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Highlights

Referendum law to be send back to Parliament for a revote

The NCP and the SPLM yesterday ended their differences over the South Sudan referendum law by agreeing to repeal a controversial provision and to send the bill back to the Parliament for voting, *local dailies* report. According to *Al-Sahafa*, GoSS VP Riek Machar told journalists following a meeting with VP Taha and Parliament Speaker Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir that the two partners resolved their differences over a controversial section in the bill.

Sudan Tribune website 23/12/09 reported the NCP today made a highly unexpected move and agreed to the SPLM's demands on removing the amendments made to the controversial South Sudan referendum bill adopted by the National Assembly this week.

SPLM senior official announced that the Sudanese parliament would vote again on the bill. "We [SPLM & NCP] agreed on the fact that the law on the referendum will be resubmitted to parliament on Monday to be adopted with the article that had been removed," the SPLM Vice president Riek Machar said.

A political observer in Khartoum told *Sudan Tribune* that the "extraordinary" change of heart by the NCP" is driven by the fear that the SPLM would join opposition ranks in an alliance against the ruling party.

US says Sudan government undermines peace process

Reuters 23/12/09 - The United States on Wednesday accused Sudan's ruling party of undermining the fragile peace process, a sign that U.S. offers of increased engagement with Khartoum are failing to bring results.

The State Department said the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), which dominates the north, had reneged on a deal setting conditions for a January 2011 independence vote in the oil-rich south, a move that could spark new political hostilities.

"Reneging on the agreement ... undermines the peace process, jeopardizes Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) implementation and risks sparking renewed hostilities between the parties," the department said in a statement.

It also expressed deep concern about Sudan's revised national security act, which it said contained no new measures for accountability of the security services ahead of the independence vote and a separate national election next year.

"For elections to be credible, it is incumbent on the regime to demonstrate in word and deed that this law will not be used to arrest and detain political opponents," the statement said.

"The government of Sudan must also make immediate and significant improvements to the electoral environment, including permitting peaceful demonstrations, ending press censorship and allowing opposition voices to be heard."

Analysts warn the south could return to war if there is any sign Khartoum will not go through with the vote and that would have a devastating impact on the country, its oil industry and stability in the region.

The State Department said the NCP had "reneged" on an earlier deal with the SPLM on the wording of the bill and urged the text to be returned to its original state before the bill is signed into law.

Many southerners, embittered by years of bloodshed, are thought to favor independence. SPLM leaders have been making increasingly separatist public comments in recent months.

Secession would mean Khartoum would lose control of most of the country's proven oil reserves, although the landlocked south is dependent on northern pipelines to carry its oil to Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

According to **AP** 23/12/09, one analyst, John Prendergast, co-founder of Enough said the SPLM's walkout Tuesday was a step toward the breakdown of the national unity government.

"This is a political shot across the bow that augurs the potential for a military one within the next year," he said.

Kiir calls on President Al-Bashir not to sign the security bill

Al-Ayyam reports FVP Salva Kiir Mayardit have called on President Al-Bashir not to sign the national security bill. In a statement circulated by the press yesterday, Kiir has expressed profound concern over passing of the bill by the National Assembly.

According to **Allafrica.com website** 23/12/09, FVP Kiir's Office issued the following statement:

1. We have been following with great concern the development in the National Assembly regarding the passing of bills on National Intelligence and Security Service, Southern Sudan Referendum, Abyei Referendum and Popular Consultation for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States.
2. On 20th of December, the National Assembly passed the controversial bill of National Intelligence and Security Service. In particular Sections 25, 50 and 51 of this bill have and continued to be our concern as they clearly contravene the provisions of CPA and our Interim National Constitution. We remain banking on the honest assumption of responsibility by the President of the Republic not to sign this bill into law until these constitutional issues are adequately addressed.
3. Last week, I was in Khartoum and we managed to avert a political crisis by agreeing with President Field Marshal Omer Hassan El Bashir to inject a new spirit into our partnership during the remaining period of the CPA. With this new spirit we managed to pass unanimously in the National Council of Ministers the three bills that were initialed by our Minister of Legal Affairs and Constitutional Development and National Minister of Justice.
4. Besides our agreement that these three bills would be passed by the National Assembly without any changes, we also agreed to take some administrative measures in the National Assembly to correct some irregularities that tended to undermine the spirit of the CPA.
5. Yesterday, I learned and to my utter disbelief, that some major changes have been introduced in these bills, a development which forced the SPLM members in the National Assembly, together with members of other political parties including some members of NCP in the National Assembly, to walk out of the discussion of these distorted bills.
6. In particular, we were yet stricken yesterday with another surprise in respect of the Southern Sudan Referendum Bill which has been purportedly passed by the National Assembly. It is inconceivable that the National Assembly can pass a bill in respect of Southern Sudan Referendum

Law in the absence of Southern Sudanese themselves and without honouring the political agreement of the two parties. This is risky and exposes our country to greater political danger for not honouring agreements.

