollars (about 34,5 billion dinars), including 5 billion dollars (6.9 billion dinars) on the short term.

The German chancellor voiced satisfaction at the democratic transition started in Tunisia and her country's support to this process.

Tunisia's delegation to the G8 meeting includes notably the Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs as well as the Central Bank Governor.

Tunisia calls on G8 leaders to adopt plan of support to its revolution

DEAUVILLE (TAP) - Tunisia called on Friday on G8 leaders meeting in Deauville (France) to adopt a plan of support to the Tunisian revolution and consider it as a global public good.

"This is both a political and economic challenge," affirmed Interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi in his address to the working session held behind closed doors under the theme of "Arab springs."

The challenge is a political one because if the transition to democracy should fail, it would be a serious setback for democracy in the world, he said, adding that the economic challenge remained very important for it is the responsibility of the international community to avoid the vicious circle: poverty and rising unemployment causing an upsurge of extremists which would in turn lead to increasing poverty and unemployment and increased migration.

Mr. Essebsi went on saying that this need is an urgent one "to avoid the stage of decline often seen in democratic transitions, a decline which our economies and societies cannot afford to endure."

"Tunisia can rely on its own forces but in order to bring the process it started to a successful end, it needs the voluntarist support of the International Community to have its economic and social transition succeed," he declared, adding that a G8 plan would back the ambitious economic and social development programme which we have undertaken to build-up a prosperous and stable Tunisia.

On the short term, the aim of the G8 support plan is to cope with the decline in key economic sectors such as tourist trade and meet immediate challenges in terms of budget assistance and support to regions and employment, humanitarian and health assistance for refugees from Libya and keeping of the country's economic and social balances.

On the long term, the plan would provide a lasting support to Tunisia's economic and social five-year-development plan which is focused on five priorities, the PM declared.

The point is to establish better governance, speed up infrastructure development in regions, develop human

resources, secure integration into international markets and reform the financial sector.

Speaking of the financial support, the PM said "Tunisia needed a 25 billion-dollar financial contribution over 5 years in additional resources, including 5 billion dollars in the short term to mobilise four times more in additional resources-national and international, public and private- to meet the needs of transition."

Creating a financial institution specific to the region, he added, would be a strong political message and would secure optimal co-ordination of the International Community's efforts.

The second part of the G8 plan will focus on securing to Tunisia access to markets through backing for an agreement on deeper and global integration with the European Union as part of advanced status and partnership and free trade agreements with the other G8 member states.

Pending the introduction of these measures, Essebsi called for unilateral granting over a temporary timeframe, of free access to G8 countries' markets for a list of Tunisian goods.

The third part of the plan relates to rapprochement among peoples through programmes of exchange and access to knowledge for youths and a mobility partnership aimed notably for students, teachers, researchers and businessmen.

For Tunisia, such a G8 plan is all the more vital as the Tunisian Revolution now stands at the crossroads with great assets and large opportunities but also serious dangers, the PM stated.

Tunisia has indeed several assets to make this transition a success: a high literacy rate, a developed middle class, a very advanced status for women and a high level of education, he underlined.

He went on saying that these gains could not blind us to the serious dangers notably at economic level such as the declining tourist trade revenues, the impact of the Libyan uprising and the surge in oil and foodstuffs prices on the world market.

Finally the PM issued a plea to the International Community and in the first place the G8 to support the Tunisian development programme "by announcing, as of today, a timetable and a set of precise commitments in figures which the International Community is ready to take to favour the implementation of this programme."

Sarkozy: France to grant one-billion-euro aid to Egypt and Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP) - French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced on Friday, during a news conference held at the end of the G8 Summit in Deauville, that France is to grant a one-billion-euro assistance to Egypt and Tunisia.

Detailing the amount of 40 billion dollars the Summit has earmarked to support the "Arab Spring," Mr. Sarkozy said that "twenty billions" are to be provided by development banks, with the exclusion of the International Monetary Fund, in addition to "10 billion dollars in bilateral commitments" and "another 10-billion package from the Gulf countries."

Out of the 10-billion-dollar bilateral commitments, France's share amounts to one billion euros to be granted to Egypt and Tunisia, he specified.

Interim PM: Tunisia "not satisfied" but re-assured

DEAUVILLE (TAP special correspondent Nedra Boukesra) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi said, on Friday in Deauville, that the G8 Summit, in which Tunisia had taken part for the first time, gave strong signals of encouragement to the democratisation process under way in the country.

Tunisia, he said, will receive economic support that would boost its progress on the path to democracy.

"We have had assurances that things will get better and better," he added during the news conference with Finance Minister Jalloul Ayed, pointing out, however, that "we cannot be totally satisfied" at these results.

He said that Tunisia counts first on its own means, then on the support of its different partners across the world, for the implementation of its economic development plan.

Asked on deferral of the elections of the Constituent Assembly as suggested by the High Independent Authority for the Elections, Mr. Essebsi reminded the two sides' proposals --the Government's and the Authority's--, arguing that it is not a postponement but rather a change of date, which is to be looked at, in order to organise "flawless" elections.

The organisation of the elections had been discussed in the interim PM's talk with the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Tunisia claimed, in this regard, a financial and technical assistance in this field.

Besides, Mr. Essebsi, who headed the Tunisian delegation in the G8 Summit, had on Friday several talks, notably with American President Barack Obama and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso.

He presented, during a working session devoted to democratic transition in the Arab countries, an economic plan requesting a financial support of 25 billion dollars, deeper integration into the European Union, free-trade agreements with the G8 countries and an assistance to the rapprochement and dialogue between peoples.

G-8: "positive" promises that need to be delivered

May 28, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia's participation in the Group of Eight (G-8) summit, on May 26-27, 2011 in Deauville, France, was "positive," said to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency Delegate Minister to the Caretaker Prime Minister Rfaaa Ben Achour, who was member of the Tunisian delegation to the summit. It opens up broad prospects before Tunisia, which ought to become reality, he said.

In its final statement, the G-8 notably committed itself to "long-term partnership with the countries which choose to launch a democratic transition and favour tolerant societies," according to the text of the declaration made public at the end of the summit.

For the benefit of Tunisia and Egypt, the Summit also adopted the principle of an assistance of 20 billion dollars (about 27.6 billion dinars) over a two-year period. This

amount, to be allocated by the multilateral development banks --the World Bank and the European Investment Bank (EIB)--, should be bolstered by a bilateral assistance of 20 billion dollars shared out among the western countries and Gulf countries, by means of 10 billion dollars (13.8 billion dinars) for each group of countries.

The summit left determination of each country's share to the finance and foreign ministries of the participating countries in the G-8 summit, to meet next July 12, in Brussels. Sharing will be decided in accordance with the projects and programmes presented by each country.

Accordingly, the Tunisian government seems "reasonably" confident as regards satisfaction of the requests it made to the summit.

Invited to participate in the session devoted by the Deauville summit to the "Arab Spring," Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi briefed the attendees, on Friday, on an economic and social development plan requiring a foreign aid package of 25 billion dollars (about 34.5 billion dinars) over a five-year period, i.e., 10 billion dollars for a two-year period (13.8 billion dinars).

As soon as he ended his presentation, Mr. Caïd Essebsi was commended by the heads of state and government attending the summit.

According to close sources of the Tunisian delegation, President Barack Obama voiced to Mr. Caïd Essebsi his respect for the Tunisian Revolution and his confidence in its success.

Promotion of Tunisia's economic and social plan and sensitisation to the stakes it represents for the country's future and transition process were the focal points of the meetings Mr. Caïd Essebsi and the delegation escorting him had on the sidelines of the summit.

Upon his arrival to Deauville, the prime minister conferred with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Being herself native of former East Germany and having lived through an experience of similar transition during the German Unification, she said that she was sensitive to the Tunisian cause and made the promise to support its plan.

At the bilateral level, the two officials discussed means to help more Tunisian students benefit of scholarships in Germany and boost economic co-operation in fields of small- and medium-sized enterprises and vocational training.

Besides, Mr. Caïd Essebsi met with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who voiced satisfaction at the agreement on immigration concluded between the two countries, during the dinner hosted in honour of the official delegations attending the summit.

The Tunisian economic plan was the focus of talks with International Monetary Fund's Deputy Director-General John Lipsky and Messrs. José Manuel Barroso and Herman Van Rompuy, European Commission and European Council chairmen, respectively.

Emphasis was laid during the meeting with European officials on means to speed up Tunisia's access to the advanced status with the European Union and assistance to be provided by the international community for managing the situation on borders with Libya.

Conditions have deteriorated noticeably in the past weeks, due to problems of security and management of the refugee camps.

According to Tunisian officials in Deauville, "Tunisia shouldn't be left alone to bear the brunt of the collateral damage of war" in Libya.

