



PROPHETIC TIMES

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS UPDATE

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 19 2011

RUSSIA WARNS WEST AGAINST ENCOURAGING MIDDLE EAST PROTESTS

February 16, 2011 Voice of America News reports: "Russia's foreign minister says it can be 'counter-productive' for the United States and the West to encourage the spread of revolutions and pro-democracy protests in the Middle East.

Sergei Lavrov says Russia has had its own revolution and does not need to be calling for others. Lavrov made his comments Tuesday at a joint press conference in London with British Foreign Secretary William Hague, after the two diplomats held talks.

In recent weeks, popular uprisings have toppled long-standing regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. Anti-government demonstrators are now holding protests in Iran, Bahrain and Yemen..."

JAPAN ECONOMY SHRINKS LESS-THAN-ESTIMATED 1.1%, SURPASSED BY CHINA IN 2010

February 13, 2011 Bloomberg.com reported: "Japan's gross domestic product fell less than estimated in the fourth quarter in a pullback that may prove temporary as overseas demand revives production after the nation fell behind China as the world's second-largest economy.

The annualized 1.1 percent drop in GDP in the three months through December was driven by a slowing in exports and fading of government stimulus programs, Cabinet Office figures showed today in Tokyo. The median forecast of 26 economists surveyed by Bloomberg News was for a 2 percent drop.

Japan's stocks rallied amid confidence the global economic recovery will strengthen as oil prices retreat and international political tensions subside with the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The rebound is set to benefit Japanese exporters, with Toyota Motor Corp. and Komatsu Ltd. this year raising profit forecasts because of increasing sales abroad.

"This was just a temporary contraction and growth may accelerate more than investors anticipate this quarter and next," said Kyohei Morita, chief economist at Barclays Capital in Tokyo, who forecast a 1.3 percent decline. "The export decline was smaller than expected and shipments will keep expanding as long as Asia's economies continue to boom."

The Nikkei 225 Stock Average has risen 4.5 percent this year, and advanced 0.8 percent as of 10:51 a.m. in Tokyo today. Japan's benchmark 10-year government bond yields have also climbed since the start of 2010, reaching a 10-month high of 1.35 percent last week. They slipped today to 1.30 percent. Japan's currency traded at 83.35 per dollar. The yen reached a 15-year high of 80.22 on Nov. 1.

Net exports, or shipments less imports, subtracted 0.1 percentage point from GDP, beating economists' estimates of a 0.2 point drop. Overseas shipments declined 0.7 percent, also better than forecasts for a 1.6 percent decline. Imports dropped 0.1 percent compared with a forecast for a 0.9 percent decline.

GDP will expand 0.6 percent in the first quarter and accelerate to a 1.9 percent pace by the final three months of 2011, according to the median estimates of 14 economists surveyed by Bloomberg News before today's report.

Private consumption dragged down GDP after the government ended a subsidy program to buy fuel-efficient cars in September and reduced incentives to purchase electronic home appliances in December, a program that will end in March.

"This was a temporary pullback from the stimulus boosts in the third quarter, so we don't need to be too pessimistic about the economic outlook," said Susumu Kato, chief economist for Japan in Tokyo at Credit Agricole CIB and CLSA. "The economy will likely gain traction toward the end of this year."

GADDAFI TELLS PALESTINIANS REVOLT AGAINST ISRAEL

February 13, 2011 Reuters reported: "Palestinian refugees should capitalise on the wave of popular revolts in the Middle East by massing peacefully on the borders of Israel until it gives in to their demands, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi said on Sunday.

Gaddafi is respected in many parts of the Arab world for his uncompromising criticism of Israel and Arab leaders who have dealings with the Jewish state, though some people in the region dismiss his initiatives as unrealistic.

He was giving his first major speech since a popular uprising in neighbouring Egypt forced President Hosni Mubarak to resign, an event which electrified the Arab world and prompted speculation that other Arab governments could also be toppled.

"Fleets of boats should take Palestinians ... and wait by the Palestinian shores until the problem is resolved," Gaddafi was shown saying on state television. "This is a time of popular revolutions."