7. What is happening in the National Assembly is a clear defiance of our joint political commitment to implement the most critical aspects of the CPA; particularly the Southern Sudan Referendum, Abyei Referendum and Popular Consultation for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States.

8. We should not allow the spoilers of CPA to provoke us again and to derail us from our focus on ensuring peace and stability in our country. The members of the National Assembly were appointed in accordance with the provisions of the CPA and their primary focus should be to ensure the full implementation of the CPA.

9. Although some of you will be celebrating Christmas with your families and friends, I ask again all the people of Southern Sudan, Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei area, all members of the SPLM and all the peace loving people of Sudan to remain calm but to be on alert. The SPLM is committed to respect and abide by the agreed upon bills and will not accept any changes in these bills which are only to be passed by the National Assembly.

10. I am confident that the leadership of NCP; particularly my Brother President Omer Hassan El Bashir and Vice President Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, will not allow such irresponsible conduct in the National Assembly to push us back to square one. We will be able to overcome again this crisis and, if necessary, we will extend the lifespan of the National Assembly or prorogue it until these bills are passed. The choice of our people is peace and full implementation of CPA and we shall not let them down.

11. I wish you all Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

South Sudan must confront insecurity - think tank

AFP 23/12/09 - South Sudan must confront insecurity on the ground which could threaten next year's elections and a 2011 referendum on self-determination, the International Crisis Group said on Wednesday.

Failure to stabilise south Sudan risks seeing it become "increasingly unstable ahead of next year's elections and the 2011 self-determination referendum," the Brussels-based think tank said in a report.

The government of south Sudan "must recognise the primarily local nature of the conflicts, extend state authority and prove itself a credible provider of security lest violence become an obstacle on the road to self-determination and beyond," it said.

The ICG said accusations that Khartoum is instigating tribal clashes in the south are "unsubstantiated", urging the government of south Sudan to "focus internally."

"Inter-tribal fighting, while not a new phenomenon, has taken on a new and dangerously politicised character, with the worst violence in and around the vast, often impassable state of Jonglei," the ICG said.

The south "should make police reform a greater priority, as they are unable to address domestic security threats... it should standardise and clarify army policy on engagement in tribal conflict and increase deployment to undertake law enforcement in areas of concern," the report said.

The ICG recommended the continued disarmament of civilians in a region "awash with weapons", but stressed the need to protect local communities during the process.

New crisis over Abyei looms

Al-Sahafa reports that the National Assembly was forced to withdraw the bills on Abyei referendum and the popular consultations for Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile to be debated next week due to the snowballing crisis between the two partners over the bills and the continued boycott of the Parliament sessions by the SPLM MPs. The Parliament is expected to convene a session on Monday to discuss and pass the bills besides three other ones before proceeding on a recess.

According to *Al-Intibaha*, the National Assembly introduced amendments in Article (24) which describes the voter eligible for voting in the referendum and also deleted the phrase "Dinka Ngok tribe and Sudanese" from the article following protest from the Messeriya who insisted that the name of their tribe should also figure in the Article like the Ngok.

Akhir Lahza reports National Assembly member and prominent Messeriya leader Al-Tahir Al-Ragig has announced rejection to the Abyei referendum bill, saying it does not provide for the rights of the Messeriya to take part in deciding the destiny of the area. He told the paper that the current Abyei referendum bill remains a "useless paper" so long as the SPLM continues to abide by the PCA ruling. He refused to recognize the PCA Award, saying the Messeriya were not engaged in the consultations preceding the Award adding they were invited to The Hague to witness the final ruling only. On participation of some Messeriya leaders in the talks leading to the Award, he said those leaders had participated in their personal capacity.

Abyei traditional leaders call for reconciliatory dialogue

Sudan Tribune website 23/12/09 — Abyei traditional leaders in collaboration with Local unions have called for reconciliatory dialogue and tolerance among stakeholders in the region.

The call comes in reaction to recent media releases of friction between Abyei chief Administration, Brigadier General Arop Mayak Monytoc and two of his cabinet members, following directives from Chief Administrator arresting two of the Director Generals in his administration, one in the department of Physical infrastructure and the other in Finance over financial scandal allegations and defiance to administrative instruction.

