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ONE) - SPANIARD, BRAZILIAN AHEAD IN FAO RACE

L'ex-chef de la diplomatie espagnole Miguel Angel Moratinos et l'ancien responsable du programme brésilien de lutte contre la faim José Graziano da Silva, considérés comme les favoris pour diriger la [FAO](#), ont présenté mercredi leurs programmes en vue de l'élection prévue fin juin. "Je reçois de plus en plus d'appuis", a indiqué à l'AFP M. Moratinos qui s'est rendu dans une quarantaine de pays dont il espère qu'ils voteront pour lui lors du scrutin prévu entre le 25 juin et le 2 juillet à Rome. Au total, six candidats ont présenté au siège central de la FAO, l'organisation de l'ONU pour l'Agriculture et l'Alimentation, leurs programmes devant les représentants des 191 pays membres. MM. Moratinos et Graziano, tous deux ex-ministres dans leurs pays, sont considérés comme les grands favoris pour succéder pour un mandat raccourci à 42 mois, au Sénégalais Jacques Diouf, en poste depuis 1994. Outre MM. Moratinos et Graziano, les candidats sont l'ex-commissaire européen à l'Agriculture Franz Fischler (Autriche), Indroyono Soesilo (Indonésie), Mohammad Saeid Noori Naeini (Iran) et Abdul Latif Rashid (Irak). Le discours de M. Moratinos où il a assuré "ne pas être le candidat du Nord" et des pays riches, a été très applaudi. Pour sa part, l'ancien ministre brésilien de la Sécurité alimentaire et de la Lutte contre la faim s'est fait l'avocat d'une FAO "forte et efficace" en plaidant pour une poursuite de la réforme de l'organisation. Graziano a déjà été vice-directeur général de la FAO et a réussi à obtenir l'engagement des pays latino-américains et des Caraïbes d'éradiquer la faim dans leur région d'ici 2025. Sur la base de son expérience, il s'est dit "convaincu qu'éliminer la faim est un objectif raisonnable que l'on peut atteindre". Moratinos a promis de son côté une FAO "qui appartienne à tous, parvienne à inclure tout le monde dans son action et soit gérée avec une vision politique", en estimant qu'elle doit devenir "un pilier de la gouvernance mondiale". Alors que le candidat espagnol est un homme politique qui a mené une vraie campagne électorale à l'échelle mondiale, son rival brésilien est un spécialiste de l'agriculture doté d'une solide formation universitaire. Pour être élu, le futur directeur de la FAO devra recevoir l'appui d'au moins 90 pays, ce qui donne aux 52 pays africains des voix décisives lors du scrutin. (AFP)

TWO) – 'URGENT HELP' NEEDED TO STEM FLOW OF NORTH AFRICAN MIGRANTS

Europe's catholic bishops have called for more "concrete solidarity" among member states to stem the flow of migrants from the uprisings in the Arab world.

The appeal comes amid growing criticism of some member states for failing to respond to the migrant crisis in the region.

The bishops say that action is "urgently needed" to help in facing the flow of migrants and refugees from North Africa.

The EU, say the bishops, should also help in improving the "deplorable" situation in countries like Libya. The EU should also stress the importance of granting equal rights to all citizens of those countries, "irrespective of their ethnic or religious origin". This was the main message to emerge from the bishops' recent synod on the Middle East.

In a statement issued after the Brussels meeting, they said, "After decades of diplomatic deadlock and conflicts in the Middle East and north Africa, Comece now see in the Arab Spring a clear sign of hope. "The popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other Arab countries represent a legitimate claim for freedom and human dignity for millions of people."

It said Comece, the EU-wide representative body for catholic bishops, "warmly encourages the citizens to continue their commitment towards the establishment of fundamental rights and democracy in their home countries".

The statement said they wish to pay "special tribute to the younger generation, who in all these countries played a leading role by launching and organising this uprising in a courageous, peaceful and ecumenical way".

The message comes as news emerged on Monday that members of an African Union (AU) delegation are offering a peace proposal to end Libya's eight-week-old conflict to rebel leaders in the city of Benghazi. The AU says the government has already accepted the plan. The delegation met leader colonel Muammar Gaddafi on Sunday.

Rebels promised to study the plan, but ruled out a truce unless Gaddafi stepped down and his forces withdrew.

THREE) – EU AIMS FOR LIFTING ON IVORY COAST SANCTIONS

The European Union is hoping to reach agreement on easing sanctions on Ivory Coast, in line with a request by presidential claimant Alassane Ouattara, a European diplomatic source said on Friday. "The EU is working on a text to lift the sanctions (on Ivory Coast) next Tuesday, on the occasion of a meeting of European foreign ministers," the source told Reuters. "The plan is to reach an agreement Tuesday but if for technical reason it is not possible, the sanctions would be lifted by Wednesday, Thursday at the latest," the source added. The diplomat said the intention was to lift sanctions on all Ivorian port authorities and on all the cocoa and coffee sectors, allowing for exports of its commodities. A text would include entities "vital" to the Ivorian economy. The European Commission said earlier on Friday it had received a request from Ouattara for action to end sanctions. (Reuters)