UNDP's keenness to contribute in various development areas in Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP) - Interim Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi conferred, on Saturday afternoon, with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assistant secretary-general, deputy administrator and director of the regional office for the Arab States Amat al Alim Alsoswa, who is presently on a working visit in Tunisia.

The UN official said, in a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, that the meeting had provided the opportunity to congratulate the Tunisian people for the success of their revolution and the beginning of "a new era," as well as to look into a variety of issues in Tunisia and the Arab world.

She went on saying that the talk had also been an occasion for exchanging views on the programme devised by UNDP for Tunisia which touches on several development fields, in such a way as to support the country's peaceful democratic transition and achieve human development.

Answering a question on UNDP's programme for Tunisian youth, the UN official said that she had met, on Friday, a group of Tunisian youths. She, then, became acquainted with their role in the success of the January 14 Revolution, as well as their expectations.

She stressed UNDP's readiness to provide support for strengthening youth's skills in Tunisia, notably as regards their integration into the labour market and participation in the coming elections, "not only as voters, but also as participants at the different stages of preparations and progress" of these elections.

She added that the National Constituent Assembly's election will be the "first answer to the claims of the Revolution youths" who are "the builders of the country's future."

Interim Prime Minister receives Dutch Foreign Minister

TUNIS May 30 (TAP) - The support for reform of the national economy and the process of democratic transition were the focus of the talk held on Monday in Tunis between Interim Prime Minister Beji Caïd Essebsi and Dutch Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal.

In a statement to the press, the Dutch FM said that his country, in its capacity as member of the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), is fully prepared to help establishing the foundations of democracy in Tunisia through fostering the rule of law to achieve the ambitions of Tunisians.

In this connection, he said that his country is ready to provide scholarships to Tunisian students, for training in areas related to the rule of law and consolidation of economic stability.

Commending the return of the Tunisian exports index to its upward pace, the Dutch Minister emphasised the need for opening European Union countries' markets to Tunisian products, particularly agricultural products to support the Tunisian economy.

In his response to a question on the support that the Netherlands could provide on the issue of refugees on the Tunisian-Libyan border, Mr. Uri Rosenthal said his country is considered as one of the largest donors to relevant international organisations.

May 30, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- "The Netherlands is ready to help out Tunisia and meet the needs expressed by the transitional government," said Monday Dutch Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal at the end of his meeting with his opposite number Mouldi Kéfi.

Mr. Rosenthal told TAP news agency that the meeting had also allowed to discuss the latest developments in Tunisia. "We will endeavour to intensify business to business contacts and assure private investors of the role of Tunisia as an economic development pole," added the Dutch Foreign Minister who is paying a two-day visit to Tunisia.

He also expressed his country's will to boost bilateral co-operation, especially in matters of training young diplomats.

Mr. Uri Rosenthal is visiting Tunisia after the G8 summit "to pay tribute to the Tunisian Revolution and reaffirm the political, technical and logistic support of the Netherlands to the current process of democratic transition due to lead to the election of a constituent assembly and to the reinforcement of public liberties and human rights," says the Foreign Ministry.

The FM and his Dutch counterpart exchanged as well views over prospects to revive bilateral co-operation both on the economic plane, with support to the private sector and the opening of the European market to Tunisian farm produce, and at the technical level through the training and further training of young staff in the fields of agronomics, journalism and diplomacy.

Mr. Mouldi Kéfi reminded of the role played by the Netherlands in the initiative to reinvest Tunisia's public debt in environment protection projects and women's promotion plans, expressing the wish that the adequate financial support mechanisms will be set up.

Speaking of the economic situation in Tunisia and the financial, political and social effects of the flow of refugees at the Tunisian-Libyan borders, Mr. Mouldi Kéfi stressed the opportunity to establish strategic bilateral and multilateral partnership for development, notably at the level of the European Union within the prospect of granting advanced status to Tunisia.

Foreign Minister briefs Caretaker President about outcome of working visits to brotherly and friendly states

CARTHAGE (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa received, on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi who briefed him about the outcome of the working visits he paid in the second half of May to numerous brotherly and friendly states and his participation in several interregional and international meetings.

The FM paid a working visit to Qatar before heading to Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates where he extended two written messages of the Interim President respectively to Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah and UAE President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

These visits, he said, provided the occasion to review the situation in Tunisia after the Revolution and the efforts made to secure the success of the transition process. They also allowed to discuss means to boost Tunisia's relations with the other Gulf countries, especially in matters of investment and employment.

The FM conveyed in this regard the respect of these countries' leaders to the choices of the Tunisian people and their will to strengthen relations with Tunisia and contribute to international efforts to help it in its democratic transition and to favour its economic and social building-up.

On the other hand, the FM informed the President of the outcome of his visits to China and Japan, saying his meetings with Chinese and Japanese officials had provided the occasion to discuss the development of relations of co-operation and partnership with these two countries, notably in the economic field, in such a way as to meet the expectations of Tunisia's people as regards comprehensive and fair development.

He conveyed the commitment of these two countries to support Tunisia in this transitional stage, especially through identifying investment opportunities and launching mutual interest projects in accordance with mutual aspirations. The Japanese officials, he said, expressed great thanks to Tunisia's people and Government for the humanitarian aid they provided to Japan after the earthquake and Tsunami that hit their country.

Besides, the FM briefed the Caretaker President about the talks he had with his Maghreb and Arab counterparts on the sidelines of the extraordinary interministerial meeting of the Arab League held in the middle of last May. He explained that these meetings had allowed to reaffirm Tunisia's sustained commitment to support any initiative to boost Arab joint action for the benefit of the Arab peoples' interests.

Besides, Mr. Kefi informed President Foued Mebazaa about the results of Tunisia's attendance of the 16th Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held last May 24-25 in Bali (Indonesia).

The meeting allowed as well to assess Tunisia's attendance of the G8 Summit in Deauville (France) and to stress the need to secure careful follow-up of the implementation of the commitments announced at this Summit to provide Tunisia with political, economic and financial support in the near future.

Tunisia-Libya Border situation:

Dehiba: 100 mortar shells land in national territory

DEHIBA, May 8, 2011 (TAP) - Uneasy calm prevailed Sunday at the border crossing of Dehiba after the fall last night of 100 mortar shells in the national territory, precisely over the heights of the "Touil Dehiba" mountain and Wadi "Errous."

Some shells landed in houses located in the districts of Jbara and El Amal at Dehiba, without causing any casualties or damage.

Moreover, the Regional Hospital of Tataouine received, on Sunday morning, over 50 injured following the violent clashes between forces of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and rebels in the city of Nalout, located 50 km from the region of Dehiba.

One of the wounded Libyans told TAP news agency that Saturday's fighting was dramatic, stressing the interruption of water supply and power cut in the city since last week.

The overseer of the Regional Hospital of Tataouine asked for medical and human assistance to cope with the growing number of wounded.

Tataouine: infiltration attempt by pro-Gaddafi forces foiled

TATAOUINE, May 15, 2011 (TAP)- National Army forces, deployed across the Eastern border of the Governorate of Tataouine, foiled, on Saturday at dawn, an attempt by Libyan armed forces to infiltrate the Tunisian territory.

Over 200 soldiers from pro-Gaddafi forces tried to penetrate the national territory at the level of Ghar Ayoub onboard 50 four-wheel-drive vehicles, a high-ranking military source told TAP correspondent, denying any clash with these forces who returned to their barracks near Ghzaya.

The pro-Gaddafi forces sought to take by surprise, from the Tunisian territory, rebels who control the Wazen/Dehiba border crossing.

Several military vehicles headed on Saturday from Tataouine to Tunisian-Libyan borders and to the desert to reinforce their presence in strategic points, TAP correspondent noted.

Libyan officials cross Ras Jedir border point

RAS JEDIR, May 15, 2011 (TAP)- Several Libyan officials, on Sunday, crossed the Tunisian-Libyan border via the border crossing of Ras Jedir, heading to the Island of Djerba.

They include according to TAP correspondent in Medenine, the Secretary for Co-operation Affairs and External Communication of the Arab Libyan Jamahiriya, the Director of Libyan Customs Ameur Diou, the Arab League Representative Ali Essid and the Secretary of Electronic Trades Co-operative as well as the Co-ordinator of External Relations for African and Arab Affairs. This visit is part of diplomatic efforts aimed to find a solution to the Libyan crisis.

Some sources told TAP correspondent that several officials close to the Gaddafi regime are currently visiting the Island of Djerba.

Mortar shells fall again near Wazen-Dhehiba crossing from Libyan side of border

DHEHIBA, Tataouine May 17, 2011 (TAP) - Mortar shells continued falling, from Monday night till Tuesday afternoon, from eastern Libyan border with Tunisia,

precisely on the Libyan Wazen crossing point still under the rebels' control.

