



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

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TUNISIA & JAPAN

Tunisia takes part in Japanese Foodex

TUNIS, March 3, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisia is taking part, for the 14th consecutive time, in the 36th International Food Exhibition (Foodex), held on March 1-4 in Tokyo, with a 144-square-metre national stand housing 14 companies from the food industries sector.

A wide range of products are on display: olive oil, dates, wines, canned food, table olives and pasta.

The Exports Promotion Centre is organising the Tunisian participation, in collaboration with services of the Tunisian embassy in Tokyo.

A seminar on "Valorization of Tunisian Olive and Aromatic Medicinal Plant" will be held on March 4, as part of the exhibition. It will be conducted by Mrs. Isoda Hiroko, Japanese expert in Tunisian olive oil at the University of Tsukuba.

Foodex, which came into being in 1974, is the major professional exhibition dedicated to food industries and drinks in Asia and the world.

The present edition is held with the participation of 2,500 exhibitors from 60 countries.

National Defence Minister receives Japan's ambassador in Tunisia

TUNIS, Feb. 17, 2011 (TAP) - National Defence Minister Abdelkarim Zbidi received, on Thursday morning in Tunis, Japan's Ambassador in Tunis.

The meeting provided the opportunity to review developments of the situation in Tunisia, notably at the security level.

The talk also offered the occasion to look at prospects of the Tunisian-Japanese co-operation and means to help promote it, notably at this delicate turning point.

The two sides reasserted the need to devise a joint long- and mid-term work schedule which meets priorities of this transitory stage and examined particularly the creation of vocational training centres, all cycles and specialties included, and financing of sustainable development projects in the inland regions to vitalise the economic channels.

Mr. Toshiyuki Taga voiced his country's support to the Tunisian People's Revolution, reiterating readiness to help Tunisians materialise their aspirations to freedom and democracy, as well as reinforcing the economic and social development, in addition to hoisting bilateral co-operation to the hoped-for level.

POLITICS

Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa signs general amnesty decree-law

TUNIS, Feb. 19, 2011 (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa signed, on Saturday afternoon, the decree-law on general amnesty.

This piece of legislation stipulates that all persons tried or persecuted before January 14, 2011, by various-degree courts and for different crimes, could benefit of this amnesty.

Secretary of state to the Prime Minister Ridha Belhaj pointed out that these crimes concern the interior state security whose files had been submitted to justice by virtue of the law on terrorism, the press code, law on demonstrations, the telecommunications code or other provisions of the Civil Procedure Code and other codes, notably that of military procedure.

He added that this decree-law also provides that all person persecuted for common law crimes, in view of their political or union activities, could benefit of this amnesty.

The Secretary of State specified that the decree-law institutes the work reintegration mechanisms and the principle of compensation for persons concerned by the general amnesty.

Besides, he highlighted that the decree-law puts an end to a period of abuse and violations, opens up a new era of reconciliation and provides the objective conditions of this transitional period and preparation for elections under the best conditions possible.

March in the capital and Sit-in at the Kasbah

TUNIS, Feb. 20, 2011 (TAP) - More than three thousand citizens gathered, on Sunday, at the Kasbah Square, demanding the resignation of Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi, Prime Minister at the Caretaker Government and the setting up of a constituent council to establish a parliamentary system.

This demonstration started by a march of approximately two thousand citizens at "Porte de France," who toured the Habib Bourguiba Avenue, stopping for a while in front of the Interior Ministry and the French embassy where demonstrators expressed their opposition to any foreign tutelage on Tunisia.

Protesters then reached the Kasbah square where they were joined by a thousand other protesters.

Participants in this peaceful march and the sit-in, which have become, in recent weeks, a Sunday tradition, demand primarily the establishment of a constituent council, abolishing the Constitution and dissolution of the chambers of deputies and advisers and the RCD.

Protestors flood Government Square

TUNIS, Feb. 25, 2011 (TAP) - Tens of thousands of protestors flooded the Kasbah Government Square and

the neighbouring streets, on Friday in Tunis, in response to the call issued by participants in the Government Square sit-in to stage a large-scale demonstration and a "Day of Wrath."

Through the placards they waved and the slogans they shouted, the demonstrators demanded in particular that the Prime Minister steps down, that the interim government, the Chambers of Deputies and Advisers be dissolved and that a constituent assembly be created to establish a parliamentary regime.

The protestors also called for "forming a national salvation government," "ridding the institutions, organisations, associations and trade unions of members involved in corruption cases," "postponing satisfaction of social claims," and "promulgating a new press code and a new electoral code."

The demonstrators also demanded the proclamation of a general legislative amnesty, the dissolution of the Constitutional Democratic Rally and fair prosecution of the former regime's symbols.

Five dead in incidents in Tunis

TUNIS, Feb. 27, 2011 (TAP)- The acts of violence, looting and burning that occurred on Saturday, February 26 at Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis caused the death of five people, announced the Interior Ministry in a communiqué released on Sunday.

These casualties were recorded during clashes between internal security forces who attempted to dissuade a group of young people armed with knives and stone who wanted to break into the headquarters of the Interior Ministry, added the communiqué a copy of which was received by TAP.

The Interior Ministry adds that these incidents caused injuries to 16 security officers, saying that investigations are underway to identify circumstances of the deaths and injuries.

The same communiqué says that the Habib Bourguiba Avenue was, on Sunday, the scene of successive attempts by some groups of youth to sow unrest by attacking security officers by throwing stones.

The Interior Ministry adds, in this communiqué, that it expresses deep regret for the dead and wounded, as a result of these organised criminal acts that have no connection with peaceful events and that show the attempts to involve youth in these acts by using them as human shields. It also reminds of the seriousness of these acts committed by these agitators who do not want Tunisia to be stable and overcome this exceptional situation.

To avoid more material damage and casualties and protect the Revolution and its noble principles, the Ministry calls upon all components of the civil society to assume their national responsibility in this difficult situation facing the country.

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi resigns

TUNIS, Feb. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Mohamed Ghannouchi announced on Sunday his resignation from his post as Prime Minister in the Interim Government, urging Tunisians to protect the people's revolution against all those who try to foil it and face the violence and looting of its enemies.

He affirmed that he had made his decision after careful thought and long consultations with the members of the Government, his friends and his family.

He noted that he was leaving the Government with a clear conscience and that his resignation did not mean he is shunning the responsibility he has assumed since last January 14, but rather that he is convinced that it will serve Tunisia and allow to restore security in the country.

He stressed that he categorically refused to take decisions that could cause losses of human lives and bloodshed.

Ghannouchi criticized Tunisian media which, from his point of view, did not report the Government words as is usual and with the necessary professionalism since they focused on protests claiming the resignation of the Government and the Prime Minister and rather covered socio-professional strikes.

He said the media did not report the major gains achieved in spite of the short term of work of the Government and the strong pressure exerted on its action, as for instance the general amnesty, the return of expatriates, the political openness and the measures decided to return stolen property and seize the property and assets of the ousted president, his family and their relatives.

He insisted on the need to redouble efforts and perseverance to secure an adequate climate for the future political and electoral events and get prepared so that they might be held in the best conditions.

As regards the events that happened in Tunisia on Friday, January 14, 2011, Ghannouchi said he had been informed about the protests at Habib Bourguiba Avenue and the proclamation of the state of emergency, the dissolution of the Government and the decision entitling him to form a new Government while he was at his office.

He also reminded that he had remained in his office until 6 P.M and had been picking up his personal documents to leave without return in view of the situation prevailing then in Tunisia.

"Before leaving my office, he said, I received a phone call from the President's Security Service urging me to assume the historical responsibility, but it was of no importance for me". "I then received a second phone call saying that in case I refused, there would be a bloodshed because the President of the Republic had left Tunisia and extremely serious events were taking place in the country".

He went on saying that without informing his family and after he had confirmation of the sudden leaving of the President which was actually an escape and in order to save the lives of Tunisian citizens, he had decided to head to the palace of Carthage.

The resigning PM added that he had called the National Defence Minister before arriving in Carthage to brief him about the events, saying that "this telephone call had saved him and even saved Tunisia from bloodshed".

He affirmed that he had found in the palace of Carthage Foued Mebazaa and Abdallah Kallel who had asked him to assume the responsibility in view of the temporary power vacuum that prevents from complying with ordinary procedures in such circumstances. This is why, he said, we resorted to article 56 of the Constitution on Friday and then to article 57 on Saturday after adopting the necessary constitutional procedures under which Foued Mebazaa assumed the Interim Presidency.

Ghannouchi outpointed that since then, he had assumed full responsibility and that absolute priority was to restore security and put an end to anything likely to cause human losses among citizens and avoid making decisions against them "even at the expense of our lives".

He affirmed that after the terrorist attacks perpetrated on Saturday, Sunday and Monday and the news that there were snipers in some places and breaking out of fire, the Interim Government had been formed in consultation with all the parties, including the Labour Union UGTT, but this Government had aroused criticism and had been met with a sit-in at la Kasbah square.

He reminded that the Government had met this people's claim with a favourable answer and that a new Government had been formed with the consensus of all the political parties and civil society activists. He said that the country had then faced difficulties in matters of security first, which were rapidly overcome, to turn afterwards to social drift through continuous claims of all parties "as if the revolution for dignity, the revolution of the unemployed and the needy has become the revolution of wage rises and improvement of conditions of favoured parties" with permanent sources of income while there are 500 000 unemployed, including 150 000 higher education graduates, not to mention the inland provinces that did not record any development adapted to their human and natural potentialities.