FOUR) - UN FOOD STOCKS IN ABIDJAN LOOTED

Les stocks alimentaires du Programme alimentaire mondial (PAM) ont été entièrement dérobés à Abidjan par une "bande armée", conduisant à un arrêt des distributions de nourriture dans la capitale économique ivoirienne, a indiqué mercredi l'agence onusienne. "Trois mille tonnes de nourriture que nous avons dans notre magasin à Abidjan ont tout simplement disparu, ont été pillés", a expliqué lors d'un point de presse à Genève le directeur du PAM en Côte d'Ivoire, Alain Cordeil, revenant du pays. "Une bande armée -on n'a jamais su qui exactement- a réussi à prendre le magasin, déloger les jeunes qui le protégeait et finalement l'ont pillé intégralement et apparemment y ont mis le feu", a-t-il raconté. "On se retrouve à Abidjan avec zéro gramme nourriture à disposition depuis cinq jours", a-t-il poursuivi. "Il faut réagir rapidement car on sait qu'à Abidjan, on aura beaucoup de personnes à assister", a-t-il insisté soulignant qu'à l'heure actuelle, le PAM estimait à environ 70.000 le nombre de personnes ayant besoin d'une aide d'urgence dans la ville. L'agence onusienne, qui prépare déjà plusieurs ponts aériens de distribution alimentaire dans le pays, pense ainsi sérieusement à faire de même sur Abidjan. Alors que la situation alimentaire est devenue dramatique en Côte d'Ivoire où les récoltes n'ont globalement pas pu être faites et où les prix des produits de base ne cessent de flamber, le PAM estime qu'il aura besoin dans un premier temps de 26 millions de dollars pour nourrir pendant six mois quelque 225.000 personnes (17.000 tonnes de nourriture). Pour l'instant, il n'en a reçu que 12 millions, a regretté M. Cordeil, s'inquiétant d'un manque de fonds qui pourraient encore ralentir une aide compliquée par l'insécurité. "A Abidjan, les prix ont été multipliés par quatre ou peut-être même par cinq. On s'attend d'ailleurs à ce qu'ils continuent à augmenter pour les produits de base", a encore raconté le responsable du PAM. "Vous pouvez imaginer le pourquoi des pillages qui existent actuellement à Abidjan. C'est tout simplement que les gens ont faim, ils vont aller piller partout où on a un supermarché", a-t-il poursuivi. En général, a souligné M. Cordeil, ces pillages commencent par des bandes "armées lourdement" qui "se servent et laissent les magasins ouverts. Alors les glaneurs viennent en profiter", a-t-il poursuivi, mettant en garde contre "ce cercle vicieux d'insécurité" engendré par la faim. (AFP)

FIVE) – EUROPEANS SPLIT AT LIBYA CONTACT GROUP MEETING

Des ministres européens ont ajouté mercredi au Qatar aux divergences apparues au sein du camp occidental dans la crise libyenne, Rome appelant à armer la rébellion et Berlin rejetant une solution militaire. En marge de la première réunion à Doha du Groupe de contact sur la Libye, le ministre britannique des Affaires étrangères William Hague a également souhaité que la pression s'accroisse sur le colonel Mouammar Kadhafi, retranché à Tripoli (est). Selon un porte-parole du ministère italien des Affaires étrangères, Rome est en faveur de fournir des armes aux rebelles libyens et cette question sera discutée à Doha par la vingtaine de participants au Groupe de contact. "Nous devons fournir tous les moyens possibles pour leur défense", a assuré Maurizio Massari, qui a souligné que la résolution 1973 "n'interdisait pas de fournir des armes aux rebelles". "La question de la fourniture d'armes aux rebelles est clairement un sujet de discussion", a ajouté M. Massari avant la réunion de Doha qui doit tenter de donner une perspective politique à l'intervention militaire multinationale en Libye lancée le 19 mars sous mandat de l'Onu. Le ministre belge des Affaires étrangères Steven Vanackere qui représente son pays et les Pays-Bas à Doha a toutefois rétorqué qu'ils n'étaient pas en faveur d'armer les rebelles: "les résolutions de l'Onu prévoient de protéger les populations civiles, mais pas de les armer", a-t-il déclaré. La réunion de Doha, que Londres et le Qatar ont organisée, intervient alors que des

divergences sont apparues au sein de la coalition alliée. Londres et Paris veulent une intervention plus musclée de l'Otan, et les Etats-Unis défendant l'action de l'Alliance qui a pris le commandement des opérations le 31 mars. Le secrétaire général de l'Otan Anders Fogh Rasmussen a répété à Doha qu'il n'y avait "pas de solution militaire" au conflit en Libye, et appelé à "lancer un processus politique". Le ministre allemand des Affaires étrangères Guido Westerwelle a affirmé que son pays ne "voit pas de solution militaire" en Libye, rappelant que l'Otan partageait la même approche. Refusant de commenter les opérations militaires en cours en Libye, M. Westerwelle a affirmé que "l'Allemagne est disposée à soutenir l'action humanitaire en faveur du peuple libyen". Dans le même temps, M. Hague, dont le pays souhaite une action plus musclée de l'Otan, a assuré que la rencontre de Doha va permettre d'accroître la pression sur le colonel Kadhafi. "Les pressions pour le départ de Kadhafi vont s'intensifier au cours de la réunion aujourd'hui. Il est impossible pour quiconque d'envisager un avenir viable pour la Libye avec le colonel Kadhafi au pouvoir", a-t-il déclaré. (AFP)

SIX) – LIBYA RISKS CHAOS IF WAR LASTS TOO LONG

La Libye peut-elle sombrer dans le chaos et devenir un havre pour Al-Qaïda? Tout dépendra de la durée du conflit, répondent les observateurs, alors qu'un ex-membre du clan Kadhafi vient d'évoquer le risque de voir son pays devenir "une nouvelle Somalie". Un conflit prolongé provoquerait "une telle effusion de sang" que "la Libye serait une nouvelle Somalie", a argué sur la BBC Moussa Koussa, l'ancien chef de la diplomatie libyenne, qui a fait défection à Londres. En Somalie, l'effondrement de l'Etat dans les années 1990 avait ouvert la voie au pouvoir morcelé des shebabs, des islamistes radicaux. M. Koussa a demandé "à toutes les parties d'éviter d'entraîner la Libye dans une guerre civile", et mis en garde contre la partition de son pays, plaidant qu'elle rendrait toute paix impossible. Les propos de celui qui fut aussi chef de l'espionnage libyen, et l'un des principaux hommes de confiance du colonel Kadhafi, résonnent avec ceux de la secrétaire d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton, le 2 mars devant les sénateurs à Washington. "L'une de nos pires inquiétudes est de voir la Libye plonger dans le chaos et devenir une Somalie géante", expliquait-elle, en rappelant que de très nombreux membres d'Al-Qaïda ayant œuvré pour le réseau islamiste en Irak et en Afghanistan venaient de Libye, en particulier de l'est du pays. "Il est assez probable que la situation dégénère en Libye, mais je ne dirais pas que le pays pourrait devenir une nouvelle Somalie", tempère pour l'AFP Bilal Saab, un analyste de l'université du Maryland. "La Libye importe beaucoup plus aux intérêts occidentaux que la Somalie", dit-il. En cas de besoin, "l'Occident augmenterait donc son effort militaire pour empêcher un tel scénario de se produire". **WEST TURNING LIBYA INTO SOMALIA, SAY EXPERTS** D'autres experts sont moins catégoriques. Sur le terrain militaire, "on arrive à une impasse", ni les rebelles, ni Kadhafi ne parvenant à l'emporter, note Christopher Boucek, de la fondation Carnegie. Interrogé par l'AFP sur les déclarations de Moussa Koussa, il décrit une situation dans laquelle le dirigeant libyen pourrait se retrouver, dans l'Ouest libyen, à la tête d'un Etat tronqué -"un régime-croupion"-, et s'inquiète de la réaction qu'aura un Kadhafi "acculé et blessé". "C'est quand même un gouvernement qui, par le passé, a soutenu le terrorisme international et a cherché à obtenir des armes de destruction massive", rappelle-t-il. M. Boucek met en cause les contradictions de la coalition étrangère, qui souhaite le départ de Kadhafi mais dit ne pas vouloir y contribuer directement. Il appelle surtout à travailler d'urgence à "la Libye post-Kadhafi". Selon lui, "c'est là que sera le vrai défi". Si Al-Qaïda est encore loin d'avoir pris pied en Libye, l'organisation fait tout son possible pour y parvenir, convient en tous cas Noman Benotman. Cet ancien djihadiste libyen est désormais employé par la fondation Quilliam, un centre de réflexion antiterroriste basé à Londres. Les islamistes "font tout ce qu'ils peuvent" pour peser sur la situation, a dit à CNN M. Benotman: "Surtout Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique (AQMI), qui a essayé récemment de faire passer des gens à la frontière sud entre la Libye et l'Algérie. Mais je pense que c'est très dur pour eux". En revanche, "si on permet que le conflit dure trop longtemps", a-t-il ajouté, "cela vaudra dire 100% d'incertitude". (AFP)