Speaking from Abyei town, Arop Kuol, a known influential chief in the area called to avoid confrontation as it has potentials to derail consultations that seek settlements.

"We have a lot to discuss through collectively exerted consultations as individuals and as community speaking on Abyei with unified voices," he said

However, he said, nowhere could be reached or achieved if we begin to talk about individuals tracing their political or social dominance in either Sudanese politics or at local affairs.

Kiir forms committee for demarcation of South states boundaries

Sudan Tribune website 23/12/09 – FVP Salva Kiir Mayardit has issued a presidential order constituting a high level committee to demarcate the borders between Southern Sudan states.

In the order he issued on Tuesday, Kiir appointed his deputy Dr. Riek Machar Teny as the chairperson of the 12-member committee.

The committee as per the references of the order shall establish borders between all the ten Southern Sudan states.

It shall also recommend to office of the President how to resolve any disputes between the states boundaries in the future.

The committee will report their findings to the office of the President within 30 days from December 22, 2009.

There are currently many cases of border disputes between states in the region, and demarcating them may prove to be a difficult task.

US Congress to discuss Sudan's elections in January

US envoy Scott Gration has confided to a senior official in Sudan government during his recent visit that the US Administration is convinced that the South is moving toward independence, **Al-Rai Al-Aam** reports. Meanwhile, an official of the Washington-based American Progress' Enough Centre told the London-based Al-Sharq Alawsat newspaper that the US Congress would meet early next year for a debate on Sudan's elections.

Political parties (Juba Conference) decide to resist security bill

The political parties (Juba Conference) have decided to step up their campaign against the passing of the national security bill by the Parliament, **Al-Ayyam** reports. The coalition announced that they would continue to resist the security law which gives NISS sweeping powers to search, detain and arrest. Sources said the coalition is planning to resist the law by all available popular means.

Sudan is on the brink of collapse – Pagan Amum

The opposition political parties (Juba Conference) yesterday held a symposium in Khartoum where they pledged to continue peaceful struggle for liberties, **Ray Al-Shaab** reports. SPLM SG Pagan Amum who addressed the symposium said Sudan was on the brink of collapse due to lack of national responsibility on the part of those who continue to consolidate their grip on power. The symposium was attended by over 7000 people and addressed by representatives of the opposition political parties (Juba Conference).

Border issues high on agenda of Sudan-Chad talks in Khartoum

Chadian government has expressed optimism over normalization of relations between Khartoum and N'djamena as a high-level Chadian delegation is set to arrive in Khartoum today on 2-day visit to resolve tension between the two countries, **Al-Sudani** reports. Chadian Consul in Khartoum Hussein Gada appeared optimistic that the two sides would overcome their differences to normalize their relations, saying the main cause of tension is border security and opposition deployment at the border between the two countries. Sources said border issues would be on top of the agenda of talks between officials in the two countries. According to the Consul, the Chadian delegation comprises 16 officials headed by the Foreign Minister.

Sudan and Mauritania ink 15 cooperation agreements

Sudan Tribune website 23/12/09 — Sudan and Mauritania signed 15 cooperation agreements between the two countries as Sudanese President Omer Al-Bashir concluded a three day visit on Wednesday.

The 15 agreements and memorandum of understanding covering the areas of infrastructure, sports, justice, social protection and the free movement of goods and people between the two countries were signed by the Mauritanian and Sudanese ministers in charge of international cooperation.

These agreements deal with trade, ports facilities, the judiciary, youth and sports. Further, the two countries decided to establish a bank in Mauritania to encourage private investments. Several agreements were also signed between the businessmen of both countries on projects for the establishment of a sugar factory, a five-star hotel and shopping mall in Nouakchott.

During his visit, Bashir inaugurated the new premises of Sudan embassy in the Mauritanian capital.

The building was established at an area of 8000 square miles and includes a house of the ambassador and other supplements.

Before to leave for Khartoum, the Sudanese President said that his visit to Mauritania aimed to consolidate the historic and cultural relations between the nations, enhancing the economic and trade cooperation frameworks.

Bashir returned this evening to Khartoum where he was received by the Vice President Ali Osman Mohamed Taha and other officials.

Mauritania is not a signatory to the Rome Statute treaty which forms the basis of the ICC

90 suspected cases of swine flu reported in Roseiris

Al-Intibaha reports an informed source as saying that over 90 people were suspected to have contracted swine flu in Roseiris (Blue Nile state). Sources said the suspected cases were discovered among pupils of Khur Gana primary school where 45 cases were checked and found suffering from similar symptoms.