Mohamed Ghannouchi went on saying: "That was the first test for the government and we have endeavoured to deal with this issue with wisdom and through dialogue with the Labour Union which has, on several occasions, helped us calm people down, incite workers to go back to work and enable us to focus on the top priority consisting in preparing for the holding of elections, which requires the adoption of political reforms notably in matters of election law and restoring of security, in addition to giving hope to all the deprived people living under the poverty line and numbering about 200 thousand families, including 125 thousand who have had the benefit of state interventions up to the end of 2010."

Ghannouchi also declared "I have always affirmed that we do not have a magic wand to change what has been accumulated in the past 23 years in only a few weeks. We have neither natural resources nor foreign support to change the situation." However, we have looked with great realism at the various issues so that public services might not be paralysed, in spite of the difficulties and schemes of some parties that endeavoured to hinder the

good course of these services to establish insecurity and doubt about the prospects opened up by the revolution for all Tunisia's citizens. These schemes, he said, have concerned several fields, including notably the economic sector since the loss of tens of thousands jobs and the materialization of the projects announced would only have aborted the revolution.

On the other hand, he stated: "Tunisia has become a free country and information is now free. Tunisians no longer fear to express themselves. Nevertheless, Democracy is not achieved yet since it requires a series of measures, procedures, regulations and duties that must be reinforced". He added that such an objective can be fulfilled only after the holding of elections and the passing on of the torch to the new government that will be formed after these elections.

Ghannouchi affirmed that the term of the Interim Government had been a long one in that every hour had been marked by new events, and a short one in that the Interim Government had started working only 50 days ago and that it is working in a climate of instability, in view of the thousands of people flocking to Ministries and the immediate and excessive claims of access to employment and improvement of conditions "as if invisible forces were trying to abort this remarkable experience and peaceful revolution triggered by youths through communication technologies, which resulted in over 200 martyrs and victims in the different regions of the country."

In spite of the instability, the difficulties and the disorder in numerous fields, the government has managed in a relatively short time to respond to several demands of the community, such as the release of all political prisoners, the establishment of general amnesty, the return of all those in exile, and the recovery of political and civil rights, out of care to open up a new page as part of national reconciliation.

The resigning PM reminded that the obstacles and restrictions had been lifted to allow anyone to form a political party, saying that 40 applications had got preliminary receipts. In addition, Tunisia's Human Rights League, which has always been met with obstacles, has recovered its rights and is working in total freedom.

As regards corruption, embezzlement and illegal enrichment, he affirmed that receivers or sequestrators had been appointed to head all the companies owned by the ousted President's relatives so that their staff might not lose their jobs. Their banking accounts in Tunisia and their assets abroad have also been frozen through official requests to the countries concerned, in addition to the adoption of a Government decree providing for the seizure of the property and assets of the ousted President and his relatives, and justice will give a verdict on these different abuses.

Ghannouchi pointed out that rogatory letters had been issued against several people who fled the country and the charges against them had been confirmed, including notably voluntary manslaughter, incitement to murder and others such as high treason.

He declared: "unfortunately and despite all these efforts, the measures taken by the Government have not been reported of course by some media", wondering why they

focused on ousting the Government, as if it were the main objective of the Revolution." Why so much focus on the PM? Does his departure mean the settlement of all these problems? Why does all this happen now? He asked.

As regards last Friday's sit-in at la Kasbah square and demonstrations that took place in Habib Bourguiba Avenue downtown Tunis, he said that some people driving cars who are not concerned by the sit in at la Kasbah, had infiltrated protesters and carried out such things as looting, fire, terrorism and violence.

He pointed out that one person had been arrested in Kasserine carrying more than 90, 000 Dinars, an amount which he planned to share out among trouble makers. He wondered in this context: "Who is behind what took place in Habib Bourguiba Avenue and all this cycle of violence?"

As to the Commission of Political Reform which is preparing draft laws, including in particular the election law, Ghannouchi affirmed that this commission, now approved unanimously, had turned into a higher committee for the protection of the revolution, for political reform and democratic transition and that the caretaker president will sign on Monday, February 28, a Government decree relating to this committee to enable it to carry out its mission at best.

He also said that the Interim President will announce, as of next week, the roadmap for next elections.

Ghannouchi concluded his news conference expressing thanks to all those who had backed up the Government after the Revolution saying "May God preserve Tunisia against any ordeal".

Kasbah sit-in maintained

TUNIS, Feb. 27, 2011 (TAP) - Despite the resignation of Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi as Prime Minister in the Interim Government, the Kasbah sit-in, which has lasted for seven days, is maintained.

Protesters, from all parts of the country, believe that this resignation is only a first step towards achieving their goals.

This resignation, which as soon as it was announced, was applauded by demonstrators, still seems insufficient for some participants in the sit-in.

The sit-in observed in the Kasbah from last Sunday ran smoothly and peacefully, despite the difficult weather conditions.

Mr. Taieb Bou Aicha, member of the coordinating committee with the media and citizens on the spot, emphasised the drive of solidarity shown by citizens living in Greater Tunis and its suburb towards their compatriots to whom they provided assistance in kind, particularly food products and blankets.

Interim President appoints Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi as Prime Minister

TUNIS, Feb. 27, 2011 (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa addressed the Tunisian people on Sunday evening, announcing his decision to appoint Mr. Beji Caid

Essebsi, as Prime Minister following the resignation of Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi.

He said he was surprised by the resignation of Mr. Ghannouchi, adding that he had accepted his resignation upon his insistence and determination to do so.

The Interim President expressed his thanks to Mr. Ghannouchi for all the efforts he had exerted and for his devotion to serve Tunisia in this delicate situation facing the country.

Given his attachment to the interests of Tunisia and to guarantee the continuity of the State, with all its institutions, he said that he had asked Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi to hold the post of Prime Minister, a responsibility which he has accepted, stressing the patriotism and loyalty of the new prime minister.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa also said he will address the Tunisian people in a few days to present to them the roadmap for the next stage, in light of the proposals to be submitted by the higher committee for the achievement of the objectives of the Revolution and political reform.

He extended, in conclusion, his thanks and consideration to all those who have made efforts so that Tunisia remains always trustworthy, urging all sides to show calm and objectivity and strive to overcome the state of disorder witnessed by the country.

Resignations from Interim Government

TUNIS, Feb. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Industry and Technology Minister Afif Chelbi, on Monday, submitted his resignation from the Interim Government.

TUNIS, Feb. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Mohamed Nouri Jouini, Planning and International Co-operation Minister, presented, on Monday, his resignation from the interim government.

TUNIS, March. 1, 2011 (TAP) - Secretary State in charge of Higher Education Faouzia Farida Charfi stepped down on Tuesday for "personal reasons" according to the letter of resignation she tendered to the interim President and sent to TAP News Agency.

TUNIS, March. 1, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Ilyes Jouini, Minister to Prime Minister in charge of Economic and Social Reform and co-ordination with the concerned ministries presented, on Tuesday his resignation from the Interim Government.

TUNIS, March. 1, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Ahmed Néjib Chebbi, Regional and Local Development Minister announced, on Tuesday, during a news conference, his resignation from the Interim Government

Ahmed Ibrahim of Ettajdid Movement resigns from Interim Government

TUNIS, March. 1, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Ahmed Ibrahim, Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister, presented, on Tuesday, in a letter sent to the Prime Minister, his resignation from the Interim Government.

The First Secretary of the Ettajdid Movement justified his resignation, according to this letter, a copy of which forwarded to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, as being the result of the recent developments witnessed by the country's political scene.

He underlined the Ettajdid Movement's commitment to see to it that the Tunisian people achieve the objectives of the Revolution "in the service of which," he asserted, "I have spared no effort, notably in the higher education and scientific research field."

Ahmed Néjib Chebbi of Progressive Democratic Party explains why he decided to quit Interim Government

TUNIS, March 1, 2011 (TAP) - Regional and Local Development Minister Ahmed Néjib Chebbi announced, in a news conference on Tuesday in Tunis, his resignation from the Caretaker Government.

Mr. Chebbi said that "insecurity and social unrest" are shaking the country, underlining that "weakness of the interim government and political parties" has paved the way for "a political vacuum" the country is presently witnessing.

He explained, in a statement to the press, that his resignation has resulted from the absence of solutions within the government, otherwise he would have stayed.

Additionally, he expressed "fear about Tunisia's straying into the wrong path: instability, political vacuum, constitutional vacuum." He added that "nature dislikes vacuum. Necessarily, an authority other than the State would attempt at seizing the opportunity."

In the absence of the authority of the State, Mr. Chebbi expressed "concern about the fact that the Army might take over: the way things happened in Egypt."

To a question on Ennahdha Movement's participation in the government, the PDP founder answered: "no, not to my knowledge," indicating that he has always been "in favour of recognition of all parties which operate within the framework of legality." Nonetheless, when it comes to Ennahdha, Mr. Chebbi voiced "total disagreement with the Movement's approaches," which, according to him, have a destabilising effect on the situation in Tunisia.

Mr. Ibrahim voiced conviction that his personal contribution, as well as the Ettajdid Movement's, to the achievement of the targets of the Revolution and the aspirations of the Tunisian people, youths and elites, will be more active and efficient outside government.

He reiterated his commitment and his Party's to militate "with great determination and responsibility in favour of the preservation of the Revolution principles, consecration of the tenets of the Republic and transition to a democratic regime which materialises people's sovereignty, free from any form of tutelage."