SEVEN) – LIBYA GROUP AGREES 'TRUST FUND' FOR REBELS

The international contact group on Libya has agreed to set up a temporary "trust fund" to help the international community channel assets to the opposition Transitional National Council in Benghazi. In a statement issued at the conclusion of Wednesday's one-day summit in Doha, Qatar, the group united to call on Libya's long-term leader Muammar Gaddafi to step down. "Gaddafi and his regime has lost all legitimacy and he must leave power allowing the Libyan people to determine their own future," the group said.

The financial mechanism being set up will allow international donations to be made - possibly from frozen assets of the Gaddafi administration - and made directly available to Gaddafi's opponents.

The group warned that up to 3.6 million people in Libya could require humanitarian assistance as the result of weeks of fighting in the country.

Members of the group have called for more pressure to be exerted against Gaddafi's regime, but they disagree on whether to arm the rebels seeking to eject him.

Al Jazeera correspondent James Bays said some participants had "deep concerns" about providing Libyan rebels, who are fighting to topple Gaddafi from power, with access to funds.

"I spoke to the German foreign minister [Guido Westerwelle] and he had concerns over whether it was legal or not," our correspondent said.

"Statements from the UK and Qatar have agreed that the situation in Benghazi is urgent. And most is due to a lack of cash - it's not all about heavy weapons for frontline fighters; it's also about being able to pay public servants and getting schools back open."

After the conference, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber bin Muhammad Al Thani, Qatar's prime minister, said that Gaddafi must step down. "Those around him should advise him that it is in the best interests of Libya," he said. "This is the ideal scenario, for the safety of everyone - including himself and his family."

Sending weapons to Benghazi

The Qatari prime minister also didn't rule out arming anti- Gaddafi rebels.

"Qatar starts by providing humanitarian supplies, including heating gas and other supplies. We have also taken 6,000 refugees. For all other needs, Qatar ... will make things available for the Libyan people to defend themselves."

William Hague, British foreign secretary, told Al Jazeera that arming Benghazi-based fighters would not be contrary to international law.

"The U.N. resolutions do allow for the provision of weapons," he said. "But we are making our contribution through our own military, as well as providing non-lethal support, such as communications equipment."

He earlier told reporters that "the arms embargo applies to all of Libya, but it is appropriate to equip people with what is needed to protect themselves".

Franco Frattini, Italy's foreign minister, went further.

"Gaddafi's tactics are to put tanks in the streets - and we cannot have air strikes against people in the city streets, in the squares, in the highly populated areas," he said.

"Either we make it possible for these people to defend themselves, or we withdraw our claims of support."

However, in an apparent rift between EU partners on Libya, Steven Vanackere, the Belgian foreign minister earlier said his country was opposed to the idea.

"The U.N. resolution speaks about protecting civilians, not arming them," he said.

Qatar 'an oil corporation'

The Libyan government has dismissed the talks and Qatar's role in the ongoing conflict.

"We are very hopeful that the American people and the American government will not buy into the Qatari lies and Qatari schemes," a spokesman of the Libyan regime told reporters in Tripoli on Tuesday.

"Qatar is hardly a partner of any kind. It's more of an oil corporation than a true nation," the spokesman said.

Among those who arrived in the country ahead of the Doha talks was Moussa Koussa, Libya's former foreign minister, who fled to Britain last month. He did not take part in the formal meeting, but was understood to have met with various officials on the sidelines of the conference.

Mustafa Gheriani, a media liaison official for the opposition, said Koussa was "not connected to (the rebel) Transitional National Council in any way or shape".

Gheriani added that he was personally surprised to learn that Koussa was leaving Britain to attend the Qatar talks, and suggested that British officials should explain why he was going and in what capacity.

'Free individual'

Koussa, the most prominent Libyan government defector, sought refuge in Britain on Mar. 30. A friend said he quit in protest at attacks on civilians by Gaddafi's forces.

The former spy chief was questioned by Scottish police over the 1988 Lockerbie airliner bombing, which killed 270 people, but the British government said he was now free to travel.

In his first public statement since arriving in Britain, Koussa told the BBC on Monday his country could become "a new Somalia" unless all sides involved in the conflict stopped it from descending into civil war.

