

## briefly

### NIGERIA President defends cuts

President Goodluck Jonathan pleaded with Nigerians on Saturday to support the removal of fuel subsidies and pledged to cut government salaries, in an effort to prevent a nationwide strike planned for Monday.

Gasoline prices have more than doubled to around 150 naira 93 US cents per liter and protests have erupted across the nation.

### DENMARK Navy captures pirate ship

The Danish navy said it has captured a suspect pirate mothership off the Horn of Africa and rescued 14 people who were being held hostage on it.

The navy said its warship HDMS Absalon, which participates in NATO's Ocean Shield anti-piracy force, encountered the ship on Saturday and the crew boarded it. They arrested 25 suspected pirates and freed 14 people from Iran and Pakistan.

### MYANMAR 'Role in govt' for Suu Kyi

National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi could be given a job in Myanmar's government if she is elected to parliament in April by-elections, a presidential adviser said.

"There is... a possibility she will be appointed to the government," Nay Zin Latt told AFP, adding it would depend on Suu Kyi's wishes. "If she's more interested in legislative matters, there can be a suitable duty for her at parliament."

REUTERS-AP-AFP



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

PHOTO BY SIPHIWE SIBEKO / REUTERS

African National Congress (ANC) supporters dance at the ANC's centenary celebration in Bloemfontein on Sunday. The movement took power in 1994 after Nelson Mandela negotiated an end to apartheid with the white-minority government.

## Arab League may seek UN help

CAIRO — Arab League foreign ministers meet on Sunday to discuss whether to ask the UN to help their mission in Syria, as a large Russian naval flotilla led by the carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*, has docked in the Syrian port of Tartus.

Qatar proposes inviting UN technicians and human rights experts to help Arab monitors judge whether Syria is honoring its pledge to stop its alleged crackdown on dissent, Arab League sources said. One said it might ask UN staff to help the mission.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad said Syria was not implementing the terms of the Arab League peace plan it agreed, and monitors

should not stay in Syria to "waste time."

The Arab League admitted to "mistakes" but defended the mission, saying it had secured the release of prisoners and the withdrawal of tanks from cities. But it said rather than pull out, it planned to send more observers.

Speaking on the eve of the meeting, the head of the monitoring operations room at the league's headquarters in Cairo, Adnan al-Khudeir, said the withdrawal of the monitors was not on the agenda and they were continuing their work according to protocols agreed with the Syrian government.

He said in a statement the delegation

could only be withdrawn by a decision of Arab League foreign ministers, who had initially agreed the mission's parameters, adding that 10 Jordanian monitors had arrived in Damascus on Saturday, bringing to 153 the number of monitors involved.

The six-day port call by the carrier group in the Mediterranean port, where Russia has a recently expanded naval base, is intended to boost ties at a time when President Bashar al-Assad's government is under mounting Western and Arab pressure over its alleged crackdown on dissent, the Syrian press said.

REUTERS-AP-XINHUA

## Iran steps up nuke activity as it rallies allies

By CUI HAIPEI AND CHENG GUANGJIN  
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING — As Iran starts its uranium enrichment program at a new underground site, the nation's president set off on a tour of Latin America in a bid to rally diplomatic support.

Kayhan Daily, a leading Iranian newspaper, said on Sunday that Teheran has begun injecting uranium gas into sophisticated centrifuges at the Fordo facility near the city of Qom.

The United States and its allies accuse Iran of trying to develop bombs under cover of its nuclear program. Iran denies the allegation, saying it needs nuclear technology to generate electricity to meet its booming domestic demand.

Meanwhile, Iran is planning its next round of Persian Gulf naval drills to practice the armed forces' ability to close the Strait of Hormuz.

The elite Revolutionary Guards Corp will start naval exercises on Jan 27 in the Gulf with the aim of enhancing the country's ability to close the chokepoint into that body of water "in the shortest possible time when the situation requires it", Esmail Kowsari, a member of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Saturday.

Iran's current stance on nuclear issues and large-scale military drills shows that it does not want a war with Western countries, said Hua

Liming, a former Chinese ambassador to Iran.

"Iran is facing mounting pressure from Western countries, and it is trying to prevent itself from being isolated by the international community."

However, Hua said it would be unlikely for Iran to block the Strait of Hormuz, because that would further damage the country's economic interests.

On Sunday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad started a four-day Latin America tour aimed at shoring up ties with his allies.

The US has declared fresh economic sanctions against Iran's central bank in an apparent bid to punish foreign companies and banks that do business with the Iranian financial institution, and the European Union is also considering measures that would forbid its member states from importing Iranian oil.

Ahmadinejad will arrive in Caracas late on Sunday, and on Tuesday he will attend the inauguration of the recently re-elected Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

Stops in Cuba and Ecuador will round off the tour.

Japan has asked Saudi Arabia to provide more crude oil to compensate for any loss in shipments from Iran, the Japanese foreign ministry said after Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba discussed the security of oil supplies and oil price stability during a visit to Riyadh.

AP, Bloomberg and Zhang Yunbi contributed to the story.

## Albania open for business

Widespread investment is transforming the resource-rich Balkan country into an energy hub

Having achieved strong economic growth in recent years on the back of a services and construction boom, Albania celebrates its 100th anniversary as an independent country with immense motivation to fulfill its extraordinary potential.

