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Highlights

NCP, SPLM fail to overcome crisis over “bills”

Local dailies report the NCP and the SPLM have failed to resolve the dispute over the draft laws. According to **Al-Sahafa**, the NCP, the SPLM, the NDA and the southern political parties MPs convened a meeting yesterday in a bid to resolve the crisis over the controversial bills but the meeting failed. The SPLM MPs stick to their decision to continue boycotting the Parliament session, saying they would not resume their parliamentary activities unless the NCP shows seriousness on the amendment of key laws. However, they agreed to set up a four-member committee to continue dialogue.

“We do not get our livelihood from America” – President Al-Bashir

Local dailies report President Al-Bashir yesterday addressed a gathering in the Blue Nile State saying the causes of marginalization had been addressed and that Sudan would not go back to war.

According to **Al-Sahafa**, President Al-Bashir has downplayed the renewal of the US sanctions against Sudan. “They do not like us. We also do not get our livelihood from them,” he declared. “Livelihood comes from Allah not from the US or Britain,” he told the crowd.

Meanwhile, the **local dailies** also report that the Sudanese Foreign Ministry has deplored the extension of the sanctions. MFA spokesperson Muawia Osman Khaled said the decision was not unexpected but regrettable in terms of timing. He said the renewal of the sanctions would not contribute toward the peace process.

Committee set up to supervise humanitarian work

The meeting of the High Committee co-chaired yesterday by the Humanitarian Affairs Minister and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan Ameerah Haq set up a committee to supervise delivery of humanitarian work with a focus on the security and safety of the humanitarian workers, **Al-Ayyam** reports.

Sudan asks Darfur elders to help free aid worker

Reuters 28/10/09 - Sudan said on Wednesday it had asked tribal elders to help free a Red Cross aid worker kidnapped in Darfur.

Armed men snatched Gauthier Lefevre last week in West Darfur, the fifth abduction of foreign workers since the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for President Omar Hassan al-Bashir for war crimes in March.

"We are working among the notable people in the area to send out the message that the ICRC (the International Committee of the Red Cross) should be rewarded not punished in this way," said Sudan's state minister for humanitarian affairs Abdel Baqi al-Jailani.

"We want them (the kidnapers) to know they have picked the wrong person. The ICRC never pays any ransom ... Our position is unchanged. No ransom should be provided."

Jailani said he had reports the kidnapers had asked for 3 million euros (\$4.4 million). "These are bandits who are moving without any aim except to make money," he added.

AU chief hits at ICC indictment of Sudan's president

Sudan Tribune website 28/10/09 – AU Commission Chairperson, Jean Ping reiterated his position regarding the indictment of the Sudanese president by the ICC.

Ping questioned at a press conference on the sidelines of the Pan African Parliament in Midrand, South Africa as to why cases in Africa are the focus of international justice.

"Why Africa only? Why were these laws not applied on Israel, Sri Lanka and Chechnya and its application is confined to Africa?" he said.

The AU official also suggested that former US president should be prosecuted for invading Iraq in 2003 saying that it was based on "false claims" and a "violation of international law". "Why are African leaders being put to trial?" he asked.

Opposition political parties to submit memo to AU

Akhbar Al-Youm reports that the opposition political parties held a meeting yesterday where they agreed on text of a memorandum to be submitted to the AUPSC meeting in Abuja to support its efforts to address the Sudanese issues particularly Darfur. Umma Party leader Sadiq Al-Mahdi told a press conference yesterday following the meeting that the memo carries the vision of the Sudanese people on how to address various issues particularly Darfur.

Release of JEM prisoners subject to developments in Doha talks

Sudan Vision reports NCP leading figure in the delegation to Doha talks, Dr. Amin Hassan Omer described the situations in Darfur as suitable for the peace process besides the serious attempts to unify Darfur movements.

He stated, in an interview with **SMC**, that the intention to normalize the relation with Chad is another positive step in that direction indicating that one of the important missions of the mediation is to unify the said movements. He said "We are ready to go to Doha as there are positive signs from the mediation with regard to the movements' unification."

Dr. Omar described the movement of Abdul Wahid Nour as having no security, military or political influence revealing that there are alternatives and other representatives in the areas where he claims to represent.

He added that Darfur issue was settled in Abuja and that there were some undecided issues demanded by the opposition of the said agreement expressing the readiness of his Government to consider the said demands. He said JEM prisoners would only be released through mediation and in accordance with the development at the negotiation table or after a cessation of hostilities is signed.