Shells fell inside the Tunisian territory because of closeness of the scene of clashes.

"Road traffic was suspended in the area due to the violent fighting but the border post from the Tunisian side remained open," a security source told Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency.

Ambulances, the same source added, transferred 6 or 7 injured Libyans to the Dhehiba local hospital, including two seriously wounded who were driven to the Tataouine regional hospital, while civilians were forced to leave the crossing point after the fall of two shells 200 metres from the Tunisian border.

These developments have to do with the repeated attempts made by the pro-Kadhafi forces to re-take control of border post, especially after they had crossed the El M'rabeh zone controlled by the rebels.

An eyewitness said on the phone to TAP that the pro-Kadhafi troops are getting closer and closer to the Tunisian border and the positions of the Army units and the national security forces.

The same source added that planes of the National Army flew over the zones next to the border to dissuade belligerents from getting near the Tunisian border.

Two high-ranking Libyan officials on Tunisian territory

RAS JEDIR (TAP) - Mr. Abdallah Mahmoud al-Hijazi, former Adviser to Foreign Affairs General Secretariat and Deputy-Director of Libyan Military Intelligence entered, on Tuesday, the Tunisian territory via the Ras Jedir border crossing.

Accompanied by four former civil servants, the former Libyan official headed for Djerba.

Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) correspondent in the region reported that the Libyan Oil Minister, who had resigned from the Libyan Government, left Djerba and headed for the capital.

The Minister who joined the rebels entered, last Saturday, the Tunisian territory through Ras Jedir crossing point.

This border post was closed, on Tuesday afternoon, from the Libyan side for a short period of time, as a result of fighting between the pro-Kadhafi forces and the rebels.

The border post re-opened for car traffic, and not for heavy-goods vehicles.

US humanitarian aid to refugees in Ras Jedir

RAS JEDIR (TAP) - A humanitarian aid worth \$50 000 was granted by the United States to refugees in Ras Jedir. This aid was extended Tuesday by US Ambassador in Tunis Gordon Gray during his visit to the border area of Ras Jédir.

Last February, the US had granted aid to Tunisia's Red Crescent including an ambulance and first aid equipment.

According to the US Ambassador, a second ambulance will be sent next month to this organisation.

Mr. Gordon Gray also hailed, on the occasion, the efforts deployed Tunisia's people to host and help refugees

fleeing Libya, stressing the need to support Tunisia in this humanitarian endeavour.

WHO praises Tunisia's care for refugees fleeing Libya

TUNIS May 19 (TAP) - Health situation at the Tunisian-Libyan border and the exceptional solidarity drive shown by the Tunisian population for refugees from Libya were emphasised by Mrs. Habiba Ezzahi Ben Romdhane, Public Health Minister, in her address to the 64th World Health Assembly held in Geneva.

The Minister, who is leading the Tunisian delegation to this meeting, stressed efforts made by Tunisia to face up to this humanitarian crisis.

Mrs. Ben Romdhane underlined Tunisia's attachment to the universal principles defended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its reasserted commitment to ensure sustainability to this important organisation.

She also outlined the Tunisian Government's efforts, at this democratic transition stage experienced by Tunisia, to face up to challenges and meet challenges in the health field to provide quality health services to citizens.

The Minister had talks with her counterparts from Iraq, Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Pakistan.

Talks reviewed bilateral relations and prospects for strengthening them, particularly in matters of medicine, health services exports and human resources development.

During these meetings, heads of delegation of sisterly and friendly countries praised the choices of the Tunisian people and expressed their admiration for the efforts exerted by the transition Government, as well as by all active forces of Tunisia to ensure success to the democratic dynamics sparked on January 14, 2011.

The Minister also conferred with representatives of international organisations such as the "Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria," and the "Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health."

During these meetings, the Minister gave an overview on development of the health situation in Tunisia, stressing the efforts exerted to meet challenges resulting particularly from the precarious situation prevailing at the country's southern border.

During her talk with Mr. Houcine Abderrazak al-Jazairi, Director of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, the Minister said the reform process started by WHO will be largely strengthened by the delocalisation of some of its activities to its Tunis centre, including the one related to training.

The regional director expressed consideration to Tunisia for its contribution to the construction of the WHO centre in Tunis.

During her participation in meetings of health ministers of Arab countries, states of the Eastern Mediterranean region members of WHO and countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Tunisian delegation brought support to the official launch by the UN of the regional emergency call to face up to the humanitarian crisis in Libya and in neighbouring countries.

The international humanitarian call includes, in addition to support to Libya, an assistance to Tunisia whose

exemplary humanitarian action earned her unanimous praise.

UNHCR express appreciation for Tunisia's dealing with the massive flow of refugees fleeing Libya

TUNIS May 21 (TAP) - Public Health Minister, Habiba Ezzahi Ben Romdhane conferred on Friday in Geneva with UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Antonio Guterres who expressed gratitude and consideration to the Tunisian people and Government for their humanist and generous approach in dealing with the massive flow of refugees fleeing Libya.

Guterres expressed the HCR commitment to support Tunisia in this critical period due to the Libyan uprising, saying that concrete action is to be taken shortly in collaboration with the World Organization for Migration and the International Red-Crescent society, to reinforce Tunisian capacities in matters of first aid and emergency medicine, such as increasing the number of ambulances on the Southern border of the country.

The UN High Commissioner also highlighted that he was very much alive to Tunisia's calls to ease the evacuation of thousands of refugees who are still staying in camps.

He also announced that the World Day of Refugees will be celebrated next June from Tunisia, in tribute to the country's huge efforts that allowed to avoid a humanitarian crisis.

Mrs. Ben Romdhane voiced for her part consideration for the UNHCR support to Tunisia in coping with the massive flow of refugees fleeing Libya.

She also stressed the need for a more effective mobilization of the International Community to reduce the pressure on Tunisian health-care infrastructure, more and more requested to meet the demands of the increasing number of refugees and seriously wounded people.

Besides, the Public Health Minister, who led the Tunisian delegation to the 64th World Health Organization (WHO) meeting, met with WHO Director General Margaret Chan who commended the progress of the democratic process started in Tunisia. Mrs. Chan expressed as well commitment to favour the transfer of some of WHO services based in Geneva to the new centre of the Organization in Tunis.

Tunisia warns Libya over border shelling

TUNIS; May 18, 2011 (TAP)- The Tunisian Government strongly condemned the continuous firing of rockets by Libyan forces at the frontier post of Dhiba, a source at the Foreign Ministry reported Tuesday.

These attacks are a violation of Tunisian territorial sovereignty and put its citizens and infrastructure at risk.

Although Libya's Government has pledged on several occasions to prevent its forces from firing in the direction of Tunisia, it has not respected its commitments, the same source underlines.

Tunisia's Government views such acts as inadmissible, saying they can only affect ties of neighbourliness between the two countries and worsen the situation at a time when Tunisia is endeavouring to support the

brotherly people of Libya and fulfil its humanitarian duty towards tens of thousands of refugees.

The Tunisian Government entrusted its ambassador in Tripoli with protesting to Libyan authorities, warning them of the possibility of "immediate and disastrous consequences" on bilateral relations.

These serious attacks are likely to force the Tunisian Government to take severe measures, including reporting to the UN Secretary General, out of its duty to defend its territorial integrity, protect its citizens and secure the safety of refugees on its land, the same source concludes.

Libyan car loaded with highly sophisticated telecommunication equipment intercepted in Djerba

DJERBA (TAP) - Security forces arrested Wednesday a car belonging to a Libyan national living in an Asian country loaded with highly sophisticated telecommunication equipment, security sources told TAP news agency correspondent in Medenine.

The search allowed to seize 10 highly sophisticated wireless devices and 10 night and day vision binoculars.

This is the fourth car of its kind to be intercepted by the police of Djerba Ajim these last days.

Ras Jedir: Several Libyan politicians cross to Tunisia

RAS JEDIR May 23 (TAP) - Several Libyan politicians, on Monday, entered the Tunisian territory via the Ras Jedir border crossing.

They include, in particular, Mr. Abdelati Obeidi, Libyan Foreign Minister, the ambassador of Libya in Liberia and some advisers. They all headed to the Island of Djerba.

The Libyan Foreign Minister had already crossed the Tunisian border from Ras Jedir, on several occasions, heading to other destinations such as the Ethiopian capital Addis-Ababa.

A massive influx of Libyans has been recorded at the border crossing of Ras Jedir since Monday morning.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

"Two Hundred Manifesto" to support Tunisian economy on eve of G8 Summit

TUNIS, MAY 10, 2010 (TAP) - A manifesto, titled "Invest in Democracy," has been launched by a group of Tunisian economists advocating support to Tunisia ahead of its participation in the G8 Summit meeting, next May 26-27 in Deauville, France.