Council for Protection of Revolution calls for "dissolving government and holding extended consultations"

TUNIS, March 1, 2011 (TAP) - The National Council for the Protection of the Revolution called on Caretaker President "to dissolve the Interim Government and hold extended consultations" to ensure a national consensus on choosing the Prime Minister and "forming an Interim Government whose task is to manage current affairs, and one which would include competent members who do not belong to the former regime."

Mission of those members, the Council specified, is due to come to end with the election of the constitutional assembly and none of them will have the right to run for the next presidential and legislative elections.

In a communiqué released at the end of its meeting yesterday at the headquarters of the National Bar in Tunis, a copy of which was sent to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) News Agency on Tuesday morning, the Council points out that:

"It is working, on this occasion, to submit a decree in response to the decree-law presented by the Caretaker President to regulate the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution, by defining its objectives, make-up and how to conduct of its proceedings."

The Council also is to work out a coherent plan on legal options and practices and deadlines "in order to elect a constitutional assembly to be charged with drafting a new constitution, materialising in this fashion the people's legitimacy;" this council would be dissolved as soon as the constitutional assembly is elected.

After denouncing the "repressive practices and claims to dissolve the political police," the Council urged the local and regional Committees for Protection of the Revolution to join hands to face up to "the plotters who are conspiring against Tunisian people and their Revolution, and identify instigators of acts of destruction, to unveil their intention and preserve public and private property."

Eight new political parties legalized

TUNIS, March 3, 2011 (TAP) - The Interior Ministry announced, on Thursday in a communiqué, that licences have granted for the formation of eight new political parties.

These are:

- Centre Social Party,
- Dignity and Equity Party,
- Free Unionists Movement,
- Ennahdha Movement,
- Young Democrats Party,
- Justice and Equity Party,
- Reform and Social Justice Movement and
- National Movement for Justice and Development.

The Interior Ministry recalls, in the same communiqué, that four other political parties had been granted licences, since last January 14, namely:

- Green Tunisia Party,

- Socialist Left Party,
- Patriotic and Democratic Labour Party and
- Baath Movement.

The total number of authorised political parties in Tunisia reached 21 by March 3, the communiqué reminded.

Interim President announces election of National Constituent Assembly on July 24

TUNIS, March 3, 2011 (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa announced, in his address to the Tunisian people on Thursday evening, that the country has entered a new period of its history, one that rests on the people's exercise of their full sovereignty as part of a new political system that breaks off definitely and irreversibly with the deposed regime.

In accordance with provisions of Article 57 of the Constitution and "to protect continuity and durability of this State, also as a token of fidelity to the memory of the martyrs and to implement the principles of the Revolution," Mr. Foued Mebazaa emphasised his commitment to carry on his mission beyond March 15, 2011, until the elections are held.

He presented a detailed plan of political events "that will determine the country's near future," a road map which, he said, "has enjoyed broad consensus among the different political sides, components of civil society and national organisations to meet the aspirations of the brave Tunisian people who expressed determination to break off one and for all with the past, during their Revolution against tyranny and oppression, and their firm commitment to fully exercise their sovereignty, by choosing freely and without any form of tutelage, their representatives to achieve a healthy and serene democratic transition."

He also announced the adoption of an interim organisation of public powers, composed of the interim president and a transitory government headed by Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi, and which will end the day when the National Constituent Assembly will start its works, after its free, pluralistic and fair election, next July 24.

The Interim President said that, in order to elect the National Constituent Assembly democratically and in accordance with the principles of the Revolution, a special electoral system will be set up to this end.

He underlined that "the Commission for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution and Democratic Transition" is striving to elaborate the required legal text in this respect, which will be the focus of a consultation within the Commission's Council, a body to be made up of national political figures, representatives of the different political parties, authorities, organisations and associations and components of civil society, in the capital and from the regions, i.e. people who had contributed and supported the Revolution. He announced that this legal document will be adopted by late March so that effective preparations for the elections could start.

Mr. Mebazaa underlined that the implementation of this programme will finalise the work for the next period, with a

view to meeting "the expectations of the Tunisian people, and remaining faithful to the memory of the brave martyrs, which would reverberate across the world the authentic image of the Tunisian Revolution, and grant it its higher place in human civilisation."

He voiced strong determination to put into effect this programme with sincerity and all transparency, to guarantee the democratic transition and place it "in safe hands, the hands of the National Constituent Assembly which is the best expression of future Tunisia, Tunisia of freedom and dignity."

Mr. Foued Mebazaa also reassured the Tunisian people on the security situation which, he said, has witnessed a noticeable improvement, thanks to the combined efforts of all forces: the home security, the armed forces and citizens.

He also denounced some sides' attempts at sowing terror in minds to impede the Revolution process and prevent preparation of appropriate conditions for the peaceful and civilised democratic transition.

These sides, he said, used, in order to carry out their acts, suspicious practices that undermine public order and other people's freedoms and disrupt the pace of development and the normal and steady functioning of public services in a period that requires from true patriots greater sincere work and efforts to create new jobs, wipe out gradually the pockets of poverty and improve living standards, in particular those of the disadvantaged categories.

He stressed the need to demonstrate responsibility and give up, in this difficult situation, personal and partial demands to bar the way for regression, preserve the will of the people to decide their destiny and choose the political system that suits them, especially at this very difficult juncture on our southern borders, as a result of the events taking place in sisterly Libya which require from all vigilance and solidarity with our Tunisian brothers returning from Libya and mutual assistance for brothers and friends who took shelter in Tunisia.

Sit-in in Government square in la Kasbah lifted

LA KASBAH, March. 4, 2011 (TAP) - Protesters at la Kasbah have started leaving the Government square at dawn on Friday morning after holding a sit-in there since last February 20, a TAP news agency journalist reported.

They indeed decided to lift their sit-in on Thursday evening after the televised speech of Interim President Foued Mebazaa, they said in statements to TAP news agency, because "this speech met most of their claims".

They started cleaning the square at dawn, lifting tents and blankets and drawing up lists of people to organize their departure to their provinces.

Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi: "We will see to it that this election be the first one in Tunisia's history to take place in total credibility and transparency"

CARTHAGE, March 4, 2011 (TAP) - Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi pointed out that the Interim

Government's programme for the coming period and its priorities as announced, on Thursday, by Interim President Foued Mebazaa, consist in restoring the State's prestige which has noticeably deteriorated in the past period and re-establishing order and security in all regions and institutions, "as the country is on the verge of the abyss," to definitely break off with the old regime and suspend the 1959 Constitution.

Talking during a news conference held on Friday in Tunis, with attendance of the government members, the chief of staff of the armed forces and several representatives of the national, Arab and international press, Mr. Caïd Essebsi pointed out that the Interim President and Prime Minister would not run for the next presidential election, adding that those ministers wishing to do so should quit the government.

"We will see to it that this election be the first one in Tunisia's history to take place in total credibility and transparency, which is an important step on the path of democracy," he stressed.

Suspension of the Constitution will entail dissolution of all institutions stemming from it, pending the election of a constituent assembly which meets people's demands. The Interim President and Caretaker Government will thus withdraw, "once the people have recovered confidence in themselves, in the State institutions and in the country's future," he also specified.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi asserted that all persons proved guilty under the old regime will be brought to justice, starting with the deposed Head of State who committed the crime of "high treason," not to mention all those key figures of the ousted system.

Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi said that breaking off with the former regime "is not an easy business," underlining that any Constitutional Democrat or any person who held a decision-making position under the ousted president's regime is not necessarily corrupt or subject to reproach.

He added that criticism heaped by some on the Interior and Justice Ministers, and on security structures, is baseless, since fair and responsible decisions and judgements "require time and patience and should neither prejudice people nor disparage them; and there is need to preserve the individual's dignity."

He also expressed satisfaction at the improvement of the situation, "thanks to the efforts made by members of the interim government, their good management, as well as their sense of responsibility," pointing out that establishing security and preserving the country's integrity also require more time and great efforts.

The Prime Minister said he understood participants in the Kasbah Square sit-in and shared "their sufferings, demands and concerns," given the simple fact that "spending more than twenty years under injustice and deprivation can only generate anger and frustration."

He said that the measures announced by the Interim President would calm down young participants in the sit-in, which would help to step in the stage of construction and development, and all that it requires in terms of restoring security, particularly regarding the tourism sector.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi said the Interim Government's mission is to "run the country's current affairs, ensure its salvation and clear the way for it."

He said, in this connection, that a road map has been devised for the next stage, through the election of a Constituent Assembly within a period not exceeding four months, after the adoption of an electoral law providing the needed guarantees for the coming elections.

He also underlined that the country has entered a new stage thanks to what has been achieved by the Tunisian people in their Revolution, one which he described as "spontaneous and whose leadership cannot be claimed by anyone."

He also announced that the line-up of the Interim Government will be announced in two days' time, after its endorsement by the Interim President.

He said, in this respect, that the new government "will shoulder its responsibility with loyalty, in the service of Tunisia's interest and progress" and will also be driven by the noble humanitarian values and integrity so that the country makes a success of this stage.

After underlining that Tunisia managed, since its Independence, to achieve many gains, particularly women's emancipation and generalisation of education, the Prime Minister said the major challenge facing the Interim Government is to create jobs for university graduates whom the national economy finds difficulties to absorbing.

He said that, despite the gains made under the former regime and the international influence enjoyed by Tunisia, "the past two decades were a dark period as a result of the unhealthy practices of a criminal gang" who plundered people's property.

He added that the coming period requires more work and perseverance to overcome this situation through the cohesion of people, all categories included, around the Interim Government so that everybody be able to contribute, from their position, to the common responsibility of Tunisia's transition to a new stage based on democracy and transparency.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi called on the Tunisians to place confidence in this government and give it needed time to discharge its mission, saying that the door is open to all people's opinions, as part of full freedom of expression.