"UN pursues double-standards" – HAC Commissioner says in an interview

(Al-Ahdath 28 & 29/10/09)

Al-Ahdath: *The Sudanese Government has been criticized for harassing IDPs and forcing them to leave their camps. What is your comment?*

Hassabo: Returns should be voluntary and the IDPs have the option of returning to their villages or to any other place. I would like to assure you that, as a matter of principle and on a practical, constitutional and legal basis, the Government does not force IDPs to return. The matter is optional.

International NGOs used to focus on providing aid for the IDP camps, making these camps attractive to the IDPs because everything is provided free in the camps. Since last year, we made it clear that Government's priorities are based on the will of the people and that those who want to return will receive the necessary support but the Government will neither coerce nor lure IDPs to return. UNAMID confirmed in its reports that voluntary returns are continuing and they are on the increase. The WFP has also started aid distributions outside the IDP camps in Darfur in 2009.

Al-Ahdath: *But there is precedence: when the Government raided Kalma Camp on the pretexts that there were guns in the camp while many say the real reason was to chase out the camp population.*

Hassabo: This is an isolated incident and the camp was not raided in order to chase the IDPs back to their villages. There were reports that there were weapons and narcotics inside the camp. Everybody knows what used to happen in Kalma – the camp had detention centres and courts and was raided in order to reinstate the rule of law.

Al-Ahdath: *There are reports that some governors sought to capitalize on the issue of returns and to portray a picture of the situation different from those reflected in the media in order to gain political leverage. Could you comment on that?*

Hassabo: I told you that we have a number of mechanisms and one of them is UNAMID which we regard as impartial.

Al-Ahdath: *But the mission is relatively new in Darfur while the IDPs have been in these camps for some six years or so ...*

Hassabo: Nevertheless, we still regard UNAMID as a source of information that should not be ignored on the grounds that it is new. We also have offices, teams and joint committee, local NGOs as well as a number of other mechanisms through which we get reliable information.

We are satisfied that there are true returns, stability and social peace. Ultimately, the citizen is more qualified to assess whether or not there is security.

Al-Ahdath: *Some returnees have complained that the Government has given their land away to Arab tribes from neighbouring states.*

Hassabo: This is not true. There are no Arab tribes from neighbouring countries brought in by the Government to replace the indigenous people. When this was first claimed in 2006, we formed a joint HAC-UNHCR team which spent three months on the ground to verify but they did not find a single village inhabited by foreigners. I recall that the IDPs used to go to farms in their villages and then return to the camps because there were insufficient services in their villages. I also did mention that the agencies provided free aid and services in the IDP camps to discourage returns.

This year, we have formed a joint mechanism with the UN to review the statistics on returns.

Al-Ahdath: *This leads to the question about how you are going deal with the seasonal migration when households are divided into two with some going to the farms while others remain in the IDP camps to benefit from aid distributions.*

Hassabo: Our strategy is to encourage the people to stay in their villages through the provision of their needs for stability. The other strategy is to request the UN and the aid agencies to provide assistance to the needy in the villages in the same way this is provided to the IDPs.

Al-Ahdath: *How do you compare the pledges from Arab states to those from the international community?*

Hassabo: Arab states provide more practical assistance while the funds from the international community are mostly used on overhead expenses. I could not imagine how one and a half

billion dollars was spent in Darfur. We have only discovered this after the expulsion of the INGOs. None of the ousted agencies constructed a school, health centre, a road or a water point. Arab agencies now have a number of projects that would be inaugurated in November.

AA: *There is talk that the government handles humanitarian issues on security line?*

Hassabo: I do not understand what you mean. But any activity, including your work as journalists, has a security element. Security is part of our behaviour. On the humanitarian front, we handle the issues in full transparency. The security does not control the humanitarian operations but we do not ignore the security element because the issue involves foreign elements and armed movements and related threats to national security. Security therefore has to be part of the operation to assist in the protection of aid workers from abductions and so on.

Al-Ahdath: *But the protection you talk about is not available given the recent abductions of aid workers?*

Hassabo: Such incidents happen everywhere but could we say against the background of the 9/11 attacks, for instance, that New York or Washington are not safe? Even in Khartoum there have been some killings but can we describe Khartoum as unsafe?

Al-Ahdath: *But you are aware of the sensitivity surrounding the situation in Darfur and the accompanying complications. The Government is therefore responsible for the safety and protection of aid workers there.*

Hassabo: The Darfur issue is a fabrication. I do not say that there are no problems in the region but not to the extent the issue is being portrayed. I have worked in the humanitarian field for almost 30 years and have never heard the UNSC calling for a single session to discuss the pre-CPA situation in southern Sudan. The situation in southern Sudan is now worse than it is in Darfur but nobody is talking about it and nobody cares. I did ask UN USG John Holmes to travel to Jonglei and see the situation there for himself. He did go there and then later went to Zam-zam camp in North Darfur. He described the situation in Zam-zam as “five-star” compared to Jonglei. Since then, nothing has been said on Jonglei. This is double-standards.