The "Two Hundred Manifesto," as it is known, is signed by figures from several countries, including academics (from universities like Harvard, Sorbonne and others), bankers (from World Bank, First Gulf Bank, Abu Dhabi, UAE, etc.), economists, industrialists, businessmen, media people, officials in various fields (telecommunications, trade, energy, environment, etc.), politicians, etc.

"Invest in Democracy" will be published this week by several international newspapers, such as American "New

York Times" and French "Le Monde," under the form of an advertising insert.

In this manifesto, we could notably read that the "Tunisian people remarkably demanded the end of an autocratic regime and they got what they wanted...." "We, women and men politicians, economists, industrialists, bankers...are sure that the establishment of democratic institutions will be the best rampart against medium- and long-term risks. This is the reason why we are more than ever confident in Tunisia's economic development prospects. Investment opportunities, restructuring, level of the labour force's skill, command of new technologies and geographical closeness to Europe, will make of Tunisia an economic partner that shares with Europe the same democratic values and transparency."

The message of the Manifesto's authors is: "Today, invited to the G8, Tunisia will be, in the coming years, one of the Mediterranean's most attractive economic hubs. This is the most appropriate time to take an active part in building that future."

Services sector: Rise in FDI

TUNIS, May 10, 2011 (TAP) - The services sector topped the sectors that recorded a rise in foreign direct investments (FDI) after last January 14 Revolution, from 42,8 MD in the first 3 months of 2010 to 62,1 MD in the first 3 months of 2011, which means a rise of 15%, said Mr. Noureddine Zekri, Director General of the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA).

The extensions carried out respectively by telecommunications companies "Orange" and "Tunisiana" and the extension of premises or activities of three call centres had also allowed to create 300 jobs, he said in a statement to TAP News Agency.

The companies with foreign stakes, whether partly or totally exporting operating in the sector of services, numbered 380 in 2010.

They provide about 27 000 jobs and operate in the fields of computing (114), telecommunications (7), call centres (37), surveys and consultancy (136), other services (66) and environment technologies (20).

Mr. Zekri outlined that "these firms whose exports are made through the Internet did not suffer from the post-revolution crisis because they do not use ports and such things of the logistics chain. "

Totally-exporting industrial project to be operational shortly in Jendouba

JENDOUBA, May 12, 2011 (TAP) - An industrial unit specialised in pleasure boat construction will be operational starting from next August in Jendouba.

Financed by Italian promoters, this totally-exporting project is expected to create 120 jobs, 70% of which for the benefit university graduates in information technology, electrical engineering, mechanics and Italian language.

UTICA calls to restore security to save economy

TUNIS, May 12, 2011 (TAP) - The Tunisian Industry, Trade and Handicrafts Union (UTICA)'s National Transition Committee called, on Thursday, all Tunisian

civil society components to close ranks to restore security and stability in the country, to make sure that the national economy recovers, to further invest and spare the Tunisian economy the risks of additional losses.

During a meeting chaired by UTICA Chairwoman Wided Bouchammaoui, the committee members expressed serious concerns about the acts of violence and trouble which had taken place in some regions across, arguing that such mishaps would damage the country's security and impede efforts meant to ensure that the economic activity returns to normal.

Economists issue call to G8 to adopt road-map for Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP) - Economists from all over the world called on the G8 to adopt a road-map supporting democratic transition in Tunisia and an economic plan of 20 to 30 billion dollars (between 27 to 40 billion dinars), to open up the country's internal regions and create a specific North African financial institution.

Three of these economists—namely 2001 Economy Nobel Prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz, Jean-Louis Reiffers and Olivier Pastré, economy professors at French "Université de Sud "and "Université de Paris 8," respectively—said, in a news conference held on Tuesday in Tunis, that "success of democratic transition in Tunisia is a huge challenge for the whole international community."

The 21 economists endorsing the call represent, in particular, the universities of Harvard, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Paris Dauphine, London, Bonn and New-York.

They believe that international assistance is absolutely necessary during this stage, given the current loss of growth, recommending "an immediate assistance to support food and energy subsidies in Tunisia."

As regards the road-map proposed, it will be devised by Tunisia and should identify clearly stakeholders involved and the amounts to be mobilised to support democratic transition.

Regarding the economic plan to emanate from the G8, it should have a budget of 20 to 30 billion dollars (about 27 to 40 billion dinars) over 5 to 10 years. It will be designed to open up inland regions of the country where development of transport and building of technological and industrial poles are top priorities.

The point is, according to the text of the call distributed one week before the Deauville G8 summit due on May 26-27, 2011, is to restore the confidence needed for the revival of the economy.

A failure of democratic transition, would be, according to the signees "a victory of all dictatorships of the region and a severe defeat for democracy."

The point, said Mr. Pastré, is to prompt the transition from "autocratic capitalism to democratic capitalism."

In this regard, Mr. Stiglitz said the revival plan by the Tunisian government is "interesting" but it needs 25 billion dollars (34 billion dinars) for the next five years, which should be provided by the international community.

He emphasised the role that should be played by the civil society and private sector in democratic transition, calling upon the United States and the European Union to give free and quick access to Tunisian products.

The economists call for granting Tunisia the status of associate partner to the European Union with full access to European structural funds.

The G8 is also called to adopt a clear position on modes of mobilising funds and ensuring co-ordination between different financial institutions (IMF, World Bank, European Investment Bank, African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank...) so that they could contribute in an optimum way to the restructuring and growth of the Tunisian economy.

The economists also called for the "creation of financial institutions specific to the region "because Tunisia and Egypt will be likely followed by other countries."

This institution would be a "strong political symbol for the region and a guarantee of optimum co-ordination of the international community's efforts."

According to the economists, the cost of the proposed plan represents only 2% to 3% of the cost of the reunification of Germany" and less than "the cost of one or two months of the war in Iraq."

FDI fell by 24.5% in first four months of 2011

TUNIS May 18 (TAP) - Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) declined by 24.5% at the end of the first four months of 2011, falling to 448.8 million dinars (MTD) compared with 594 MTD in the same period of 2010, according to statistics of the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA).

Investments are shared out as follows: 426.8 MTD of foreign direct investment (FDI) and 21.6 MTD in portfolio, compared with 569.3 MTD and 24.7 MTD, respectively in 2010.

Analysis of the flow of FDI shows a concentration in energy sectors (260 MTD) and manufactured industries (101.1 MTD).

By sector, analysis of FDIs made exclusive of energy showed a 6.1% growth of investment in services, reaching 62.7 MTD (from January to April 2011).

Flows of FDI in manufactured industries are estimated at 101.1 MTD compared with 133.5 MTD, i.e. a fall of 24.3%

A strong polarisation of FDIs in the manufacturing sector is noted for some activities.

Mechanical and electrical industries and textiles are the first industrial sectors in attracting FDI and exports.

Mechanical, electrical and electronic industries rank first with 33 projects carried out with an investment of 37 MTD (creation of 1,181 jobs), followed by textile and clothing industries (22 new projects generating 1,034 jobs).

Chemical industries posted a growth of 102%, increasing from 16.8 MTD in 2010 to 34 MTD in 2011.

According to FIPA, the first four months of 2011 were marked by the start of production of 36 new joint ventures, the achievement of 65 expansion operations by foreign companies settled in Tunisia as part of the development of their activities and the creation of 2,983 new jobs, including 2,681 in manufactured industries.

Main economic indicators of this year's first 4 months

TUNIS May 19 (TAP) - Tunisia's exports recorded, during the first four months of 2011, an 11-per-cent rise, and imports went up by 5.1%, which brought down by 11.3% the trade deficit which dropped from 2691.9 million dinars (MTD) in 2010 to 2388.5 MTD.

The coverage rate stands at 73.1%, against 77.3% during the same period of the previous year, i.e., a rise of 5.7%, according data published by the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

Exports volume went up from 7307.2 MTD to 8120.3 MTD, i.e. a rise of 11.1%, and imports reached 10508.8 MTD during the first four months of 2011, against 9999,1 MTD during the same period of 2010, that is a rise of 5.1%.

Consumer goods exports were still on the rise, going up from 2579.6 MTD in 2010 to 2940.2 MTD during the first four months of 2011, i.e., a 14-per-cent growth.

Raw materials and semi-finished products kept their sustained rise of 8.8% as regards exports, whereas imports fell by 5.6% in 2011, against 30% during the previous year.

As to the consumer price index, the INS specified that it rose by 0.6 % last April. This increase was mainly due to the end of the seasonal balances with an increase recorded by clothing items (+5.3% in a month).

Food prices have registered a decrease of -0.1% for the fourth time in five months. This drop touches mainly meat (-1.4%). Similarly, prices of entertainment equipments have recorded a fall of -1.3% for the audiovisual.