To a question on the situation of Dar Al-Amal, the Prime Minister said the media assume a major role in the democratic process, as they contribute to better inform on the government's activity, support its efforts and entrench national unity.

He emphasised the Interim Government's keenness to grant due attention to this sector so that it would be transparent and responsible.

One member of the sit-in organizing committee affirmed that the Government decisions will be constantly followed up until the election of the Constituent Council next July 24.

New line-up of Interim Government

TUNIS, March. 7, 2011 (TAP) - Upon proposal of the Prime Minister, the Interim President has appointed new members of the Interim Government:

- Mr. Lazhar Karoui Chebbi, Minister of Justice
- Mr. Abdelkrim Zbidi, Minister of National Defence
- Mr. Farhat Rajhi, Minister of the Interior
- Mr. Mouldi Kefi, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Mohamed Ennaceur, Minister of Social Affairs
- Mr. Jalloul Ayed, Minister of Finance
- Mr. Laroussi Mizouri, Minister of Religious Affairs
- Mr. Taïeb Baccouche, Minister of Education
- Mr. Ezzeddine Bach Chaouch, Minister of Culture
- Mr. Rifaat Chaabouni, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research
- Mrs. Habiba Zahi Ben Romdhane, Minister of Public Health
- Mr. Mehdi Houas, Minister of Trade and Tourism
- Mr. Mokhtar Jallali, Minister of Agriculture and Environment
- Mrs. Lilia Laabidi, Minister of Women Affairs
- Mr. Yassine Brahim, Minister of Transport and Equipment
- Mr. Saïd Aydi, Minister of Employment and Vocational Training
- Mr. Mohamed Aloulou, Minister of Youth and Sports
- Mr. Abdelhamid Triki, Minister of Planning and International Co-operation
- Mr. Abdelaziz Rassaa, Minister of Industry and Technology
- Mr. Ahmed Adhoum, Minister of State Property
- Mr. Abderrazak Zouari, Minister of Regional Development
- Mr. Rafea Ben Achour, Delegate Minister to the Prime Minister
- Mr. Radhouane Nouisser, Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Nejib Karafi, Secretary of State to Minister of Regional Development
- Mr. Lamine Moulahi, Secretary of State to the Minister of Public Health
- Mr. Slim Chaker, Secretary of State to the Minister of Trade and Tourism in charge of Tourism
- Mr. Salem Hamdi, Secretary of State to the Minister of Agriculture and Environment in charge of Environment
- Mr. Ridha Belhaj, Secretary of State to the Prime Minister
- Mr. Slim Amamou, Secretary of State to the Minister of Youth and Sports

-Mr. Adel Gaaloul, Secretary of State to the Minister of Industry and Technology in charge of Technology

-Mr. Hassen Annabi, Secretary of State to the Minister of Education

Prime Minister Caid Essebsi: "Government mission, making Tunisia reach safe heaven till Constituent Assembly election"

CARTHAGE, March 7, 2011 (TAP) - Prime Minister in the Interim government Béji Caid Essebsi said continued action to further improve the security situation, which has already registered some amelioration, is part of the Government's priorities in the coming period, insofar as, he said, security and stability remain the cornerstone to carry on economic activity and development effort.

During a news conference held, on Monday afternoon, in Carthage after the announcement of the new line-up of the interim government to shed light on the outlines of the coming stage, Mr. Béji Caid Essebsi said factors of continuity and efficiency have been taken into consideration in choosing new members of the Government from which five ministers and two Secretaries of States had resigned.

He said he sought to replace ministers who left the government by secretaries of state of the same departments, so that they carry on processing files submitted to them, insofar as this government, he added, is essentially, a "Caretaker Government," underlining that the mission of the government is to make Tunisia reach safe heaven, on July 24, 2011, the day of the election of the National Constituent Assembly.

Mr. Caid Essebsi stressed the role falling on the media during this phase, expressing hope that the government will receive the needed understanding and co-operation from the media to support it in achieving its objectives.

Answering a question on reasons that led him not to dedicate a ministry to information, the prime minister said experience has clearly shown the restrictions imposed on this sector, each time an official is appointed at the head of this department, adding, in this regard: "we want a free, transparent and objective press."

About the absence of political parties representatives in the new government line-up, Mr. Caid Essebsi said party leaders "have preferred to withdraw from the government, given the incompatibility of candidacy for the Constituent Assembly with presence in the government, to ensure that the next elections be fully credible.

Regarding the situation in Libya, the prime minister underlined the long-standing and fraternal relations between the Tunisian and Libyan peoples, stressing their common destiny, more particularly during times of tension and crises and during colonisation.

Answering a question on sanctions against elements of the state security apparatus involved in acts of torture, Mr. Béji Caid Essebsi said each officer whose involvement in or perpetration of abuses or crimes will be proved, will be punished, adding that he "does not prefer collective punishment."

Answering a set of other questions, The prime minister said that the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) is a prestigious national organisation which had contributed to the country's liberation and building of the modern state and its assistance and support for the government's efforts will always be welcome.

He added that the judiciary is independent and that the government will spare no efforts to create necessary conditions for the reinforcement of its independence.

He said, in conclusion, that sanctions against key figures of the ousted regime, first and foremost Ben Ali and members of his family, will be examined in the next Cabinet meeting, underlining that he will do everything possible to be "equal to the confidence of those who staged the Kasbah sit-in."

Ten new political parties authorized

TUNIS, March. 8, 2011 (TAP) - The Interior Ministry has authorized the setting up of 10 new political parties.

They are :

- "Al-Watan" Party,
- "Echaab" Movement,
- Tunisian Liberals Party,
- "Al Wifak" Party,
- Party For Freedom and Development,
- Party of Freedom For Justice and Development,
- Progressist Unionist Movement,
- Tunisia's Free Youth Movement,
- Movement of People's Unity,
- Congress For The Republic,

According to a communiqué issued, on Tuesday, by the Interior Ministry, the total number of authorised political parties, till today, in Tunisia is of 31 political parties.

Former Ruling Party (RCD) dissolved

TUNIS, March. 9, 2011 (TAP) - The Democratic Constitutional Rally Party RCD has been officially dissolved after the ruling on Wednesday morning by the court of first instance of Tunis.

"The court of first instance of Tunis ruled that the RCD be disbanded and its funds and property liquidated through the state property department" the ruling says.

The announcement was followed by a burst of jubilation, applause and chants by the crowd gathered at the court and in the neighbouring street, reports a TAP news agency journalist.

Lawyer Faouzi Ben Mrad representing the Interior Ministry which filed the request, said that the dissolution of the RCD had today fulfilled one of the major objectives of the revolution.

He said this is not a final judgment since defendants can appeal against it, adding that however the appeal did not defer the implementation of the decision.

But in the absence of RCD lawyers, no reaction of defendants could be obtained.

DIPLOMACY

Mouldi Kefi appointed as Foreign Minister

TUNIS, Feb. 21, 2011 (TAP) - Mouldi Kefi has been appointed as Foreign Minister in the Interim Government, authorized sources at the Presidency reported.

The FM was sworn in this morning before caretaker President Foued Mebazaa.

[Biography of Mr. Kefi](#)

Prime Minister receives Malta Maltese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister

TUNIS, Feb. 19, 2011 (TAP) - As part of the visit he is paying to Tunisia on February 18-19 and during which he was received by Prime Minister in the Interim Government Mohamed Ghannouchi, Malta's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Tonio Borg conferred with Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Radhouane Nouisser.

The talk provided the opportunity to examine ways to boost Tunisian-Maltese co-operation in various fields.

Mr. Nouisser briefed his guest on the situation in Tunisia, after the people's Revolution for freedom, dignity and democracy.

The Maltese FM said his country will provide support for Tunisia in this crucial stage of democratic transition.

Prime Minister receives US senators McCain and Lieberman

Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received on Monday visiting US Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman.

At the end of the meeting, republican Senator John McCain said to TAP news agency that the US Government and Congress had promised to support Tunisia in this important transition time.

The talks with the Prime Minister "have been very fruitful and allowed to have a better idea of the support the US might provide to Tunisia in this transitional period", he affirmed.

Independent Senator Joseph Lieberman declared in turn that the Congress delegation, the first to visit Tunisia for more than one year, had come to express the US support to the process of democratic transition in Tunisia, "This revolution for democracy, which is now extending to the Arab World, has started here in Tunisia", he said, affirming that the US "will do its utmost to ensure its success". He went on saying: "the sovereign choice is for

the Tunisian people", stressing that "The US people are ready to offer every support".

The meeting was attended by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the US Ambassador in Tunis.

Senator McCain (Arizona, Republican) stood for the presidential election of 2008 against current President Barack Obama. Joseph Lieberman (Connecticut) is a democrat who became independent. He ran for the post of US Vice President in 2000.

Foreign Minister receives Turkish counterpart

TUNIS, Feb. 21, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi received, on Monday, Turkish Foreign Minister and chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Ahmet Davutoglu.

During the meeting, the Foreign Minister voiced the caretaker Government's determination to carry out successfully this democratic process, to meet the Tunisian people's aspirations and goals of their Revolution of dignity, freedom and justice.

In a statement to TAP news agency at the end of the meeting, Mr. Davutoglu reasserted the Turkish people and government's support to the democratic transition in Tunisia, recalling that Turkey and Tunisia share a common history and are bound by a same destiny.

The Turkish minister said that "he sides with the brotherly Tunisian people," reasserting Turkey's readiness to provide the necessary assistance to the Tunisian interim government.