"We need to create a problem for the world. This is not a declaration of war. This is a call for peace," he said in a speech given to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohamed, a holy day in the Islamic calendar.

He also said: "All Arab states which have relations with Israel are cowardly regimes."

ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS, CLASHES SPREAD TO LIBYA

February 16, 2011 The Associated Press reported: "'Egypt-inspired unrest spread against Libya's longtime ruler Moammar Gadhafi on



Wednesday, with riot police clashing with protesters in the second-largest city of Benghazi and marchers setting fire to security headquarters and a police station in the city of Zentan, witnesses said.

Gadhafi's government sought to allay further unrest by proposing the doubling of government employees' salaries and releasing 110 suspected Islamic militants who oppose him — tactics similar to those used by other Arab regimes in the recent wave of protests.

Activists using Facebook and Twitter have called for nationwide demonstrations on Thursday to demand the ouster of Gadhafi, establishment of a constitution and comprehensive political and economic reforms. Gadhafi came to power in 1969 through a military coup and has ruled the country without an elected parliament or constitution.

The Benghazi protest began Tuesday and lasted until around 4 a.m. Wednesday. It was triggered by the arrest of an activist but quickly took on an anti-government tone, according to witnesses and other activists. The protest was relatively small, but it signaled that anti-government activists have been emboldened by uprisings elsewhere.”

It started at the local security headquarters after troops raided the home of rights advocate Fathi Tarbel and took him away, according to Switzerland-based activist Fathi al-Warfali.

Palestinians have long demanded that refugees who fled or were forced to leave in the war of Israel's creation in 1948 should be allowed to return, along with their descendants.

Israel says any resettlement of Palestinian refugees must occur outside of its borders.”...”

TURKEY TO HELP NEGOTIATE NEW 'ROAD MAP' FOR IRAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

February 17, 2011 Haaretz.com reported: “Turkey has agreed to cooperate with Iran on a new "road map" for its disputed nuclear program, according to a statement Thursday by Turkish President Abdullah Gul on his return from a four- day trip to Iran.

"We agreed to come together to work on a new road map on nuclear energy. Turkey will continue to exert all facilitating efforts for a solution to this matter through diplomacy and dialogue," Gul was quoted by the semi-official Anatolia Agency as saying.

Gul did not provide any details about what such a the road map might entail, but said Turkish foreign ministers and Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeid Jalili would be involved in discussions on the issue.

Gul's first visit to Iran came less than a month after a round of talks held between Iran and six world powers in Istanbul that did not produce any meaningful results. Although Turkey had sought to serve as a mediator between the world powers and Iran, its role at the Istanbul talks was limited to that of host.

The Turkish president met with his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in Tehran on Monday, part of a trip that was focused primarily on strengthening economic ties between the two neighboring countries.

In an interview Tuesday on Iranian state TV, Ahmedinejad called on world powers to resume talks with his country over the nuclear issue.

Many countries fear Iran intends to use its nuclear technology to develop nuclear weapons, though Iran says its nuclear program is for strictly peaceful purposes.”

SAUDI PRINCE CALLS FOR REFORM AMID REGIONAL UNREST

February 17, 2011 The Associated Press reported: “The protests and unrest in Arab countries may be dangerous for Saudi Arabia if King Abdullah does not step up the pace of reform, a Saudi prince said Thursday.

Prince Talal bin Abdul-Aziz, a half brother of the king, said it was not too late for the Saudi government to take steps to avoid protests _ and that the king is the only person who can bring about major changes.

"The only person who could really maintain things and do major things and change is King Abdullah," the prince told BBC Arabic in an interview. "Because he is not merely liked, but he is loved by the people. But if he doesn't do it, it would be very dangerous in our country."

Talal is an outspoken prince who has called for reform before. He holds no government posts and is considered something of an outsider within the royal family. He was forced briefly into exile in the 1960s amid reports at the time that he planned a revolt.

Political activity in oil-rich Saudi Arabia, which follows strict Islamic rule, is severely restricted and all power rests in the hands of the ruling Saudi family.

The kingdom's first political party was formed recently by moderate scholars calling for reform, following the turmoil in Egypt and Tunisia.”



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