Tunisia's exports to Libya down 32%

TUNIS May 21 (TAP) - Tunisia's exports to Libya fell by 106.2 million dinars (MTD), or 32%, in the first quarter of 2011, compared with the same period of last year.

This fall is due to the interruption of imports of crude oil which represent the major part of Tunisian imports.

Tunisia's exports to Libya reached 226.3 MTD in the first four months of this year against 332.5 MTD in the same period of 2010, said the Foreign Trade Observatory stemming from the Trade and Tourism Ministry.

Exports of the mechanical and electronic industries declined in the first four months of this year to 48,6 MTD compared with the same period of the previous year.

Decreases were also recorded in cement (-18.3 MTD), phosphate and derivatives (-16.3 MTD), toilet paper (-11.1 MTD), building materials (-9.8 MTD), textile and clothing (-4.7 MTD), hair preparations (-4.5 MTD), package paper (-3.4 MTD) and leather and shoes (-0.2 MTD).

However, exports of foodstuffs increased by 53.2 MTD, reaching 124.9 MTD in the first four months of this year, against 71.6 MTD in the same period the year before.

The increase involved exports of canned potatoes (22.1 MTD), vegetable oils (12.5 MTD), cheese and curd (6.5 MTD) and maize (4.2 MTD).

Exports of canned fish fell by 1.7 MTD.

Tunisia-South Korean shellfish farming project

BIZERTE (TAP) - A Tunisian-South Korean shellfish farming project carried out in Bizerte with an investment of 1.6 million dinars has produced 500 thousand shellfish larvae.

Five Tunisian promoters have received training in this kind of farming and will then take over in this field.

The project was achieved in May 2008, in association between the Higher Institute of Farming and Aquaculture of Bizerte and Korea International Co-operation Agency (KOICA) and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI).

Results of this farming were presented on Saturday in Bizerte by Mr. Mohamed Chelfak, Co-ordinator of the project who said that technologies brought by the South Korean side helped bring the maturity of shellfish larvae (commercial stage) from three years to one year.

Tunisia can now produce 1.5 million of shellfish larvae per year at a time when the global demand is witnessing a noticeable increase, he said.

Secretary of State in charge of Environment Salem Hamdi said Tunisian-South Korean co-operation has involved a set of pilot projects in the agricultural sector such as shellfish farming.

Mr. Beyong-gook, Deputy Chairman of KOICA stressed the South Korean Government's readiness to support the economic and social development process in Tunisia.

Zoellick: 1 billion dollars for Tunisia in support for budget and investment projects

TUNIS May 24 (TAP)- World Bank (WB) Group President Robert B. Zoellick announced up to 6 billion dollars in new Bank support over the next two years for Egypt and Tunisia linked to progress made by the two post-revolutionary countries in modernising their economies so they provide more opportunities for their people.

Mr. Zoellick said, in a press release posted on the Bank's website, that the bank will grant Tunisia 1 billion dollars (1.38 billion dinars) in support for the budget and for investment projects, in addition to the 500 million dollars (690 million dinars) already announced by the Bank as part of a 1.2 billion (1.656 billion dinars) package from the African Development Bank and European donors for a Governance and Opportunity Programme to support Tunisia's efforts in freedom of association, access to information, transparency in public procurement, beneficiary participation in service delivery, and retraining of unemployed workers.

Support to the Tunisian private sector from the International Finance Corporation, the Bank's private sector arm, could be up to 400 million dinars (552 million dinars), he said, adding that the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, the Bank's political risk arm, hopes to provide guarantees of up to 100 million dollars (138 million dinars) a year.

Mr. Zoellick also said 4.5 billion dollars were available to Egypt over the next 24 months as part of potential package including an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme to address budget and reserve shortfalls and support reforms that strengthen its credit and investment prospects.

He said the World Bank was working closely with IMF and other multilateral development banks on an integrated approach to stabilise and modernise the economies of the region. These joint efforts will be discussed with the Group of Eight at its summit later this week in Deauville, France.

The announcements of the new World Bank support come as the institution announced new forecasts that showed a marked slowdown in economic growth in the Middle East and North Africa.

Forty-billion-dollar aid to "Arab Spring" countries

DEAUVILLE (TAPEX/TAP correspondent Nedra Boukesra) - The G8 Summit decided, on Friday, to devote a 40-billion-dollar assistance (1 dollar = 1.38 dinar) to the "Arab Spring" countries, Tunisian Finance Minister Jalloul Ayed said, during a press conference jointly held with Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi in Deauville, France.

Sharing out of this amount will be decided, he said, in the next inter-ministerial meeting that will gather the concerned countries and authorities. The World Bank, he added, will allow Tunisia to benefit from a 4-billion-dollar aid for the coming two years, in addition to a budget support of 1.3 billion dollars that WB will grant in association with other financial institutions, including the African Development Bank (AfDB).

He reviewed the major focuses of the economic plan adopted by the Government: this programme is based on improving public governance, reinforcing infrastructures, developing human resources, integrating international markets and modernising the financial sector.

During a summit session devoted to partnership with new Arab democracies, Mr. Caïd Essebsi presented to G8 the economic plan of support to Tunisia requiring funding of 25 billion dollars over a five-year period.

Tunisian economy remains strong despite impacts of Revolution and crisis in Libya

TUNIS (TAP) - "The Tunisian economy remains strong despite the impacts of the Revolution and the crisis in Libya," said African Development Bank (AfDB) President Donald Kaberuka.

During a meeting with the press held, on Wednesday in Tunis Mr.Kaberuka reiterated his institution's readiness to support the economic growth process in Tunisia and attract foreign investments.

In this connection, he reminded that the 500-million-dollar loan extended to Tunisia, aims to guarantee an immediate response to the requirements of the Tunisians, notably in matters of reducing regional disparities by improving access to social services in underserved regions, creating and preserving jobs and strengthening the citizen's voice and accountability.

This emergency support programme, which is to be granted rapidly, is part of an overall 1.4-billion-dollar programme financed by the World Bank (500 million dollars), the European Union (92 million Euros) and the French Development Agency (185 million Euros), reminded Mr.Kaberuka.

He went on saying that by late June 2011, the AfDB will grant Tunisia another 210-mln-dollar loan meant for the achievement of the Gabés/Ras Jedir motorway.

SOCIETY

Interim President addresses Tunisian people on Labour Day

TUNIS, May 1, 2011 (TAP)- Interim President Foued Mebazaa said the Tunisian people had confirmed, on the occasion of the glorious Revolution of January 14, their commitment to dignity that would be meaningless without an income source that guarantees decent life.

He underlined that the celebration Sunday in Tunisia of National Labour Day is special this year as it takes place in an exceptional historical period which the country is living through after the revolution of dignity and freedom.

He emphasised, in an address delivered on Saturday night to the Tunisian people on the occasion of Labour Day, the commitment of the Interim Government in this transitory phase to focus on preserving jobs and helping businesses overcome the fallout of the current situation and resume their pace of activity.

Mr. Mebazaa also stressed the need to develop an exceptional employment programme including mechanisms that aim to grant benefits to employed people among university graduates and provide them with training and qualification opportunities to open broader prospects for their integration in the job market.

He also reminded of measures announced in the social reform programme adopted by the Interim Government and designed, in particular, to regularise the situation of specific groups of workers, strengthen all attributes of decent job and remove employment under the sub-contracting system in the public sector.

Besides, the Interim President recalled efforts designed to settle the problem of unemployment and rectify the regional imbalance, in addition to boosting several vital economic sectors, while focusing on stimulating regional development in areas which he emphasised the obvious needs in terms of utilities and infrastructure.

He added that this reform programme also comprises temporary measures aimed to support businesses that had suffered damage during the incidents that occurred in the country after the revolution, in order to help them continue their activities and preserve jobs.

To improve purchasing power of low-income citizens, Mr. Mebazaa announced the increase in the minimum guaranteed wage in the agricultural and interprofessional sectors; these increases will be determined after consultation with relevant professional organisations.

He expressed hope that these measures will contribute to "improve the social climate and revive the Tunisian economy," allowing, thereby, speeding up the pace of growth and overcoming, in the best way, this delicate situation.

He reiterated the Interim Government's willingness to spare no effort to reactivate the economic circuit and involve all concerned categories in the development effort

to ensure fair distribution of its fruits and guarantee more job opportunities.

In another connection, the Interim President reviewed efforts aimed at "restoring order in political affairs," to prepare a healthy democratic transition in power, stating: "we strive to ensure that it takes place in a responsible national consensus."

He noted that daily life is gradually returning to its normal pace in a climate of trust and serenity thanks to the efforts and sacrifices made by the internal security units, the National Guard and the National Army, as well as thanks to the awareness and cohesion that marked the majority of Tunisians in this difficult transitional period.