Mr. Davutoglu also specified that the main mission of the Council of Europe, whose rotating presidency is presently assumed by Turkey, is to enhance Human Rights and democracy through law.

He said that he was on a visit in Tunisia, escorted by the Council of Europe secretary-general Thorbjorn Jagland, to get acquainted with the country's situation and provide assistance to Tunisia which is member of the Venice Commission, a commission for democracy and rights.

He added that this Commission is expected in Tunisia next March, to provide technical assistance to the caretaker Government to organise free and transparent elections.

The Turkish FM specified that the Venice Commission would endeavour, together with the Tunisian authorities, to institutionalise Human Rights and the rule of law, reaffirming "his deep confidence in the great Tunisian people's wisdom and maturity."

French Economy, Finance and Industry Minister, French Minister for European Affairs visit to Tunisia

TUNIS, Feb. 22, 2011 (TAP) - Mrs. Christine Lagarde, French Economy, Finance and Industry Minister, and Mr. Laurent Wauquiez, Minister for European Affairs, renewed, on Tuesday in Tunis, France's support to the democratic transition in Tunisia.

The two French Ministers, who met with Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, talked about a "Marshall Plan" for Tunisia, describing as "impressive" what the Tunisians have been able to accomplish for their country.

The French senior officials' visit is aimed to review ways to strengthen Tunisian-French economic partnership and to express France's appreciation of the Tunisian people "for this revolution which is both a pioneering and deeply moral one; and it set the country on this path of transition," Mrs. Lagarde said.

She added that "we must admit, with great admiration, the deep change that took place; and we also wished to mobilise the government members to support this change."

In this regard, the French Secretary of State for Tourism will visit Tunisia next week to look at "ways for France's mobilisation of all French tourism players to campaign for Tunisia," she pointed out.

The aim of this campaign, the French Minister elaborated, is to make sure that French tourists, and many others, could return to Tunisia for their holidays and have total confidence in the country.

Mr. Pierre Lellouche, Secretary of State for External Trade, will support French companies in Tunisia, starting from next month, to step up exchanges, keep up investments and highlight the economic confidence placed by France in Tunisia.

Mrs. Lagarde said France took the initiative at the end of its Presidency of the G 20-Finances, held in Paris, to commit the international community, in a message of support and friendship and also of economic and financial mobilisation alongside international authorities and regional development banks, to support the Tunisian people in their democratic movement.

"The Tunisian people have taught the whole world a lesson," Minister for European Affairs Laurent Wauquiez told representatives of Tunisian and foreign media.

"You have demonstrated that the unthinkable may come true thanks to the Tunisian people's mobilisation; and what you have been able to do inspires respect," he said, adding "there's no point about coming after the battle to give lessons or to explain what would be good or bad for Tunisia."

The two French ministers' visit to Tunisia is essentially aimed to listen to the Tunisian counterparts and become acquainted with the interim government's expectations to "shift from comments to action."

"France seeks to engage firmly on the side of Tunisia so that Europe makes of Tunisia its priority," he announced, adding that to achieve this target "France will strive to be Tunisia's best champion in Brussels."

Concretely, France will "militate" to make sure that Tunisia be granted the advanced status before the end of the present year, not a classical or standard status of the European Union but a "privileged and tailored" one, Mr. Wauquiez said.

The advanced status will provide a huge opportunity for Tunisia to improve its economic integration into the

European sphere and ease access of Tunisian small- and medium-sized enterprises in European markets, he said.

France will also strive to develop sectoral co-operation with Tunisia in such areas as biotechnology and vocational training.

Regarding tourism, the French minister said there is room for making Tunisia better known in all Europe. "The will of France, in this regard, is to finance a European programme to promote the Tunisia destination to attract tourists from all over Europe to Tunisia and publicise this destination in Northern Europe.

Regarding regional programmes, France wishes to be pragmatic, Mr. Wauquiez said, reviewing the intents to achieve projects in the areas of solar farms, create networks to help SMEs and set up Mediterranean depollution and research programmes.

For the last sector, he announced plans to create a Euro-Mediterranean research centre in Tunis.

At the financial level, the French minister said the neighbourhood policy should not be the only support.

"Europe should increase financial means dedicated to Tunisia," adding that the policy of priority of the Southern shore should be embodied in Tunisia.

Mr. Wauquiez said the European Investment Bank (EIB) whose investment capacities are huge (80 million euros of funding) and presence in the region could be increased, should increase its financial means for Tunisia.

The Minister for European Affairs reasserted France's commitment to ensure that additional financial means be granted to Tunisia as part of the European instruments and mechanisms to "side Tunisia in order to invest in democracy," he said.

Foreign Minister receives American under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs

TUNIS, Feb. 23, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi received, on Wednesday, American under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns.

Mr. Mouldi Kéfi expressed, during the talk, Tunisia's will to forge ahead on the path of a democratic and pluralist society that respects fundamental freedoms.

He pointed out that the caretaker government's mission is to guarantee the country's stability and organise free and transparent elections in the best deadlines.

After voicing satisfaction at the quality of Tunisian-American relations, the Foreign Minister pointed out that in this transition period to democracy, the international community is called upon to play a greater role in supporting the Tunisian People's Revolution.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. William Burns said to TAP news agency that the talk had been an opportunity to extend the United States of America's congratulations to the Tunisian people for the "historic achievements accomplished during the past weeks."

The American diplomat also expressed "the interest the US takes in Tunisia's success in this transitional period,"

reasserting his country's commitment to establish a strong partnership with Tunisia.

He added that the American administration undertook to "support the Tunisian economy," specifying in this regard that numerous opportunities are available and that the American investors could play a role in this.

The meeting was attended by US ambassador in Tunis Gordon Gray.

Foreign Minister receives from the International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF)

TUNIS, Feb. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kéfi received, on Monday in Tunis, a high-level delegation from the International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF) on a visit to Tunisia.

The Foreign Minister commended the action of IOF for anchoring and promoting democratic practices and values in the Francophone area and for enhancing dialogue between cultures and civilisations.

He welcomed the IOF Secretary General's statement emphasising "the commitment of Francophone countries to support and accompany the transition underway in Tunisia."

After the meeting, Head of the delegation Clement Duhaime said he had come to convey the wishes of success of IOF and its Secretary-General Abdou Diouf for this democratic transition.

He emphasised the willingness of the entire Francophone network to support Tunisia in this extremely important stage.

"The Francophone community is very attentive to what is happening now in Tunisia, in this crucial period for the future of the country," he added.

During the visit, the delegation will meet various sides in this transitory phase, particularly in the areas of human rights, media and structures that will be in charge of the electoral process.

Foreign Minister receives adviser to UN Secretary-General

TUNIS, March 1, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi received, on Tuesday afternoon in Tunis, a United Nations delegation led by Mr. Jamel Benomar, United Nations Secretary-General adviser in charge of political affairs and UN special envoy to Tunisia.

The Foreign Minister highlighted the Tunisian aspirations to democracy, freedom and dignity and determination of the Caretaker Government to mobilise the national resources in the service of the country's political, economic, social and cultural development.

He extended gratitude to the UNO for its readiness to accompany Tunisia in its democratic transition.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) News Agency, Mr. Benomar said that his visit was an answer to an invitation from the Tunisian government to discuss the

UN contribution to the democratisation process in Tunisia, notably in the organisation of free and fair elections.

He added that the UN had already started consultations with the different political parties and civil society components to define a programme of support to the current democratisation effort.

Interim President receives Spanish Prime Minister

CARTHAGE, March. 2, 2011 (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa conferred on Wednesday with Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero about bilateral relations and prospects for cooperation between the two countries, especially in light of the latest developments on the national and regional scene. The meeting was attended notably by the Prime Minister and the two countries' Foreign Ministers.

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero underlined that his visit to Tunisia aims to "encourage the process of historic change in Tunisia." He said he was "moved to visit Tunisia, an old nation which, today, has again found its freedom and democracy, with an exemplary process through peaceful demonstrations, which made of Tunisia a reference and a model for other countries in the Arab world."

During a press conference, held on Wednesday afternoon in Carthage as part of his friendship and working visit in Tunisia, Mr. Zapatero emphasised the solid ties binding Spain and the Maghreb and Arab countries, in general, and Tunisia, in particular. He said that Spain "sides with Tunisia in its democratic process."

"This visit does not aim to give Tunisia any advice but only to accompany its progress and development," the Spanish Premier added, underlining that Tunisia is a young country which aspires to democracy, freedom and development, and that this entails important social developments.

He reasserted the commitment of Spain and the European Union (EU) to help Tunisia open up new economic prospects, particularly through its Association Agreement with European sphere.

Besides, Mr. Zapatero spoke of the situation which he described as "very serious" on the Tunisian-Libyan border, with the flocking of thousands of refugees from different nationalities. He commended Tunisia's efforts to meet the needs of these refugees, notably its assistance to the organisation of the evacuation operations.

He reminded, in this respect, that Spain is one of the first countries to have sent to the Tunisian-Libyan border an aircraft loaded with 30 tonnes of humanitarian aid to satisfy the need of 10,000 evacuees, within the framework of consultation and co-operation between the Spanish Foreign Ministry and its Tunisian counterpart. He urged the other European countries to join in the international efforts to provide aid to these thousands of refugees.

Additionally, the Spanish Prime Minister underlined his country's pledge to support the Libyans so that Libya, in turn, be a free country and enjoy democracy, in the same

way Tunisia and Egypt did. He said, in this connection, that "the wind that blew across Tunisia will also blow over other Arab countries."