EIGHT) – GERMANY MAY JOIN LIBYA 'MILITARY-HUMANITARIAN' MISSION

Germany says it would be prepared to commit its military to a possible European Union humanitarian mission in Libya, even as it stays out of combat operations. Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said Friday that if the United Nations requests that the EU conduct such a mission, Berlin would be prepared to participate. Germany has kept troops out of the NATO-led operation to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya. The government abstained in the U.N. vote that authorized it - drawing criticism at home. Seibert says that taking part in a humanitarian mission, for example securing supplies and evacuating wounded people, "would not be a turnaround" as it would be completely different from a combat deployment. (AP)

NINE) – LIBYA REBELS SEEK HELP TO BOOST OIL EXPORTS

Rebels fighting to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi said on Wednesday they wanted to export more oil to pay for food and medicine, but buyers in Europe were wary of violating international sanctions. The rebels control fields that currently pump 100,000 barrels per day of crude, Mahmud Awad Shammam, a spokesman for the rebel Libyan National Council (LNC) said on Wednesday, but are only exporting what he termed a "minimal" amount of oil. Italy was the top consumer of Libyan crude before the conflict broke out. It will not resume imports and wrestled with how to provide the cash-strapped rebels with fuel and other supplies without violating sanctions, an official said. "It (crude oil imports) has not been considered yet, we need to find concrete mechanisms to work around this asset freeze," foreign ministry spokesman Maurizio Massari told reporters. Libya's has been on the U.S., European Union and United Nations sanctions lists since March. Although the rebels have been unofficially excluded from them, Western oil firms remain reluctant to buy their oil. Oil exports have been at a standstill since the crisis erupted in March, helping send crude prices to over \$125 a barrel, their highest since July 2008. Rebel officials did not provide more details on their claimed oil output. Libya's largest oil field, Sarir, was shut earlier this month after pro-Gaddafi forces attacked it and an executive with the rebel firm operating the field said on Sunday it would not restart until security improved.

QATARI ROLE Qatar, which is marketing the rebels' crude, said on Tuesday it had facilitated the sale of 1 million barrels of oil this month as well as arranged the shipment of four cargoes of fuel to the rebel stronghold of Benghazi and was ready to support further transactions. "There is a formula but we are not receiving any cash. Instead we are receiving aid," Shammam said, adding the rebels still faced shortages of gasoline. Saudi Arabia and other OPEC producers unilaterally boosted oil output in an effort to compensate for the loss of supplies, but the kingdom throttled back output recently due to slow demand, sources told Reuters on Tuesday. Oil market players believe Qatar played a role in helping trading house Vitol export a cargo of Libyan crude earlier this month and may be assisting Trafigura, which said on Wednesday it was discussing the export of crude oil from rebel-held eastern ports of Benghazi or Tobruk. Vitol has declined to comment and Qatar has not said whether it was involved in the Vitol or Trafigura shipments. A rebel official with direct knowledge of the LNC's export plans refused to comment, saying the attack on Sarir was triggered by media reports of planned rebel oil exports. "We are at war, and it's for the security of our (oil) supplies," the official said. Meetings of the Libya Contact Group will start in Qatar on Wednesday regarding Libya's future, and will include representatives of the LNC. The group will ask Western governments to provide \$1.5 billion in aid to help meet the needs of civilians in rebel-controlled areas and would like to arrange to receive humanitarian aid in return for oil shipments, Shammam said. (Reuters)

TEN) –SPLIT NATO MEETS ON LIBYA

Les ministres des Affaires étrangères de l'Otan, divisés sur l'urgence de durcir l'intervention militaire contre le leader libyen Mouammar Kadhafi, se retrouvaient jeudi à Berlin, deux semaines après que l'alliance a pris les opérations en main en Libye. La France et le Royaume Uni tentent de convaincre leurs alliés que la mobilisation insuffisante de certains freine l'action de l'aviation contre les troupes de Kadhafi. La secrétaire d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton sera présente. Toutefois, l'appel franco-britannique ne concerne pas les Etats-Unis. S'ils ont retiré comme prévu du théâtre libyen une cinquantaine de chasseurs-bombardiers le 4 avril, ils continuent d'aider puissamment l'Otan et restent en réserve. Les demandes de Paris et Londres visent d'autres alliés, même s'il faut exclure un changement d'attitude de l'Allemagne, qui a été d'emblée contre toute intervention militaire, ou de la Turquie, la plus radicalement opposée aux frappes. Il est néanmoins impératif aux yeux des Français et des Britanniques, en pointe depuis le lancement de

l'intervention le 19 mars, d'intensifier les opérations aériennes. Deux mois après, l'impasse militaire entre les rebelles tenant l'est du pays et les troupes loyales à Kadhafi, n'est pas de nature à convaincre le leader libyen à quitter le pouvoir, estiment-ils. Sur le terrain, les forces rebelles ont repris la ville stratégique d'Ajdabiya (est), à 160 km au sud de Benghazi, théâtre de combats meurtriers ces derniers jours, mais les unités pro-Kadhafi y maintenaient leur pression. Mercredi à Paris Nicolas Sarkozy et David Cameron se sont dit d'accord pour accroître "la pression militaire" sur le régime du dirigeant libyen. "Tous les moyens doivent être mis à disposition", a souligné l'Elysée. Aujourd'hui, la France et le Royaume-Uni assurent la moitié des missions de bombardement, selon un responsable français. Quatre alliés --la Belgique, le Canada, le Danemark et la Norvège-- effectuent l'autre moitié. Pour ces six pays, un meilleur partage du fardeau politique et militaire serait le bienvenu. "Le commandement militaire de l'Otan a demandé plus d'avions il y a quelques jours" et à ce stade, après l'apport de quatre appareils britanniques supplémentaires et bien que "certains des pays engagés dans les frappes aient haussé le rythme de leurs opérations", "une dizaine manquent" encore, a indiqué un diplomate allié. L'Espagne, dont les avions de même que ceux des Pays-Bas n'effectuent des patrouilles que pour faire respecter la zone d'interdiction aérienne, a fait cependant savoir qu'elle ne trouvait "pas nécessaire" d'en faire davantage. Outre des renforts, Paris demande aussi à l'Otan de frapper les cibles quelques heures seulement après les avoir identifiées et casser ainsi la machine militaire de Kadhafi à un rythme plus soutenu, ce qui suppose "plus de souplesse opérationnelle", souligne un responsable français. (AFP)

ELEVEN) – EMERGING POWERS BLAST WESTERN BOMBARDMENTS IN LIBYA

Leaders from the five "BRICS" emerging powers joined in criticising the Western air campaign in Libya, a government source at the summit said on Thursday, when Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa met in southern China. "They all condemned the bombings," said a government source who participated in the meeting of the BRICS country leaders. The source said the leaders voiced concern about the effects of the air strikes on Libyan civilians. The source spoke on condition that his country not be identified. He said that South Africa, which voted for the United Nations Security Council resolution authorising the "no fly" zone over Libya was among the countries that joined in the criticism. Western warplanes began striking Libya last month, but embattled leader Muammar Gaddafi has refused to yield to calls from rebel groups and other governments for him to step down, and his forces remain locked in combat with the rebels. The comment came ahead of a final statement from the summit of the five big emerging powers, which will reject the use of force in the Middle East and North Africa at a summit on Thursday, urging instead dialogue and non-intervention, according to a draft statement. In the context of the Middle East and Northern Africa, specifically Libya, the BRICS "share the principle that the use of force must be avoided", according to the draft statement, a copy of which was seen by Reuters. China, Russia, India, Brazil and other developing countries have condemned the U.S.-led air strikes on Libyan forces. South Africa, on the other hand, voted in favour of the United Nations Security Council resolution authorising the strikes. But during a visit to Tripoli on Sunday, South African President Jacob Zuma called for NATO to stop air strikes. The BRICS summit, in the southern Chinese resort of Sanya, has also given the world's big rising economies a venue to coordinate views on global financial reforms, commodity prices and other shared concerns. (Reuters)