Moreover, Mr. Mebazaa highlighted that the unanimous tribute rendered by observers to the Tunisian Revolution, which is now regarded as a model of democratic transition that deserves to be supported and protected from all dangers and convulsions, is for all Tunisians a source of pride for it was conducted to eliminate all feelings of hopelessness, marginalisation and exclusion.

The Interim President said, however, that these tributes and praises "begin to turn gradually into apprehensions and fears in light of some missteps and acts of lawlessness and instability," because of sit-ins, strikes and paralyse of some public service, pointing up in this regard: " we can understand some of the viewpoints of principle but we could not understand their occurrence at this specific time, let alone the methods adopted."

He said that such practices start to impact negatively on foreign investment intentions in Tunisia and even on the survival of some investment projects in Tunisia as well as on the revival of the normal pace of tourism, noting that hundreds of thousands of Tunisian families live from this sector.

"I confirm that these fears are true and need to be addressed in a responsible way; the future of our children depends on the future of this Revolution and it is the duty of every Tunisian today to preserve it," he added.

Mr. Mebazaa said it is time "to get back to work with all needed seriousness and seek to preserve the potential of the State to provide public services to all citizens," which are among their fundamental rights.

He said that work and perseverance, particularly today, are in no way incompatible with democracy, noting that they are two "inseparable and complementary" ways, as " democracy cannot co-exist with disorder and irresponsibility."

He added in this context: " I rely on the spirit of responsibility that drives all professional organisations and their awareness of the precariousness of the current stage and the need to preserve the invulnerability and balances of our country's economy and adopt dialogue and consultation as an approach to reach consensus on all issues of concern to different production partners," likely to contribute to developing the country's businesses and improving living conditions.

The Interim President also emphasised the great responsibility falling on social partners, more particularly, in this delicate situation to rehabilitate work, as civilisational value and ideal way for consecration of citizenship.

He urged all Tunisians to engage in serious and constructive work, redouble efforts to develop production and improve its quality, so as to resume the normal pace of activity in different sectors and meet the legitimate expectations of the revolutionary youth, as part of a development model that relies on self-reliance and takes into consideration the needs of disadvantaged zones in the areas of investment and job creation.

Mr. Mebazaa also emphasised the role of the national media, political parties and all segments of the civil society, in this crucial stage in the history of Tunisia, in raising awareness of the major importance of the homeland to which all Tunisians are attached, saying that "all intellectual trends and electoral programmes should be above any political calculation."

He said that the revolution starts today to experience a turning point that requires adopting a serious approach by all Tunisian citizens that places the interest of the homeland above all considerations.

The Interim President also said that the Tunisian people had offered to the homeland a glorious revolution which represents a historic opportunity that requires national reconciliation.

He also considered the revolution a single opportunity to build a new society that "should break with all negative aspects of the past and avoid committing the same mistakes, so that history will not repeat itself."

Mr. Mebazaa stressed, in conclusion, that this new societal structure should be based on a strong consensual foundation bringing together all Tunisians without exception and rejecting rancour.

Tunisian-European agreement on regionalisation and employment

TUNIS, May 13, 2011 (TAP) - An outline agreement on regionalisation and employment was signed, on Friday in Tunis, between the Regional Development Ministry and the Assembly of European Regions (AER).

This agreement aims to back up Tunisia's decentralisation process, while making the most of AER's expertise, notably in matters of vocational training.

It also provides for helping Tunisian young university graduates integrate the labour market, through organisation of traineeship placements in European regions and drawing inspiration from the Eurodyssey Programme which has been piloted by AER for 25 years.

Besides, the agreement will help support the Tunisian regions' economic development, by means of stimulating small- and medium-sized enterprises' creation and favouring rapprochement and business exchange between Tunisian and European entrepreneurs.

On the occasion, AER Chairwoman Michèle Sabban congratulated Tunisia and its people for their exemplary revolution, asserting Europe's readiness to help Tunisia materialise its objectives for freedom, dignity and democracy.

For his part, Regional Development Minister Abderrazek Zouari laid emphasis on the importance of the agreement which opens up partnership prospects between 24 Tunisian regions and 270 European AER members.

Taking the floor, Employment and Vocational Training Minister Said Aydi specified that the convention would help 150 Tunisian youths be placed in AER European member regions to gain professional experience.

The Assembly of European Regions is an independent network gathering 270 regions from 34 European countries and 16 organisations. It is an inter-regional co-operation forum.

Woman to chair Tunisian Judges Union

Monday, May 23, 2011 19:51

TUNIS (TAP) - Mrs. Raoudha Labidi has been elected, on Monday, as chairwoman of the Tunisian Judges Union (SMT).

Duties within the Union's bureau have been distributed as follows:

- **Chairwoman of SMT: Raoudha Labidi**
- **Deputy-Chairman: Boubaker Souguir**
- **Secretary-General: Issam Lahmar**
- **Deputy Secretary-General: Fayçal Dali**
- **Treasurer: Lotfi Rouis**
- **Deputy-Treasurer: Fayçal Bouselmi**
- **General Co-ordinator: Imed Ben Taleb Ali**
- **Commissions Supervisor: Walid Ouguini**
- **Public Relations Officer: Hédia Laidi.**

First "employment-training" cheques handed to 7 Tunisian firms

TUNIS May 23 (TAP) - Seven Tunisian enterprises were handed, on Monday, the first "employment-training" cheques to train 17 young people, as part of a vocational training funding mechanism for the benefit of Tunisians from the underprivileged regions.

This action, which is part of a programme co-financed by the French Co-operation Institute (IFC= 100,000 euros) and the Tunisian-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CTFCI= 30,000 euros), is aimed to hire some fifty youths.

The amount of this first funding phase is about 32,800 euros, i.e., 64,500 Tunisian dinars.

During a ceremony organised on Monday in France's embassy in Tunis, Mrs. Nadine Morano, French Minister in charge of Apprenticeship and Vocational Training, pointed out that this mechanism helps Tunisian youths to make the most of a quality business training and experience.

"It's youth who started the Revolution. Consequently, it is our duty that we help them," she said.

Rate of poverty estimated at 24.7%

TUNIS May 28 (TAP) - The rate of poverty in Tunisia is estimated at present at 24.7%, according to international standards that set the poverty line at 2 dollars a day per capita.

This rate has indeed largely increased in western areas in view of the protests held by local residents who claim better living conditions, promotion of welfare services and development of collective facilities.

The number of unemployed is now estimated at 700 000, including 69% aged less than 30, whereas the unemployed among higher education graduates number 170 000.

Social Affairs Minister Mohamed Naceur who was addressing on Friday a meeting with members of the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, explained that poverty and unemployment are the main claims of people living in these areas in this transitional stage .

He also said that protest could go on in the absence of a moderating role of the government and of social consensus.

In spite of the current measures made by the Interim Government to remedy this situation, he declared, it is necessary to launch social structural reforms that should include the social coverage system, the tax system, the wage policy, the interprofessional relations, the sector of health and the system of education and higher education.

Interim Government to initiate national consultation on economic and social programme

May 28, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- The Interim Government plans to initiate a national consultation on the economic and social development programme requiring investments of 125 billion dinars (172.5 billion dinars), the Prime Ministry reported on Saturday.

This consultation will involve the country's political and social forces. The point, according to the prime ministry, is to "reach a national consensus" around this programme and major economic and social issues in the country such as needs in matters of infrastructure, employment and financing small and medium enterprises.

The programme, whose first version for the short term, has already been presented to the civil society, political parties, private sector..., focuses on five priorities: improving governance, developing infrastructure, promoting human capital, enhancing economic integration in international markets and modernising the financial sector.

The Government submitted a plan to support this programme to the G8 summit held on May 26-27 in Deauville, France.

Interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi, who attended a working session devoted to the "Arab Spring," had requested funds of 25 billion dollars (nearly 34.5 billion dinars) over five years, i.e. 5 billion dollars (6.9 billion dinars) a year, which accounts for one fifth of the funds needed by the economic and social development programme of the Interim Government.

The interim PM said, at the news conference that followed the summit, that Tunisia relies first on its own means, stressing the importance of proactive support from the international community to ensure success to the economic and social transition in the country.

British Gas "forced to shut down" if sit-ins in front of its plant go on

TUNIS, May 14, 2011 (TAP) - British Gas Tunisia, first producer of natural gas in Tunisia will be "forced to shut down Saturday" if the problem of access to its plant in Sfax is not settled, affirmed BG President Ian Perks.

He urged Tunisian authorities to provide a swift solution to the deadlock resulting from the sit-ins of members of the neighbouring communities in front of the plant premises in Nakta (Sfax).

For Ian Perks "what is taking place is unacceptable and it is impossible to keep the plant running."

The closing of the company would lead, according to a communique released by the company before, to stop its gas production that meets more than half of the country's domestic needs in this field and generates electricity to the whole of Tunisia.