Mr. Zapatero asserted that "Spain is determined to be present and take side with the countries of the Maghreb, Africa and the Arab world in their change process and support them at this historic stage, driven by its firm conviction of the need to defend the values of peoples' freedom, democracy and dignity."

For his part, Mr. Beji Caïd Essebsi, Caretaker Government Premier, commended the friendship and working visit of his Spanish opposite number to Tunisia which "is going through a historic stage and a new experience, after 23 years of silence." He added that this visit evidences this friendly country's firm support to Tunisia as part of their long-standing relations.

He voiced hope that this stage be crowned with success and that success also rewards efforts of all countries which are going through similar circumstances, on the path of their quest of dignity, freedom and democracy.

Foreign Minister receives Swiss Deputy-Secretary of State for Africa and Middle East

TUNIS, March 2, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi voiced satisfaction at the quality of Tunisian-Swiss relations and expressed Tunisia's will to boost its co-operation with Switzerland, when receiving, on Wednesday, Mr. Marcel Stutz, Swiss Deputy-Secretary of State for Africa and the Middle East.

In his statement to TAP News Agency, the latter pointed out that his visit in Tunisia is part of reinforcing co-operation between the two countries.

He pointed out that the talk had turned on the political and diplomatic support that Switzerland could provide to Tunisia, at the level of international authorities, notably to mobilise funds.

Besides, Mr. Stutz said that Switzerland is closely following the humanitarian situation in the Tunisian South-Eastern borders, specifying that experts in drinking water and sanitary fittings had been sent to prevent any risk of diseases or unhealthy conditions for refugees there, pending repatriation to their home countries.

He pointed out that Switzerland is financially supporting action in Tunisia, the International Committee of the Red Cross, notably in setting up transit camps, adding that other funds would be granted to the Tunisian Red Crescent and volunteers from the Swiss Red Cross would be dispatched.

In another connection, Mr. Stutz specified that all assets of the Ben Ali family and relatives had been frozen in compliance with article 184 of the Swiss Constitution, and that a delegation of Swiss experts had been in Tunisia last week to discuss this issue, ahead of Tunisia's sending of a rogatory commission to Switzerland to legally finalise the issue.

He concluded by asserting that his country is ready to support Tunisia in its democratic transition by providing

technical assistance in conformity with the Tunisian people's sovereign political choices.

Tunisia-Libya Border humanitarian situation :

World Food Programme calls for global solidarity with Ras Jedir refugees

RAS JEDIR, March 1, 2011 (TAP) - Mrs. Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) headed, on Tuesday, to the Ras Jedir border zone to enquire about conditions of refugees who flock by thousands from the Libyan territory.

The UN official told TAP correspondent that the WFP appeals for global mobilisation to face up to this situation, reminding that this UN programme brings assistance to Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, with support from civil society to rescue refugees.

She expressed consideration to the Tunisian people for their generosity and their humanitarian assistance to persons fleeing Libya.

Mrs. Sheeran also voiced concern about reported acts of violence in Libyan city of Zaouia, denouncing the use of food as a pressure weapon and preventing international organisations from entering the Libyan territory to rescue civilians.

It should be noted that a planeload of assistance from the WFP landed in Djerba-Zarzis. This aid, including 80 tons of foodstuff, was sent to the hosting centres of refugees in Ras Jedir.

Other assistance—blankets and medicaments—from several countries and international organisations also arrived at Ras Jedir.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees had set up 500 tents on Tuesday to host over 5,000 persons. One thousand additional tents arrived on Wednesday, raising the total hosting capacity to nearly 10,000 persons.

Tunisian and foreign nationals continue flocking to Tunisian-Libyan borders

TUNIS, March. 2, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign refugees continue flocking to crossing points on the Tunisian-Libyan borders fleeing the bad security conditions in Libya.

Over 470 runaways from different nationalities crossed on Tuesday evening the border point of Dhiba in Tataouine. Among them, there were 51 Libyans most of whom made the journey to get basic food supplies.

Refugees are from Thailand, Philippines, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Syria and Egypt, in addition to Tunisians.

Competent services transferred them to the capital or to hosting centers before their repatriation.

New solidarity convoys of food products and medicine reached Dhiba. One part of the assistance was sent to Libya, in the area of Nalout, more precisely, which is experiencing a difficult security situation.

A high-level security source told TAP correspondent that Army and Security Forces control all border-crossing points.

Egyptians staying in hosting centers in Gabes were transferred on Tuesday to the commercial port of Sfax and the Djerba-Zarziz airport.

They expressed their consideration to the Tunisian people for the hospitality and support they have shown since their arrival in Ras Jedir.

Switzerland ready to provide aid to prevent humanitarian crisis on Tunisian-Libyan border

TUNIS, March 2, 2011 (TAP) - Switzerland is ready to provide assistance to Tunisia to prevent that the humanitarian situation at the Tunisian-Libyan border deteriorates as a result of the flow of refugees from Libya, said Mr. Marcel Stutz, Swiss deputy secretary of state for Africa and the Middle East, during his talk, on Wednesday in Tunis, with Social Affairs Minister Mohamed Naceur, on the occasion of his working visit in Tunisia.

Mr. Stutz added that experts have been dispatched to the Tunisian-Libyan border zone to identify the needed intervention actions and assistance convoys, in close collaboration with the Tunisian government, Tunisia's Red Crescent, the International Red Crescent Committee and the International Organisation for Migration.

The talk provided the opportunity to discuss means to boost partnership in the political, economic and social fields.

The Swiss official underlined that his country puts its expertise at Tunisia's disposal to make a success of the democratic transition and contribute in the achievement of the targets of the Tunisian People's Revolution.

The talk was attended by Swiss ambassador to Tunisia, as well as a representative of the Swiss humanitarian aid body.

EU: 10 million euros for evacuation of refugees from Libya

TUNIS, March. 3, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi received here on Thursday European Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Reaction to Crises Kristalina Georgieva and Hungarian Secretary of State to European Affairs Eniko Gyori, on a mission in Tunisia as part of the EU contribution to humanitarian aid to refugees fleeing Libya through Tunisian borders.

The Minister briefed them about the latest developments in Tunisia and the "efforts made to ensure the success of the democratic process in the country and establish the rule of law and for development".

He hailed the European Union for its emergency programme for the evacuation of refugees flocking from Libya to their countries, an initiative that will allow to "prevent a humanitarian disaster", he said.

At the end of the meeting, Mrs Kristalina Gorgieva announced in a statement to TAP news agency that the

EU is allocating a special aid to Tunisia worth 10 million euros (more 19 million Dinars) as financial support to evacuate refugees from Libya. This aid, she said, aims to supply the most urgent needs of the population crossing the Tunisian-Libyan border (medical aid, food supplies, blankets, tents).

The European Commissioner also spoke of the mobilization of European states, namely France, Spain, Italy and Great Britain, for the repatriation of more than 20 000 expats at the Tunisian-Libyan border. A disaster and emergency services team including delegates of European states will be sent this afternoon to the border post of Ras Jedir to look at means to transfer refugees. Ships will also be chartered to contribute to their evacuation, she added.

Mrs Kristalina Georgieva hailed the burst of solidarity of Tunisians in favour of migrant workers at the Tunisian-Libyan border, describing these efforts as "wonderful" in difficult circumstances.

As to the Hungarian Secretary of State to European Affairs Eniko Gyori whose country is chairing the EU, she affirmed the commitment of the Union to provide the necessary aid for the evacuation of refugees coming from Libya. She also reaffirmed the support of the EU to North African states, this region, she said, where "economic development is the guarantee of freedom, democracy and prosperity".

Committee to monitor situation at Tunisian-Libyan border: call for international community's assistance

TUNIS, March 3, 2011 (TAP) - Social Affairs Minister Mohamed Ennaceur stressed the difficulties of repatriating foreign refugees flocking to the Tunisian-Libyan border.

During a news briefing held on Thursday in Tunis, he called on the Arab and foreign countries, along with international organisations, to bring necessary assistance to avoid a humanitarian disaster, by sending ships and airplanes to evacuate the refugees.

Despite the support from France, Spain, Great Britain and Egypt, the number of air and sea travels is not enough to face up to the increasing number of refugees, he added.

Between February 20 and March 2, 2011, some 95,000 entries were recorded on the Tunisian territory (out of a total of 30,000 thousand Tunisian nationals and 41,000 Egyptians, 27,000 of whom were repatriated).

The minister pointed to the meeting, on Thursday in Tunis, of the national committee of observation and follow-up of the situation at the Tunisian-Libyan border, in the presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the High Commissioner for the Refugees and the International Migration Organisation.

The committee brings together representatives from the Foreign Affairs, Interior, National Defence, Justice, Public Health, Transport and Equipment Ministries, as well as those of vocational training and employment, in addition to representatives of the National Board of Tunisians Abroad, the Tunisian Union of Social Solidarity and the Tunisian Red Crescent.

This structure is designed to monitor the situation in co-ordination with all intervening structures, anticipate developments of the situation on the ground and prepare for all scenarios, said the minister, adding that the situation is presently under control and that no case of epidemics has been reported.

The border is completely secured by the Army and national security forces, in association with citizens from the South of the country, who have shown a tremendous humanitarian drive, along with other regions of the country which were mobilised to bring assistance to refugees, the minister also said.

For her part, Mrs. Sarra Rejeb, Land Transport Director-General said the Djerba International Airport is able to operate one hundred flights per day and cope with 20,000 passengers and that ports in southern Tunisia have a large hosting capacity for ships. She called for the need to support the Tunisian fleet in its efforts to repatriate refugees.