TWELVE) – LIBYA WANTS ASSETS UNFROZEN FOR "HUMANITARIAN NEEDS"

Libya said on Wednesday it had reserves in gold and other assets that would help its people cope with sanctions, but it also called for funds it holds abroad to be "unfrozen immediately" for humanitarian needs. Planning and Finance Minister Abdulhafid Zlitni estimated that about \$120 billion of Libya's assets had been frozen as part of sanctions, but that the North African country still had significant "contingency reserves," without giving details. He also told a news conference there were "no legal grounds" for diverting Libyan assets to rebels fighting the government of Muammar Gaddafi. "We have confidence that the banks cannot do that, they don't have the legal grounds to do it," Zlitni said. Earlier on Wednesday, a group of Western powers and Middle Eastern states called for the first time for Gaddafi to step aside, and said they would work to create a financial mechanism to help rebels run the eastern region of Libya they control. The World Food Programme said Libya was facing a humanitarian crisis and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the group's meeting in Doha that up to 3.6 million people, or more than half the population, could need assistance. Zlitni suggested Libyans were adjusting to the hardships. "Let me tell you that the time of the shock has gone and the Libyans

are now more than capable of standing and resisting it, and adapting their life accordingly," he said. "There is always what we call the contingency reserves, they are still here. The Libyans are wealthy, their accounts exceed 50 billion dinars (\$41.39 billion) in banks.... which can make them resist long-term austerities," he said. An International Monetary Fund report put Libya's net foreign assets held by the central bank and the sovereign wealth fund at \$150 billion at the end of last year. Some of these assets were abroad and have been seized as part of sanctions against Libya. Of the around \$120 billion he said were frozen, Zlitni said some were "in euros, some in pounds, some in yen, they are in stocks, in real estate ... these funds belong to the Libyans, the Libyan people will decide how to use them, not us." "Even when assets were frozen, there were clauses to say these are frozen but can be used for food, medicine, legal matters, electricity, fuel et cetera ... our concern is therefore that assets should be unfrozen immediately for humanitarian needs," he said. (Reuters)

THIRTEEN) – MOROCCO ROYAL HOLDING'S ASSETS SOAR AMID PROTESTS

An investment holding company controlled by Morocco's royal family has announced a sharp surge in net profit and assets in 2010 amid street demands for King Mohammed to reduce his business and political clout. National Investment Co., or SNI, made a consolidated net profit of 8.28 billion dirhams (\$1.06 billion) in 2010, up from 2.38 billion in 2009, according to financial statements published over the weekend in *Le Matin*, one of Morocco's most pro-establishment newspapers. Siger, the firm that groups the main business interests of the Moroccan royal family, holds a stake of around 60 percent in SNI, market sources said. SNI's assets and turnover rose more than fourfold to 102.6 billion dirhams and 14.08 billion respectively in 2010 compared with 22.53 billion dirhams and 3.43 billion in 2009. Based on the latest growth forecasts, Morocco's 2010 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should stand at 761.6 billion dirhams. SNI gave no explanation for its performance in 2010. However, in August SNI and ONA Group, in which SNI already held a majority stake, both delisted from the Casablanca bourse to pave the way for a merger that would see ONA transfer all its assets to SNI. "The rise in net profit appears to have been fuelled by capital gains on the transfer to SNI of assets ONA owned in listed firms," a market source said. Explaining what prompted SNI to publish its financial statements after being delisted, another source said: "It had to publish its financial statements because it has bonds traded in the stock market". Both sources did not want to be named citing a "sensitive political context". Debt, which SNI itemised as non-recurring financial debt, stood at 30.91 billion dirhams by the end of 2010 against 7.57 billion at the end of 2009. Of those, bonds totalled 13.7 billion dirhams against 3.9 billion a year earlier. A youth protest movement is spearheading calls for the king to transfer his executive powers to elected politicians and reduce his business clout. They, and many business leaders, say firms controlled by the king and his close inner circle dominate key economic sectors. At times, demonstrators have carried placards reading 'SNI degage'. SNI has stakes in mines, steel, cement, supermarkets, sugar refining, banking, telecommunications, insurance and renewable energy. It is involved in partnerships with French firms including Lafarge, Danone and Renault. SNI also holds a 48.3 percent stake in AttijariWafa, North Africa's biggest bank by assets. SNI is putting some of those stakes up for sale, including AttijariWafa, Cosumar and Lesieur, the latter two being the country's sole sugar refiner and its biggest cooking oil producer. (Reuters)

FOURTEEN) - MOROCCAN YOUTH CALL FOR DEMONSTRATIONS ON APRIL 24

Le Mouvement de jeunes du 20 février, qui revendique des changements politiques "profonds" au Maroc, a appelé sur le réseau social Facebook à de nouvelles manifestations le dimanche 24 avril. C'est la troisième fois que le Mouvement appelle à des manifestations pacifiques dans plusieurs villes du royaume pour demander des réformes politiques et constitutionnelles. "Nous appelons à manifester pacifiquement dans toutes les villes pour mettre un terme à la corruption, à l'injustice et pour une véritable démocratie dans notre pays", dit un jeune Marocain dans une vidéo diffusée sur la page Facebook du Mouvement du 20 février, qui compte plus de 45.000 personnes. Un autre jeune paraissant sur la même vidéo ajoute, en berbère, que "ces manifestations auront lieu pour revendiquer une monarchie parlementaire et pour dire non à l'exclusion et à la marginalisation". Des manifestations ont déjà eu lieu le 20 février et le 20 mars dans plusieurs villes du Maroc, à l'appel de jeunes via Facebook pour réclamer des réformes politiques "urgentes" et une limitation des pouvoirs du roi. Dans un discours tenu le 9 mars, le roi Mohammed VI a annoncé d'importants changements politiques visant notamment à renforcer l'indépendance de la justice et la séparation des pouvoirs, et mis en place, le lendemain, une commission pour la réforme de la constitution présidée par le juriste Abdeltif