British gas also said in this communiqué that "its staff and workers have been held hostage for over 48 hours now inside the plant" and "a group of the local community forced their way into the Hasdubal/Hannibal site."

BG openly criticized "the persistent lack of support from the relevant authorities" in such a way as to secure free access to the facilities and ensure the security of employees and neighbouring communities."

Indeed, citizens from the regions of Chaffar, Bouokazine and Nakta have been staging their sit-in on Friday in front of the local British gas plant, reported TAP local correspondent.

This sit-in is taking place after a disagreement between these communities and the company officials over the implementation of the agreement concluded by both sides and providing for the employment of a number of citizens and the granting of micro-credits to create sources of income for others.

The latter notably contest the resort to a regional commission to look at the question of micro-credits that will be financed by the company and call for dealing directly with the local development associations as was the case for the first 42 micro-credits.

The company reckons for its part that this commission is likely to provide further efficiency to the projects that will be carried out through these micro-credits.

In addition, local residents refuse " the reduction of the amount of the micro-credit from 5 000 to 2 000 dinars" and deny that they threatened to close the plant.

British gas had promised in its agreement with representatives of the vicinity to hire 60 of them and mobilize about 2,7 million dinars for micro-credits and social investment plans.

BG refuses in its communiqué to always change "the terms of the agreements signed or give in once again to threats ".

Tunisia to produce 244 MW from wind energy in 2012

TUNIS May 17, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisia will produce 244 Megawatts (MW) from wind energy in 2012, with the start of production next year of the 190-MW wind power plant of Bizerte.

This is the conclusion of the international workshop held on Tuesday in Tunis on "opportunities for developing wind power in Tunisia."

According to Mr. Ayadi Ben Aissa, former CEO of the Tunisian Electricity and Gas Company (STEG), production of power through wind energy will not exceed 300 MW in 2012, i.e. 5% of power production in the country, seeing that STEG in its current structure cannot absorb a capacity higher to this upper limit.

Yet, wind energy production capacity in Tunisia can reach 8 thousand MW, if wind power plants are built nationwide, he said.

He added that financing opportunities are available internationally to encourage production of power through wind energy.

Tunisia has now only one wind power plant in Sidi Daoud (Houaria) with a production capacity of 54 MW.

WB ready to carry on funding environmental projects in Tunisia

TUNIS, May 12, 2011 (TAP) - A World Bank (WB) delegation of experts is presently on a working visit in Tunisia, as part of following up waste management projects co-financed by the Bank, the Agriculture and Environment Ministry reported, on Thursday.

This WB delegation, led WB resident representative in Tunisia Eileen Murray, conferred with Secretary of State in charge of Environment Salem Hamdi.

The talk turned, according to the Ministry, on the world financial institution's readiness to carry on funding environmental projects, particularly those of waste management and setting of controlled dumps.

The talk was also devoted to looking at possibilities for boosting capacities to conduct studies on environment impact of some projects and the need to associate people in conception of environmental projects.

TOURISM & CULTURE

Launching of first post-Revolution tourism campaign

TUNIS, May 7, 2011 (TAP) - The first post-Revolution tourism promotional campaign, "Summer 2011," will be launched next May 9 in French city of Bordeaux.

Sixty million dinars (MTD) were allocated to finance the first part of the campaign and 55 MTD will be possibly devoted for the second part of the campaign, once the objectives of the first part are achieved, National Board of Tunisian Tourism Director-General Habib Ammar.

During a news conference, held on Saturday in Tunis, Mr. Ammar pointed out that the campaign is characterised by a typical humour, as it "quips about fear which still prevents European tourists to visit Tunisia," while

emphasising positive changes in new Tunisia, a country so hospitable and captivating as ever.

Regarding the results of the last four months, Mr. Ammar said that the sector's overall profits recorded a drop by 41.8%, compared with the same period last year.

The number of over-nights during the same period went down by 53.7% (a little over 3 million), and tourism earnings fell by 47.7%, according to Tunisia's Central Bank, compared with last year, the official said.

Cruising: resumption confirmed

TUNIS, May 10, 2011 (TAP) - More than 4,700 tourists arrived on Tuesday in La Goulette port aboard three ships, a Trade and Tourism Ministry communiqué announced.

Resumption of cruise tourism is thus confirmed, after a three-month interruption, the communiqué points out.

Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas announced that, two cultural tours will be held, by the end of May and the end of June in Tunis, to boost cruising tourism in Tunisia.

Regarding the renowned ship-owners who did not resume activities in Tunisia, such as MSC and COSTA, the Minister said that negotiations will be engaged in the coming few days.

Tunisia hosted more than 900,000 cruising tourists in 2010.

Tunisian tourism's new promotion campaign in Algeria

TUNIS May 19, 2011 (TAP) - On the sidelines of Tunisia's participation at the International Tourism and Travel Fair, organised on May 18-22 in Algiers, Tunisian National Tourism Board (ONTT) Director-General Habib Ammar held, on Wednesday in Algiers, a news conference on the Tunisian tourism's new promotion campaign in Algeria.

The campaign, due to be launched next June 1, will be staged on TV, written media, Internet and on visual posters, inviting Algerian tourists to visit Tunisia.

Speaking about the importance of the Algerian travel market for the Tunisian tourism, Mr. Ammar pointed out that this vanguard campaign aims to attract a larger number of Algerian tourists and start an action aimed to structure demand on that market, one that takes into consideration the Algerian tourists' expectancies and specificities, particularly regarding the offered rates and accommodation modes.

Answering questions on the current conditions of security and peace in Tunisia, ONTT Director-General said that the situation has so far recorded a noteworthy improvement and that the Government has made the necessary arrangements to bolster security, adding that similar measures have been taken on the border areas so that transiting takes place under the best conditions.

Besides, he briefed the meeting on the Tunisian tourism's current situation: it recorded a 41% drop in its input and a 48% fall in tourist revenues in the last four months. He added that the Board had launched a quality-inspection action across the country's tourist regions, favouring advice and guidance of the sector's professionals.

Earlier, working sessions had been held between ONTT officials and travel agents operating on Tunisia, who had

expressed their solidarity and support to the Tunisian tourism, voicing their concerns about the high rates of air transport and stays in Tunisian hotels.

Two large-scale tours will be organised, next May 30-June 5 in Tabarka and Yasmine Hammamet, for Algerian travel agents' benefit.

World Bank plan to promote eco-tourism in South Tunisia

KEBILI May 26 (TAP) - The judicious utilization of the sahara biological heritage and the development of customs in the southern region of Kébili to provide a new eco-tourism product in South Tunisia were the focus of the working session held on Wednesday at the premises of Kébili Governor's office with attendance of World Bank experts and tourism and environment senior executives.

The meeting allowed to review the natural resources in Nefzaoua, notably the Chotts (salt lakes), oases and Sahara that host flora and fauna likely to favour the development of eco-tourism.

The World Bank is indeed endeavouring to carry out a tourist and environmental project in the southern governorates of Tunisia by means of investments worth about 4,2 million dollars and a survey is being worked out in this regard by the bank experts through an amount of 200 000 dollars.

Participants explained that the large surface areas of the governorate (2,2 million hectares) provided an ecosystem adapted to this kind of tourism, especially the national park of Jebil extending over 150 hectares.

A second World Bank team will carry out a more thorough survey later.

Tourist project to be launched soon in Kerkennah

TUNIS May 30 (TAP) - An ecological tourist resort project in Sidi Founkhal (Kerkennah Isles) will be submitted next week to the Tourist Options' Co-ordination Committee coming under the Tourism Ministry for review and approval.

This project should be achieved in strict compliance with environmental standards and the island's specificities, Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas said during the visit he paid to Kerkennah on Sunday.

The project, which stretches over an area of 90 hectares, will comprise hotels, residential areas, holiday resorts, entertainment centres and fitness trails, with an expected accommodation capacity of 300 beds.

The resort is expected to generate over 2,000 jobs.

"Jasmine Village" exhibit in Paris May 21-22

TUNIS May 20 (TAP) - A "Jasmine Village" will be set up next May 21-22 in front of the Paris town hall to enable visitors to get acquainted with another picture of Tunisia's culture, tourism and crafts, that of new Tunisia, announced Thursday the Paris Council.

This village is organised by the Paris-based 00216 magazine with the support of the City of Paris and the Ministry of Trade and Tourism, says a communiqué of the town council.

This initiative had been announced by Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë during his two visits to Tunisia last February and April "to support the revival of tourist trade in Tunisia" and "reaffirm the readiness of the City of Paris to support all actions of solidarity allowing Tunisia to start working again at democratic, economic and social levels."

Professional tourism exhibitors, craftsmen, producers of the land and artists will exhibit the richness of new Tunisia; Debates and video screenings will allow to exchange views, promote the Tunisia destination and make better known post-revolution Tunisia.