EU to triple aid to meet humanitarian crisis in Libya

TUNIS, March. 4, 2011 (TAP) - The European Union will triple its aid to meet humanitarian needs on Tunisian-Libyan borders, announced Mrs Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Reaction to Crises, when visiting the Tunisian-Libyan border post with Mrs Eniko Gyori, Hungarian Minister in charge of European affairs.

«The commission is tripling the aid allocated previously and worth 10 million euros to meet humanitarian needs», she said.

Mrs Kristalina Georgieva and Mrs Eniko Gyori urged member states to increase efforts to provide emergency aid to the refugees stranded and ease their repatriation.

Beyond the support to evacuation, the European funds will also be used to meet urgent needs of people crossing into Tunisia so as to provide them with tents, food, blankets and medical care.

Italian humanitarian assistance on Tunisian-Libyan borders

TUNIS, March 5, 2011 (TAP) - Italy has contributed to the humanitarian aid for the benefit of the different nationalities in the Tunisian-Libyan borders.

A communiqué of Italy's embassy in Tunis, issued on Saturday, indicates that immediate support measures have been approved by the Italian government, since March 3 after the call of the Tunisian and the Egyptian authorities.

The communiqué underlines that "a flexible multi-use structure" has been set up by "a team operational in the Ras Jedir zone in collaboration with the United Nations Agency for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)".

In another connection, the embassy said that a first convoy of Egyptian refugees headed toward Cairo, on

March 4, onboard of an Italian military aeronautical plane and that flights continue on March 5 for the repatriation of Malian nationals from Djerba towards Bamako and Egyptian nationals towards Cairo.

The communiqué reminds that an amount worth 500,000 Euros have already been allocated to the IOM to back up the repatriation of refugees.

Besides, a military ship is also ready to leave Sicily towards Tunisia to repatriate the Egyptian nationals.

Decrease in number of people stranded on Tunisian-Libyan borders

RAS JEDIR, March 5, 2011 (TAP) - The number of refugees stranded on the Ras Jedir crossing border has decreased significantly, after the evacuation of a large number of Egyptians, TAP News Agency's correspondent noted on Saturday.

Humanitarian organisations such as the Tunisian Red Crescent and the World Health Organisation (WHO) hope that the security situation in Libya will improve, which is an essential condition to overcome this humanitarian crisis.

Most of the refugees stranded on the Tunisian-Libyan border are now Bangladeshis with 20,000 persons; this community raises many problems related particularly to communication.

The Bangladeshis issued a call to international organisations to ensure their repatriation, especially in the absence of a Bangladeshi diplomatic representation in Tunisia.

Several Tunisian charities and people's committees are striving to help persons stranded in Ras Jedir, particularly among people from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sudan.

Foreign refugees expressed their gratitude to the Tunisian people, the National Army and medics and paramedics for their precious assistance in these painful circumstances.

Two Tunisian telephone companies have made available free telephone lines for the benefit of refugees to enable them to contact their families.

French ship "Mistral" loaded with humanitarian aid arrives in Zarzis port

RAS JEDIR, March 7, 2011 (TAP) - French military ship "Mistral" loaded with 50 tonnes of humanitarian aid for the benefit of Ras Jedir refugees, docked, on Monday morning, at Zarzis commercial port.

The aid provided by the French Government in partnership with humanitarian organisations consist in blankets, tents, medicines, foodstuff and water tanks.

Lieutenant Thierry Delorme, "Mistral" official spokesman said the ship was sent by France in response to the Egyptian authorities' call for the repatriation of its nationals from the Ras Jedir border area, in co-ordination with the Tunisian authorities.

The "Mistral" was scheduled to leave the port of Zarzis on Monday evening, with 900 Egyptian refugees on board, but after the evacuation by air of many of the refugees, it

was decided that the ship would await the arrival of other Egyptian refugees at the Tunisian-Libyan border to ensure their repatriation, in co-ordination with the Egyptian authorities.

In addition, to a hospital with a capacity of 69 beds and two surgical service, the amphibious ship can carry 16 helicopters and a large number of trucks and tanks.

Mistral, whose crew consists of 700 servicemen, is the second largest ship in France after Charles De Gaulle's.

Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister reasserts his country's sustained support to Tunisia

CARTHAGE, March 7, 2011 (TAP) - Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhai Jun said "China is following with great interest Tunisia's events and wishes success for Tunisia and its people in their struggle to win all challenges."

In a statement after his meeting with Prime Minister the Interim Government Béji Caïd Essebsi, the Chinese official said: "on behalf of the Chinese government, I reiterate our constant support to the progress of Tunisia and its people on the path of development."

Mr. Zhai Jun also said his talk with the Prime Minister had reviewed ways to develop the relations of friendship between China and Tunisia and fields of future co-operation between both countries.

He added that this his country has decided to grant Tunisia a donation of 40 million Yuans (over six million dollars), under the form of investment in a development project that will be defined later by both sides.

The meeting was attended by Mr. Radhouane Nouisser Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Minister and China's ambassador in Tunis.

Foreign Minister receives Inter-Parliamentary Union Secretary General

TUNIS, March. 7, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi received here on Monday morning visiting Inter-Parliamentary Union Secretary General Anders Johnsson.

The talks turned notably on ways and means for the Union to support Tunisia in its current democratic transition to build up the rule of law.

Anders Johnsson expressed the union support to and congratulations on Tunisia's successful revolution that resulted from a huge people's aspiration for democracy, freedom and justice.

At the end of the meeting, he told TAP news agency that it had allowed to discuss means likely "to support Tunisia in the political transition underway ", adding that the assistance will focus on two things: advice in matters of drafting the election law and monitoring of elections on the one hand and functioning of the constituent assembly that will be tasked with writing a new Constitution on the other hand.

"We have participated in numerous similar processes throughout the world and we are ready to share the experiences and know-how that can be useful for Tunisia as part of actual assistance ", he pointed out.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union gathers delegates of parliaments from all over the world and makes their expertise in matters of elections, constituent assemblies and running of parliaments available to Tunisia, he added.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Australian investors interested in Kalaa Khasba phosphate

EL KEF, Feb. 17, 2011 (TAP) - Australian investors are on a visit in Tunisia to look at investment opportunities in the Kalaa Khasba phosphate mining fields, in El Kef.

Prospection works are well advanced. The Australian investors have been conducting feasibility studies to set up production units.

Tunisian experts are associated in this project.

Euro-Mediterranean textile-clothing leaders delighted at Tunisia's resolute path to democracy

Tunis, Feb. 23, 2011 (TAP) - Euro-Mediterranean Textile-Clothing professionals said they were convinced that Tunisia will remain a privileged land that welcomes European investments and industrial and trade partnership.

These professionals, members of the Euro-Mediterranean Circle of Textile-Clothing Leaders CEDITH, are delighted at the fact that Tunisia has resolutely taken the path of full democracy, says a communiqué sent to TAP news agency.

They congratulated management and labour, businessmen, trade unions and wage earners on the great sense of responsibility they gave proof of in preserving their work tools.

The supply of companies, the production and exports have indeed been regularly ensured in last weeks, states the communiqué.

Central Bank: Tunisia will need International Community's financing

TUNIS, Feb. 24, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisia's Central Bank Governor (BCT) Mustapha Nabli said, on Wednesday in Washington, that the country "will need financing" from the International Community in the coming months to meet its people's aspirations.

"It is probable that our financing needs, in external and budget matters, will be on the rise," Mr. Nabli said in a conference at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"We will need financing and we strive with the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other partners, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the European Union and Arab funds. We are expecting a support that will be higher than the average," he underlined.

"The great challenges that we are facing today are social pressures. With the opening of the political system, there is a lot of pressure to try to catch up in matters of wages and employment. And this has generated risks for the economy," BCT Governor said to AFP.

"The important risk, in my opinion, in the coming three, four months, is that production and activity do not return to normal. In that case, we would be confronted with external pressures... and from the budget point of view too," he specified.

TUNIS, March 1, 2011 (TAP) - The Board of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT), which met on February 28, said it was necessary to show greater vigilance in the short term, given the rising pressure on the outlook of national economic growth for 2011, the domestic and external financial balances and reserves in foreign currency.

Even though these assets have been kept at acceptable levels, i.e. 12,259 million dinars (MTD) or 139 days of imports to February 24, 2011, compared with 13,000 MTD and 147 days by late 2010, according to BCT Board, they could record a significant drop if the economic activity does not recover its normal pace in the near future.

It also says that lowering of Tunisia's sovereign rating by some international rating agencies will result in an increase in the cost of mobilisation of the external resources needed for the balance of external payments and the State budget.

At monetary level, the Board points to the continuous decrease of bank liquidity from the beginning of the current year, which required a massive intervention from the Central Bank to inject an average of 1,790 MTD on the monetary market, during the first two months of 2011.

Thus, the average interest rate fell to 4.65% in February 2011, compared with 4.75% in the previous month and 4.87% in December 2010.

To provide necessary funding to assist companies to resume activity at a pace that would open up new prospects for investment, exports and employment, the Board has decided to increase the rate of reserve requirements by 2.5% on the outstanding deposits and the stock certificates by 0.5 percentage point, along with other deposits submitted to reserve requirements.

The Board reviewed the deep changes experienced by the political scene to establish a democratic system likely to open up promising prospects for the Tunisian economy in a climate of transparency that ensures equal chances for all investors and restores confidence among economic operators.

This will stimulate the pace of growth in the next years and, consequently, step up opportunities for job creation sought by different social classes in different regions of the country.