Menouni. "Nous soutenons les manifestations pacifiques du 24 avril, à l'instar de celles qui ont eu lieu les 20 février 20 mars, et appelons à une forte mobilisation", a indiqué, dans un communiqué paru mercredi, le Comité de soutien au Mouvement composé de plusieurs ONG, jeunesses de partis et syndicats marocains. La commission pour la réforme constitutionnelle a été boycottée par le Mouvement du 20 février. Elle "achèvera ses travaux le 15 juin et remettra ses résultats au roi le lendemain (le 16 juin)", avait indiqué à l'AFP l'un des ses membres sous couvert de l'anonymat. (AFP)

FIFTEEN) – EGYPT: SHIA HOPE FOR NEW CHAPTER

The political currents that sweep across the Middle East often surge out of Iran, form treacherous eddies in Lebanon and Iraq, then slam into the front door of Ahmad Rasem El-Nafis' apartment in the northern Egyptian city of Mansoura.

The university professor and Islamic scholar was arrested three times, banned from travelling, and subject to continuous harassment by Egyptian state security during the 30-year rule of deposed president Hosni Mubarak. His crime, he says, was his belief in Shia doctrine. "It's astonishing that the Egyptian government claimed to be tolerant of religions while at the same time it put pressure on Shia by threatening them, banning their books and putting them in prison," El-Nafis told.

Like all Shia in Egypt, he hopes Mubarak's ouster will herald a new era of respect and tolerance for religious minorities.

"Under Mubarak, if you were Shia in Egypt you had to take care in your life and never join any political parties or express your ideas," he says. "Since the revolution (two months ago) there has been a general improvement, not just for Shia, but for all Egyptians."

Shia constitutes an estimated one percent of Egypt's predominantly Sunni Muslim population, which in turn constitutes about 90 percent of the country's 82 million inhabitants. Their true number is difficult to know with certainty, as many Shia are believed to observe *takiyya*, the practice of hiding one's sectarian identity in order to avoid persecution.

El-Nafis has never hidden his creed. Although he was born and raised a Sunni, the 58-year-old scholar says he converted to Shiism some 25 years ago after being drawn to the sect's principles, particularly its emphasis on innovative interpretation of the scriptures.

"Islam is not as divided as some would like us to believe," he says. "It is very difficult for people to tell who is a Shia and who is a Sunni, as the two doctrines share many ideas."

Both sects agree on the basic tenets of Islam and share the same holy book, the Qu'ran. The main schism lies in their differing views on the rightful successor of Prophet Mohammed. Shia believe he should have been succeeded by his cousin Ali rather than his companion Abu Bakr, as Sunnis contend.

Al-Azhar, the highest institution in Sunni Islam, recognises Shia as a legitimate branch of Islam. The Mubarak regime, however, viewed the sect's adherents with suspicion and questioned their loyalty to the state.

"The Mubarak government feared that Shia were loyal to Iran, the stronghold of Shia power," explains Ishaak Ibrahim, a researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). "(Discrimination against) Shia should be seen in the context of relations between Egypt and Iran."

The two regional powers have a history of bad blood. Iran severed relations with Egypt after Cairo signed a peace deal with Israel in 1979 and provided asylum to the deposed Iranian shah, Mohamed Reza Pahlawi. Animosity increased when Egypt backed Iraq in its war with Iran from 1980 to 1988.

Egypt and other Sunni-ruled Arab countries are fearful of Iran's growing influence in the region. Mubarak previously accused Tehran of attempting to destabilise Arab regimes through proxy groups, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah.

While analysts suspect there may be some truth to the allegation, they say sweeping assumptions have unfairly vilified Egypt's Shia, the vast majority of whom have no connection with foreign political groups. Hundreds of Shia were arrested during the latter half of the Mubarak era. Detainees were often labelled as terrorist suspects and held on spurious charges.

Many former detainees claim Egyptian security officers showed little interest in their alleged political activities, questioning them instead on their religious practices. Transcripts of their interrogations were leaked to local media outlets, presumably to portray Shia doctrine as blasphemy and turn public opinion against them.

Last September, Egyptian security forces arrested a group of 12 Egyptian and foreign Shia accused of plotting to overthrow the regime, falsifying the Qu'ran and insulting the companions of Prophet Mohammed.

Prosecutors submitted as evidence the suspects' confession admitting that they do not recognise the caliphs that followed Prophet Mohammed.

"This is Shia doctrine," says Ibrahim. "The police arrested these men for what they believe, not for anything

they did."

State prosecutors eventually dropped the case for lack of evidence.

Analysts say persecution of Shia in Egypt tends to rise and fall according to Iran's regional influence. Arrests increased after Israel's war in Lebanon in 2006, which garnered widespread local support for Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

"Egyptians are very susceptible to Shia beliefs," explains a sermon leader at a mosque in Cairo's Islamic quarter. "Shia Islam has a long history in our country and many mosques and tombs are associated with (revered Shia figures). Al-Azhar itself was founded by the Shia Fatimids. Given this, some people worry that Shiism could spread very easily among the majority Sunni population."

Abdel Moneim Abdel Maqsoud, director of Sawasya Centre for Human Rights, dismisses fears expressed in the yellow press that a "Shia awakening" could sow the seeds of sectarian strife in Egypt, as has happened in Iraq.

"There is no need to dictate what type of Islam people should adhere to," he says. "Over 99 percent of the Muslim population here is Sunni, so there is no threat that Egypt will be overrun by Shia."

Egypt-Iran relations have warmed since Mubarak stepped down on Feb. 11, and senior officials on both sides have hinted at a resumption of diplomatic relations. Egypt's newly-appointed foreign minister Nabil El-Arabi recently announced that his country was ready to "open a new page" with Iran. Tehran has welcomed the overture.

Normalisation with Iran "would undoubtedly help improve" the image of Shia in Egypt, says Abdel Maqsoud. It could also reduce the bad press.

While vestiges of the old authoritarian regime remain, Mubarak's departure has lifted the cloud of oppression over Shia in Egypt. The new atmosphere of freedom appears to be prompting the sect's adherents to abandon their cloak of takiyya.

"Since the revolution I've received many communications from Shia converts," says El-Nafis. "This never happened before because our phones were tapped, and whenever state security learnt that someone was Shia they would send security agents to harass or intimidate them."