With foreign direct investment (FDI) having tripled between 2006 and 2010, the government, led by Prime Minister Sali Berisha, has worked hard to procure a competitive investment environment, dropping corporation tax from 25 percent to 10 percent and personal income tax from 23 percent to 10 percent. Social security contributions have fallen from 32 percent to 15 percent for entrepreneurs.

Formerly one of the countries with the lowest information communication technology (ICT) penetration rates in the world, at just 4.8 percent in 2006, Albania has increased this to 50 percent in 2011, and it is still one of the government's biggest priorities. "The next two years will be decisive," said the prime minister. "We are trying to provide super-fast broadband Internet in the country. Albania has a very high penetration of mobiles, higher than the European average. We have just issued the second 3G license and are preparing the framework for 4G."

"In 2009, we collected \$1.7 billion in revenues. This has been a huge advantage and allowed us to undertake some very ambitious projects. Soon Albania will have the newest

and the most impressive road network in the region, with every community having access to a national road within 15-25 minutes. Time is precious, and this way, it will take every citizen 60 percent less time to reach Tirana, our capital."

Albania's excellent water resources have earned it the nickname "Small Norway of the Balkans."

"We look forward to building 443 hydropower stations and have signed with private sector contracts for works to start in 2020, among them some of the largest projects in Europe," the prime minister said.

"Energy and mining are our greatest potentials. We are one of the richest countries in terms of minerals — we have chromite, nickel and copper — and new data has confirmed the presence of gold."

"We have been producing oil for 19 years and currently have around 850,000 tons."

"We have a constant dialogue with China, one of our most important trading partners, about economic investment and cooperation."

Minister of Economy, Trade and Energy Nasip Naço is pleased to see the government's investment reforms bearing fruit.

"The only way we will become more competitive is to involve the private sector," he said.

"We have a very favorable legal framework that protects the investor with maximum guarantees of transparency and openness to promote fair competition. We also have one of the lowest and simplest taxation regimes in the region."

"These days, a company can register in less than one hour. We have created a one-stop shop for registering and licensing as well, and we guarantee investments

over \$10 million.

"We also have a young and qualified workforce; this is not just fundamental for attracting FDI, but also good for business in general to encourage further development and growth."

"We have just approved a new law for the mineral sector that will give it more impetus and bring more strategic investors. More than 96 percent of the energy we produce comes from hydropower resources. We are using only 35 percent of our potential, but have awarded close to 100 concessions for the construction of more plants which will have a total estimated capacity of around 1,400 megawatts."

"We are also pursuing privatization reforms to increase efficiency. We're in the process of privatizing more than 1,200 assets, mainly factories that are no longer in use, and will revitalize these with private investment and more diversified activities, and evaluating the assets of Albpetrol, our national oil company."

Meanwhile, Minister of Public Works and Transportation Sokol Ollidashi points to the vast opportunities in infrastructure.

"Since 2009, we have spent around 9 percent of our gross domestic product investing in roads and will finish this within three years," he said. "There is a great chance for Chinese construction companies to take part in this process through electronic public procedures."

"Although we will build the roads with public money, we will outsource the operations and maintenance. Three years from now, we will concentrate on the railways," he said.

InFocus provided the story



Durrës Port, one of the busiest in the Adriatic regions, is preparing for expansion.



## On a voyage of success

The largest port in Albania, Durrës Port plays a key role in the development of Albania and the region.

Around 90 percent of the Albanian's maritime transport passes through the 80-hectare port every year, and it is growing at a yearly average of 5-6 percent.

Within the last five years, Durrës Port has gained in stability and undergone many important legal and structural transformations. Having shifted from a government to a private entity, it has been able to bolster both its infrastructure and superstructure. And, having implemented European policies and procedures, it has eliminated security problems, and is now on a very successful path.

When InFocus Reports spoke to Eduard Ndreu, general director of Durrës Port Authority, he was understandably upbeat, particularly with Albania's plan to join the European Union.

"The port authority is looking forward to all of the positive changes that will occur in Albania as a result of its EU candidacy. In the meantime, we are implementing a variety of changes that will improve our operations: thanks to our private operators, the port is both more flexible and more efficient."

"This makes us attractive and competitive, and sets us apart from others nearby. By the end of next year, we hope to be done entirely with the privatization of all terminals. I remain convinced that this procedure will have a positive impact on our operations."

All procedures are being processed through a ten-

dering process and the port authority is targeting open international tenders, Ndreu explained.

"The container terminal will be managed by a Turkish company and all other terminals will be in the privatization process by the end of the year. In adherence with our concessions law, all these procedures will go through the Ministry of Transportation."

"The port authority will focus on infrastructure and guaranteeing security and regulation, while delegating management of port-activity related operations to private companies."

Plans are afoot to deepen the entrance channel within the coming year. The port will be dredged by 11.5 meters and the quays restructured as part of the 15 million euros project. When that is done, the port will be able to handle ships of between 30 and 40,000 tons.

"Most Albanian minerals go directly to China through this port. Our dredging and infrastructure projects are therefore targeted to lower the cost of transporting goods," the port chief said. "Six years ago, ships transporting coal and other such minerals stayed in the port around 10 days. Now they are out within 24 hours."

Security is guaranteed to high levels, performance is very high and our tariffs are competitive.

"Albania is an open country for foreign investment and the port authority would be very happy for any Chinese company to take part in the operations here."

### Durrës Port Authority

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