At the end of its works, the Board emphasised the need to follow closely the economic and financial indicators to preserve financial balances in this difficult situation.

Fitch downgrades Tunisia's long-term debt rating to BBB-

TUNIS, March 2, 2011 (TAP) - Fitch Ratings downgraded Tunisia's long-term debt grade one notch to BBB- and maintained its "negative" outlook "as a result of uncertainties about the country's stability and its economic policy during this difficult period."

The BBB- rating places Tunisia, according to Fitch Ratings' communiqué, "among those countries whose debts are considered of major risk, but an additional downgrade would make the rating junk status, which means investing in the government bonds would be a little more than speculation."

As to the negative outlook, it has to do with the possibility for the agency to further lower the rating in accordance with the Tunisian elections scheduled for July.

Fitch warns that "Tunisia's first fully democratic elections scheduled for next July could fail to produce a stable government with a strong mandate able to implement responsible economic policy and gain the investors' confidence."

However, success of these elections or signs showing that public finances and the economy are less affected than feared would result in a revision of the outlook which would then be stable.

EIB: 1.87 billion euros to finance priority projects in Tunisia

TUNIS, March 3, 2011 (TAP) – A fund of 1.87 billion euros (more than 3.6 billion dinars), has been put at Tunisia's disposal by the European Investment Bank (EIB), after assessment of the country's priorities, announced, on Thursday in Tunis, Mr. Philippe de Fontaine Vive, the Bank's Deputy Chairman.

In a news conference held at the end of his two-day visit in Tunisia, Mr. De Fontaine Vive voiced will to accompany the democratic transition in Tunisia, specifying that the priorities fixed centre, in particular, round speeding up disbursement of a 1-billion-euro fund (about 2 billion dinars), already allocated in 2009 and 2010, on public projects in the sectors of sanitation, energy and road infrastructures.

Additionally, accompanying the creation and development of the small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), by means of mobilising EIB credit lines to Tunisian banks and leasing companies, i.e. an amount of 260 million euros (500 million dinars).

EIB also plans to support, with an amount worth 140 million euros (270 million dinars), the construction of the new Mdhila manufacture of the Tunisian Chemical Group (GCT) to strengthen this group's position to export. This financing is awaiting the European Commission's go-ahead.

This institution will also mobilise an amount worth 160 million euros (310 million dinars), for the implementation of a large programme of road modernisation, granting priority to the road infrastructure in the inland regions.

Besides, the European bank has plans to finance by 310 million euros (more than 600 million dinars), several significant projects, notably in the underprivileged zones: local communities equipments, SMEs, and energy in the gas sector.

Mr. De Fontaine Vive specified that the priorities, fixed in consultation with the Tunisian authorities, target the job-creating projects and improvement of the Tunisians' daily life.

He said that clear signals to the Tunisian and foreign investors have been sent meaning that new Tunisia is likely to reach, late this year and surely starting from next year, higher growth rate.

He said that, through the mobilisation of these funds, EIB intends to contribute to a better distribution of the fruits of development in Tunisia, noting that other projects could be financed depending on the needs expressed by the government or civil society, in the sectors of health, education or vocational training.

EIB Deputy Chairman pointed out that the different European structures—specialised and bilateral agencies—all agree that the time has come to re-launch co-operation with Tunisia.

Answering a question on the possibility of a Marshal Plan for the Mediterranean, he said that a plan of global revival of investment is likely to open up new prospects in matters of job creation and fair distribution of riches.

On the Union for the Mediterranean (UPM), the European official estimated that Union needs to be re-conceived of in such a fashion as to help it better accompany the change taking place in the region.

He paid tribute to the "extremely positive attitude of the Tunisian people, particularly executives of the public establishments who carry on working, in spite of the conditions prevailing in the country".

SOCIETY

Central Bank Governor announces creation of fund to collect donations to support post-revolution Tunisia

TUNIS, Feb. 17, 2011 (TAP) - Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT) Mustapha Kamel Nabli announced, on Wednesday in Tunis, the creation of an independent fund to collect donations from Tunisian and foreign sides that have expressed their desire to provide financial support to post-revolution Tunisia.

Resources of the fund, which seeks to contribute to the social and economic process in the country, will be placed in an open account of the BCT, Mr. Nabli said.

He added that the legislative framework governing the activity of this structure, decided by the Interim Government, is being prepared, specifying that emphasis

will particularly be placed on ensuring efficiency of the interventions and transparency of the management of its resources.

The aim assigned to this fund is to collect financial resources to use them in social and economic projects of general interest.

The projects will be achieved through direct interventions of the fund or through associations as well as other non-profit legal entities.

Resources of the fund will come from donations and other forms of financial assistance granted by moral or physical entities, said BCT Governor, adding that this structure could launch calls for public donations through the media and according to conditions defined beforehand.

The BCT will be tasked with providing necessary logistical support (offices, human resources...) to reduce the fund's expenditures resulting from interventions and tasks assigned to it, particularly operation expenses.

Mr. Nabli stressed the legal independence of the fund, underlining that it does not belong to any administrative party or category of companies and funds known in Tunisia.

A management commission composed, in particular, of members of components of the civil society, who will not receive financial compensation, will be responsible for the management of the fund's resources.

To ensure transparency of management, the fund's accounts will be subject to external audit to be conducted by auditors.

The fund should also provide continuous information to the public on the website about its accounts and activity reports and also submit a relevant report to auditors.

TOURISM & CULTURE

First tourists arrive in Tozeur, after Revolution

TOZEUR, Feb. 17, 2011 (TAP) - The city of Tozeur witnessed, at the start of this week, the arrival of the first groups of tourists after the Tunisian People's Revolution.

A German team, including 70 persons, came to the region to shoot a movie, and three other groups of Canadian, American and French tourists also arrived.

Mr. Ouahid Ben Frej, Tourism Regional Commissioner in Tozeur, pointed out to TAP news agency that restoration of security in the region would favour the gradual resumption of tourist activity, which coincides with the high season for Saharan tourism.

Twenty four flights expected this weekend in Djerba

DJERBA, Feb. 18, 2011 (TAP) - Twenty four flights are expected this weekend in Djerba island, boarding tourists from France, Switzerland and Belgium.

Other flights scheduled by world-known such tour operators Marmara, Thomas Cook and Nouvelles Frontières are also expected for next week.

Action plan to revive tourist season implemented

TUNIS, Feb. 19, 2011 (TAP) - The plan to revive Tunisian tourism was the focus of a working session held on Friday in Tunis, in the presence of Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas and Messrs. Mohamed Belajouza and Tahar Saihi, Chairmen of the Tunisian Hotel Trade Federation (FTH) and Tunisian Federation of Travel Agencies (FTAV).

Participants in this session agreed to implement a plan of action setting measures to be taken urgently to save the current season and devise a plan of revival defining practical modes and financial means allowing their implementation in the shortest terms.

It was also agreed to include this plan of action in an effective partnership between the administration and the profession to ensure it best conditions of success.

The Chairman of Professional Tourism Federations praised the communication plan targeting French media, launched by the Trade and Tourism Ministry.

The number of French tourists is 1.4 million out of the 7 million tourists who visit Tunisia each year.

To support this action, the operation " I Love Tunisia, the Place to be... now" was launched on February 14 and is experiencing a remarkable success as it is relayed by social networks and all French media such as TF1, FR2, FR3, FR24, Europe1, RTL, RMC, France Inter, RFI, le Monde, France Soir, Libération, les Echos,

Ouest France, Est Républicain, le Journal de Dimanche, le Figaro, le Parisien

«Go Voyages » said, on Friday, on its web site, that Tunisia is already topping its sold destinations.

Le Figaro said, in turn, that tour operators are already assured of the Tunisia destination.

French tourists eager to see new Tunisia

TUNIS, March. 2, 2011 (TAP) - "The Tunisian Revolution has made of Tunisia a pioneer nation, and French people are observing this situation with admiration," French Secretary of State in charge of Tourism Frédéric Lefebvre said.

Speaking at a news conference held on Wednesday in Tunis, the French official, who is on an official visit heading an important delegation of professionals and journalists specialised in tourism, said his Department already contributes, in co-operation with Tunisian competent authorities, to launch communication campaigns targeting millions of French people who are eager to see "the true image of this new Tunisia."

"We expressed our commitment to ensuring all means to help recover Tunisian tourism, especially as the country is the first destination for French tourists outside Europe," said Mr. Lefebvre.

He added that the current situation does not encourage price slashing on Tunisia which "is not a destination at high risk," as reflected, he said, in the lifting of all restrictions on coastal areas for French tourists.

According to Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas, the visit of the French Secretary of State in charge of Tourism along with tourism professionals is an answer to those who try to take advantage of the situation to undercut prices.

He said that the revival of the sector depends on strengthening the foundations of effective partnership in matters of communication.

"The image that used to be conveyed of Tunisia was a disguised one and it is no longer the case today," the Minister said.

The two sides said the joint working groups, which were set up, will look at ways to foster ties, particularly in matters of tourism training and initiate an exchange of know-how, particularly in matters of handicrafts development.

Culture Minister announces resumption of cultural activities

TUNIS, March 7, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Ezzeddine Bach Chaouch, Minister of Culture has announced the resumption of all cultural activities in all regions of the country, following the gradual return to normal life in the recent days, thanks to improved security situation.

In a statement made to TAP News Agency, on Monday evening, after his confirmation in the Interim Government, the minister called on all actors of the cultural scene (artists, writers and journalists) to submit their proposals and projects to contribute to boosting cultural life.