One clear sign that El-Nafis believes Egypt has embarked on a new era of openness: he and other Shia are now openly involved in the formation of a broad-based political party. That, he admits, would have been unthinkable during Mubarak's rule.

SIXTEEN) - LIBYAN EXODUS SHRINKS REMITTANCES

The exodus of migrants streaming out of Libya due to ongoing unrest has highlighted the heavy dependence of some countries on remittances from their citizens working abroad. In several countries this flow has now become choked.

"With thousands returning home the economic impact of the unrest in Libya is that remittances will be reduced," Dr. Mizanur Rahman, economist and research fellow at the National University of Singapore told.

"Most workers travel to the region under adverse payment systems, which means they need to pay anywhere between 2,000 dollars to 3,000 dollars to secure their visas. In order to raise the money they resort to various means like selling their land, and in the end when this money halts it disrupts the entire family economics."

Recent World Bank statistics indicate that developing countries got more than 325 billion dollars last year from migrant worker remittances, outstripping foreign direct investment and development assistance combined.

According to a recent survey carried out by the African Development Bank (ADB), remittances sent home by African migrants have quadrupled in the last 20 years. They hit the 40 billion dollar mark in 2010.

Massive land grab in some African countries, forcing those that would be growing food to feed their families off their lands, has resulted in large numbers getting onto rickety boats and risking their lives to try and migrate out.

Stable economies like Libya were a hub for migrants from African countries, said Emira Woods, co-director of Foreign Policy In Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies based in Washington. Migrants headed to Libya, and out through there because they were unable to withstand huge increases in the price of food and staple goods back home.

"Remittances are this sleeping giant in terms of development finance that has awakened. They create a financial tie between people and their communities by helping to build clinics, schools, roads and other infrastructure development projects," says Woods.

"There are some efforts to harness more the strategic resources from remittances, which have created a space for governments to act independent of external actors like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) whose interest and loan conditions have failed to serve the needs of Africa."

Libya has been a major destination for migrant workers following the 1969 revolution led by Gaddafi against King Idris. Construction workers from Tunisia, teachers from Egypt and Palestine and healthcare workers from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria poured in to assist in rebuilding.

Two decades later, a second wave of migrants swept in, mainly from Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and West Africa, to take advantage of the relatively high salaries of almost 300 dollars per month for unskilled labour. On the macro level, says Dr. Ibrahim Awad, Director of the Center for Migration and Refugees Studies at the American University in Cairo, remittances assist in reducing chronic trade deficits and contribute to balancing the economy in countries like Egypt due to their resilience and countercyclical nature. This helps sustain consumption and investment during economic downturns.

But, he says, the countries that sent labour now face an exodus of migrants fleeing violence in Libya. The countries face an increase in the demand of jobs as unemployed workers return. Reliance on remittances to spur economic activity as a means of reducing poverty is slowing down.

"The crisis highlights the dependence some migrant sending countries have on remittances. In some countries remittances constitute over 30 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) like in Egypt. Reliance on this money influx suggests that any reduction will mainly impact the household level as well as create external financing gaps, which are hard to fill," Dr. Awad told IPS.

With no end to unrest in sight, concerns are growing amongst some developing nations that turmoil in the region could spread to oil-rich Gulf states where foreign labour adds up to more than 11 million.

«Instead of waiting for the rebellions to die down in order to send migrants to Libya again or redirect efforts in locating new markets, labour sending countries should adopt appropriate policy measures to end reliance on labour export, and create incentives that encourage their nationals to stay home, Dr Awad said.

"Migrant sending countries should not rely solely on migration as a means of solving unemployment. The issue of lack of jobs should be solved internally. Countries of origin should therefore put in place effective policies for the reinsertion of returning migrant workers into their labour markets by creating decent work where people live."

SEVENTEEN) - WRESTLING OVER ICC'S ROLE IN AFRICA

On its face, Kenya's failed bid to defer International Criminal Court cases against alleged organisers of post-election violence in 2007-2008 was a story of changing positions. But to argue that either the U.S. or Africa has switched sides in the debate over the appropriate role of the ICC is too simplistic.

Last December, after six prominent Kenyans were named as suspects by the International Criminal Court, the government of President Mwai Kibaki - who had previously supported the ICC process - began arguing that the cases could jeopardise "international peace and security," while simultaneously lobbying for them to be transferred to domestic courts.

All six suspects face crimes against humanity charges of murder, forcible transfer and persecution. Three also face torture charges, and the other three also face charges of rape and other inhumane acts.

In advance of a Mar. 18 U.N. Security Council meeting addressing the issue, the African Union, which includes many countries that have long provided a crucial bloc of support for the ICC, took Kenya's side. Meanwhile, the United States, once accused by Human Rights Watch of "going to war" with the ICC, came out against the deferral bid, effectively killing its chances: after a closed-door meeting on Apr. 8, Security Council President Nestor Osorio of Colombia said members "did not agree on the matter," and that it would be shelved "for the time being." This endorsement of the court's work followed the Feb. 26 Security Council resolution referring the situation in Libya to the ICC - the first time the U.S. had voted in favour of such a move.

Rights groups largely hailed U.S. support for the ICC, while lambasting Kenya's - and by extension the AU's - attempt to delay the post-election violence cases.

"We're certainly glad to see statements like this that the US has been making," Elizabeth Evenson, senior counsel for HRW's International Justice Program, said in reference to criticism of the deferral bid by American diplomats. "Indeed, it will perhaps convince the Kenyan government that this is the wrong avenue, that this isn't going to go anywhere and that there's no point in pushing it further."

But analysts say it is simplistic to argue that either the U.S. or Africa has completely switched sides in the debate on the ICC. In fact, the U.S. embrace of the ICC has been partial at best, and it remains to be seen whether frustrations aired by some African governments are fully shared by their counterparts throughout the continent.

The Darfur question

American support for action by the ICC dates as far back as the March 2005 Security Council resolution referring the situation in Darfur, Sudan, to the court, says David Scheffer, who served as the first U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues during the administration of former President Bill Clinton. In that vote, the U.S. abstained instead of wielding its veto power, thereby allowing the referral to go forward. Scheffer says, "The Obama administration has been increasingly supportive of the utility of the ICC in addressing critical accountability challenges in the world, and views the court's work as often aiding US national interests."

That does not mean, however, that the US is likely to grant the ICC jurisdiction over its own nationals by becoming a member any time soon. "We always knew the road to ratification would be a long one," Scheffer said.