Even the press does not mention the south because Darfur is a fully political issue and is in the international media agenda.

But the situation in Darfur is really improving. Among key indicators of that is that aid assistance now reaches all parts of the region. Thank God, our joint reports with the UN confirm what I say.

Al-Ahdath: *How large is the budget earmarked for the voluntary returns programme?*

Hassabo: I do not quote a figure but what I can say is that the returns programme covers a number of sectors that include health, education, water and sanitation, livelihoods, etc.

Al-Ahdath: *Why, in your view do most of the IDP camps reject assistance from the Government?*

Hassabo: That was in the beginning and was because of some aid agencies and other factors that all tried to create distrust between the Government and the IDPs. The situation has now changed; IDPs now cross over from areas controlled by the armed groups. Some IDP leaders have tried to discourage IDPs from doing so but the fact remains that most IDPs now request assistance from the Government.

Al-Ahdath: *Your report on the status of returns has however been criticized by members of the parliamentary committee on humanitarian affairs and dubbed untrue. They claim there are no returns. Where exactly is the truth?*

Hassabo: They did not say that it is not true. They described it as “baseless”. What they said about inaccuracy in the figures is inaccurate. I told them that IDPs are indeed returning and I do have figures and names of places. We have been carefully monitoring these returns since 2005.

Al-Ahdath: *But why should the MPs doubt those official figures? They also said they visited those areas and did not see evidence of returns.*

Hassabo: I do not know why they should doubt those figures we gave. The returns should not necessarily have occurred in the areas they are talking about. I did not say that the IDP camps are now empty but I talked about voluntary returns. I expect some 25% not to return though.

Al-Ahdath: *How then would you deal with this group?*

Hassabo: Their areas of resettlement will be re-planned. Some 750 households have been granted plots and resettled in Nyala and there are 6,000 plots available in Nyala to cater for such cases with similar numbers in El-Fasher.

Al-Ahdath: *In the wake of the NGO ouster, there was a lot of talk that Government had seized assets of the ousted agencies. What is it that happened?*

Hassabo: In the wake of the decision, we established a committee to follow upon the issue of the employees and issued clear directives on how to handle the issue. We also gave ample time for directors to resolve employee and contractual issues.

Government did not seize those assets but, by virtue of the law, such assets would have to be used for the continuation of those projects that they were brought in for in the first place.

Al-Ahdath: *How do you assess the situation in southern Sudan?*

Hassabo: We have been coordinating with the GoSS and the UN since last May and have formed a joint team and carried out a survey in five states on the initiative of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs. We also organized a donors' meeting in Juba where donors promised to honour their pledges.

Al-Ahdath: *Do you have statistics on the affected?*

Hassabo: No, we do not have statistics but we have a joint team to assess the situation. The evaluation report will most probably come out at the end of November this year. We have also flown in relief to Aweil, Jonglei, Upper Nile and Eastern and Western Equatoria. I can say that the situation is now under control.

Al-Ahdath: *Can you comment on reports that a number of southern Sudanese states face the threat of hunger?*

Hassabo: Any talk about famine at this moment is premature. We have to be accurate. We would be more to the point if we describe the situation as a food shortage because of the intermittent rains in some areas.

Al-Ahdath: *Some UN officials say the situation in southern Sudan is worse than that in Darfur.*

Hassabo: UN officials do not focus on the situation in the South like they do in Darfur. These persons in the UN are not neutral. They could have intervened to address the situation but they did not do".

Al-Ahdath: *But they have done some air-drops ...*

Hassabo: This is a routine work.

Al-Ahdath: *It was routine, it was stopped and resumed in recent months ...*

Hassabo: Air-drops were stopped because of a shortage in funds. My view is that the UN is not as concerned for the south as it is for Darfur. The UN says that the situation in southern Sudan is worse than that in Darfur. We are asking: what humanitarian intervention did they carry out to prove that they are not pursuing double-standards or that they do not have a hidden agenda. Donors might have pressured the UN.

Al-Ahdath: *Do you still obstruct the work of aid agencies?*

Hassabo: There are no obstacles to the work of the NGOs but I could say that the most important decision Sudan has taken was the expulsion of the aid agencies and invitation to national NGOs take over. The INGOs had nurses to run their dispensaries while Sudanese universities graduate some 3,000 doctors each year. Now those health centres are being run by doctors with a lot of support from the Federal Ministry of Health.