A large photo exhibition will be dedicated to the events of the jasmine revolution. In addition, a reading place will exhibit the latest books on Tunisia, not to mention several music, dancing and giant puppet shows .

TUNIS May 23 (TAP) - Over 100 000 people visited, this weekend in Paris, the "Jasmine Village" exhibit and got acquainted with the new picture of Tunisian tourism and post-Revolution Tunisia.

The exhibit was held by Paris-based 00216 Magazine with the support of the city of Paris and the Ministry of Trade and Tourism in front of the Paris town hall "as part of the series of actions of the Paris Council to support Tunisia's people and revive Tunisian economy and tourist trade after the Jasmine Revolution," says a communiqué of the city of Paris released Monday.

The exhibit was inaugurated Saturday by Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë, Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas and 00216 Magazine Director Samir Bouzid, with attendance notably of the Ambassadors of Palestine and Arab League in France and several officials and friends of Tunisia like comedy actor Michel Boujnah and former Ambassador in Tunis Admiral Lanxade.

About 70 French personalities visiting Tunisia for "Voyage du jasmin" on May 7-10

Thursday, May 12, 2011 17:22

TUNIS, May 7, 2011 (TAP) - Some 70 French personalities from the worlds of culture, cinema, communications and media, and show-business are visiting Tunisia on May 7-10, 2011, sources from the Commerce and Tourism Ministry told TAP news agency.

Among these stars and high-profile figures, the group includes Tunisian-born film-maker, writer and TV host Serge Moati, singer and song writer Patrick Bruel, French-Tunisian actor and film-maker Michel Boujneh, Director of Afrique Magazine Ziad Limam, former international football player Frank Le Bœuf, comedian and humorist Smaïn, actor Zinedine Soualem, sports commentator and journalist Mourad Zghidi, actress Nathalie Besançon and other famous figures.

This "charm operation" called "Voyage du jasmin," which is held by the Commerce and Tourism Ministry, is part of the efforts made to revitalise tourism in Tunisia and promote its upmarket quality.

The agenda of this group's stay includes visits to Sidi Bou Said, Carthage archeological site and the sea resort of Hammamet.

Tunisian cinema honoured

TUNIS, May 13, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisian film Director Nouri Bouzid received, on Thursday evening, the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur insignia from French Culture and Communication Minister Frédéric Mitterrand.

According to a press release by the Tunisian Film Directors Union, the French Minister pointed out that the decoration is a token of recognition to "a freedom activist in a country which, last January 14, taught the world a good lesson."

During a ceremony held on Thursday evening as part of the 64th Cannes Film Festival, Mr. Nouri Bouzid dedicated this Légion d'honneur decoration to Tunisia and the Tunisian film-making, all trends and schools included, who had striven to free themselves from a dictatorship that had stifled Tunisians for more than two decades.

Albert Londres Prize Association chairwoman: "Tunisia's choice, this year, is a friendship and solidarity gesture"

TUNIS, May 13, 2011 (TAP) - "Tunisia's choice for awarding this year's Albert Londres Prize is a symbolic initiative and a gesture of friendship and solidarity towards Tunisia," Albert Londres Prize Association chairwoman, and French "Le Monde" grand reporter, Annick Cojean.

In an interview to TAP news agency, she commended "the Tunisian people's fight for democracy, freedom and dignity," specifying that this is the reason why the Albert Londres Prize Association is ready "to collaborate with Tunisian friends and colleagues."

She expressed wish that "Tunisian journalists will take part in the 2012 edition, through a French-Tunisian partnership in media field."

The 2011 edition ceremony, due on Saturday, May 14 in Tunis, will award the 73rd Albert Londres Prize of the written press and the 27th audiovisual Prize to laureates, with attendance of all those who are attached to freedom of speech under all its forms.

The Prize's jury is composed of Annick Cojean, Chairwoman, and 26 French journalists and writers.

The Albert Londres Prize is a French journalism award, named after journalist Albert Londres, was created in 1932. It was first awarded in 1933, and has been awarded every year since that date to the "best reporter in the written press."

TUNIS, May 15, 2011 (TAP)- The 2011 Albert Londres Award ceremony was held on Saturday afternoon at the Municipal Theatre of Tunis, in tribute to the Tunisian Revolution.

Agence France Press (AFP) journalist Emmanuel Duparcq was awarded the written press prize of this new edition (73rd) for his reports in Pakistan and Afghanistan, while the 27th Albert Londres Audiovisual Award was handed to director David André for his film "Une Peine Infinie" on death penalty in Oklahoma, USA.

Cannes pays tribute to Tahar Cheriaa

TUNIS, May 14, 2011 (TAP) - A posthumous homage was paid by the International Organisation of la Francophonie (IOF) to film Director and Founder of Carthage Film

Festival (JCC) Tahar Cheriaa (1927-2010), on Friday, on the sidelines of the 64th Cannes Film Festival.

The ceremony was attended by several African, Arab and European figures, including Cameroon's Culture Minister, the French Film Institute Director and Egyptian film maker Taoufik Salah.

The first part of this homage included the screening of the film "In the Shade of Baobab" by Director Mohamed Challouf, followed by testimonies on Tahar Cheriaa's life and work.

The second part consisted in a roundtable held as part of the "World Films" section conducted by producer Taoufik Boughedir and gathering such African and Arab film makers as Souleimane Cissé from Mali and Taoufik Salah.

The meeting was crowned by handing over the Senghor medal to the defunct's son, awarded by the International Organisation of la Francophonie, as a token of consideration to Tahar Cheriaa's achievements.

Cannes Film Festival: Tunisian pavilion attracts foreign film directors and producers

CANNES May 18 (TAP) - The Tunisian pavilion located in the international village on the "Promenade de la Croisette" in Cannes continues to attract many foreign film directors, producers and artists coming to discover the Tunisian participation in Cannes Festival 2011.

Over one hundred persons visit the Tunisian pavilion each day, showing their appreciation for the Tunisian Revolution and the Tunisian people's bravery.

This year, the Tunisian pavilion is not only an artistic and cultural space but also a showcase of new Tunisia's shining image.

Tunisia is also present in film markets where director Moez Kammoun is promoting his film "End of December". Swiss, Belgian, Russian and many other film producers and directors showed interest in buying and distributing the film.

Tunisian participants in this 64th Cannes Festival, including producers, directors and journalists, called for the need to work together to promote the "Tunisia destination" and Tunisian art production on the occasion of this international festival.

Banderas hails "Tunisians' bravery"

CANNES May 20 (TAP) - Though not an easily approachable person, Hollywood star Antonio Banderas did not hesitate, in a brief statement to TAP news agency, to express "admiration for the bravery of Tunisians who seduced the whole world," voicing respect for "this warm people who, I'm definitely sure, will earn for themselves the status they deserve, after the historic events of January 14, 2011."

He also said that he had been discussing with Tunisian producer Tarak Ben Ammar the shooting of a new long feature in the Tunisian south.

Regarding his participation in the film "Black Gold" whose shooting in Tunisia had lasted five months, Antonio Banderas pointed out that "that experience in Tunisia was very special and unique in its artistic nature."

Tunisian Culture Days open in Tlemcen

TLEMEN (ALGERIA) May 23 (TAP) - Tunisia's Culture Days opened, on May 22, in the Algerian city of Tlemcen, as part of the "Tlemcen, Capital of Islamic Culture 2011" event, with attendance of several Tunisian and Algerian men of culture, journalists and officials.

These days will last till next May 25, with a rich and varied programme including plays, films, conferences, exhibitions and artistic meetings.

Tunisia takes part in Islamic Cultural Week in Rome

TUNIS May 24 (TAP) - Tunisia is taking part on May 24-31 in the Islamic Cultural Week organised in Rome, Italy, by the Italian Islamic Cultural Centre, jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Under the aegis of the Culture Ministry, Tunisia's participation includes a documentary exhibition turned "Convergence: Islamic Ifriqiya-Italy" by Dr. Khaled Ben Romdhane, a Professor in the National Heritage Institute, displaying photos and posters illustrating the historical ties binding Tunisia and Italy.

The exhibition was inaugurated, on Tuesday, by Religious Affairs Minister Laroussi Mizouri who lectured on "Islamic Civilisation in Tunisia: Tolerance, Harmony and Peace among Religions."

Besides, Tunisia participates with an Arab calligraphy exhibition of artists N'ja Mahdaoui, Khaled Slimane, Faouzi Belkhala and Khaled Miladi, and a documentary film titled "Olive Tree in The Heart of Tunis" by Hamida Ben Ammar.

The event will be closed by a lecture by Mr. Farhat Drissi, Adviser to the Religious Affairs Minister, on "Islam and Democracy: Voice of Today's Tunisia."