While the U.S. backed action on Darfur, resistance came from Africa. After ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo requested an arrest warrant for Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in July 2008, the AU asked the Security Council to approve the same type of deferral Kenya sought more recently. In March 2009, however, the court issued an arrest warrant for Bashir on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes, prompting calls for AU countries to withdraw from the Rome Statute which established the ICC.

Calls to withdraw from the ICC

Godfrey Musila, senior law lecturer at Kenyatta University in Nairobi and an expert in international law, says the rejection of the Darfur deferral bid made the AU "very unhappy." He says calls for withdrawal are likely to be renewed if Kenya's deferral bid meets the same fate as Sudan's.

"The suggestion is that if the Kenyans fail to get a deferral - as I think they will fail - then you're likely to see movement at the AU reawakening the call for African states to withdraw from the court," he told IPS in March, adding that this would likely happen around the time of the body's upcoming summit in July.

Speaking to reporters in Nairobi last month, Mahboub Maalim, executive secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a seven-nation East African regional development organisation, hinted that Musila's prediction of calls to withdraw from the ICC could have merit.

After accusing the Security Council of delaying a hearing on Kenya's deferral bid, Maalim said: "From the tone of the AU Commission, I have heard members saying that they have ideological differences with the ICC. This tells clearly that the cases that are developing are being watched by the AU."

Musila said a main reason Africa - which has more ICC member states than any other region - supported the court from the beginning was because leaders believed it would be immune from political influence. Therefore, he said, it makes sense that Security Council votes and discussions - and the politics that inform them - are at the root of recent AU complaints.

He said the unanimous Security Council vote on the Libya situation could reinforce impressions that the court is politically compromised. "It provides evidence, if you will, to African leaders who are saying that the Security Council only acts where it is in the interests of the permanent members of the Security Council," he said, adding that many leaders believed the 2006 Israel-Gaza conflict also should have been referred to the court.

"You hear many African leaders saying, 'This is not the court we wanted. We wanted a court that is apolitical,'" Musila said.

Court enjoys strong African support

Evenson said there was no evidence of a "monolithic" move away from the ICC in Africa. "We've seen before a couple of times in which it's been threatened that African members of the ICC will withdraw in response to what has been perceived as not listening to AU positions," she said.

She added that she doubted recent threats would translate into actual withdrawals by individual countries, saying they were likely more "useful as a matter of rhetoric." Referring to instances in which the ICC has drawn the AU's ire, she said, "I think what they have in common is when you have an action that makes it more likely that someone in a position of power might be subject to these criminal processes, we see this kind of backlash."

This argument rings true for Ken Wafula, chairman of Kenya's National Council of NGOs, who dismissed IGAD - the membership of which includes Kenya and Sudan - as a collection of "perpetrators of crimes against humanity, war crimes, potential suspects in their own countries and future victims of the court." And it's not just African NGOs who have defended the ICC. At an Apr. 5 press event in Nairobi marking the 17th anniversary of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, George William Kayonga, Rwanda's high commissioner in Kenya, suggested that support for the court on the continent remained strong.

Recalling the Kenyan government's initial support for the post-election violence cases, he said: "Kenyans

invited the ICC. Since they invited the ICC they have to respect that the ICC did not come to Kenya because they wanted to come. They were invited."

Though he cautioned that the ICC might not effectively promote reconciliation on the ground, he credited the court with deterring atrocity crimes, saying it has created awareness. "It is a wake-up call to other leaders that if you get involved in this you will not get away with it," he said.

As for concerns that the ICC is in the hands of major powers such as the US, Wafula says they are baseless. "The ICC's an African court," he says. "It has everything to do with Africa. Its creation was necessitated by atrocities committed by African governments against African citizens. It's not a Western tool."

EIGHTEEN) - SOUTH SUDAN VIOLENCE KILLS AT LEAST 800 THIS YEAR, SAYS UN

More than 800 people have been killed this year in a rise in violence in south Sudan before its independence in July, the United Nations said on Wednesday. Southern Sudanese voted to separate from the north in a January referendum, promised to them as part of a 2005 peace accord which ended decades of civil war in Sudan. The war claimed some two million lives and destabilised much of the region. The referendum stirred great optimism and celebrations across the oil-producing south but renewed violence in the south has since taken hold. This year 151 incidents across nine of the south's ten states have killed 801 people and displaced nearly 94,000 more, according to the United Nations. The violence had also crippled development. Some analysts say the building momentum of southern insecurity -rebel militia battling the army, Uganda's LRA rebels raiding agricultural land, tribes fighting over resources- may sink the south after independence. "We are worried, with at least seven militia that are active, with inter-communal violence continuing, with the LRA active in Western Equatoria. This is not a good picture," said Lise Grande, the United Nation's senior humanitarian official in the south. Grande said the wave of conflict in the last two months had stalled the headway needed in building the new African nation starting almost from scratch and the rainy season would soon make much of the region inaccessible. "We can't start winding down an emergency operation if (nearly) 100,000 people have been displaced," she said in a news conference, adding that emergency relief was now underway in about half of southern counties. Grande singled out Uganda's LRA rebels as posing a persistent threat to any hope of the south feeding itself. **WHAT A MESS!** Last year the United Nations said almost half the southern population was short of food. Militia groups have clashed with the southern army including a February massacre which claimed 200 lives. And long-standing tribal rivalries have reignited, leading to 31 deaths in the first two weeks of April. These crises are compounded by the hundreds of thousands of southerners returning to the region from the north and the diaspora before the looming independence. Some 264,000 have returned since October and another 300,000 are still expected to arrive, according to the United Nations. Many hope July's independence celebrations could become a rallying cry for peace and unity. But analysts see any unity would be short-lived given how quickly southern tensions reemerged after the euphoria of the referendum. The south has fought the north for all but a few years since 1955 over differences in religion, ideology, ethnicity and oil. (Reuters)

NINETEEN) - GERMAN SHIP CAPTURED BY SOMALI PIRATES

A German-owned ship was captured by pirates early Friday off the Omani coast, reported the EU mission charged with reducing piracy in the region. The MV Susan K was on its way from Mumbai, India to Port Sudan, Sudan, when it captured about 200 nautical miles north-east of Salalah, Oman, at a site about 35 nautical miles from the Omani coastline, reported the European Union Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR). Exact details of the attack remain unclear. EUNAVFOR reported that at least 10 pirates boarded the ship, which is flagged in Antigua & Barbuda. The ship has a crew of 10, four Ukrainians and six Filipinos. EUNAVFOR had no further information about the crew. (Dpa)

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Brussels

