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(By Public Information Office)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

UN/ AMIS-UN Transition

Minister Alor holds talks with SRSG Pronk

(*AlAyaam/SUNA* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) Cabinet Affairs minister Deng Alor held talks yesterday with SRSG Jan Pronk.

The talks focused on the ongoing Abuja talks and on possible solutions to the Darfur conflict.

Alor said that talks between the parties to the Abuja talks is progressing well and added that the NCP and the SPLM have a common stand on the issue of Darfur.

UN urges Chad not to expel Sudanese refugees

(*AlRai AlAam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) SRSG Pronk has expressed deep concern over the violence in Chad and the Chadian government's threats to expel about 200,000 Sudanese refugees from her territory.

In a press statement issued yesterday, the SRSG urged the Chadian government to abide by its international obligations to secure the full protection and well-being of all refugees on its territories.

He urged all sides concerned to resolve political problems through talks and diplomatic means and described peace in Chad and Sudan as essential for the region.

President Bashir reiterates Sudan's rejection of international forces in Darfur

(*AlAyaam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) President Bashir has reiterated Sudan's rejection of a deployment of international forces to replace the AU forces in Darfur.

Speaking yesterday to the visiting Assistant Secretary-General of the UN for Peacekeeping Operations Hedi Annabi, the President reiterated Sudan government's commitments to a negotiated solution to the problem of Darfur through the Abuja process.

The ASG assured the President that a transition of the AMIS to a UN operation can only take place through the consent of the government of Sudan.

On the other hand, the President of the Republic said that Sudan has no interest in causing instability in Chad as this will reflect negatively on the Sudan.

The President said that Sudan is committed to the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement and added that the fact that the Chadian government did not send its representatives to the concerned security committee charged with border patrol impeded the implementation of the said agreement.

Workers' union at the Commissioner for Refugees in el-Shuak stage strike

(*AlAyaam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) The workers' union at the Commission for Refugees in el-Shuak, eastern Sudan, has staged a one-week strike with effect from today in protest against what they describe as disregard on the part of the UNHCR of their rights.

The union issued a statement yesterday saying the workers will not stop demanding for their rights and those of the refugees.

They also claim UNHCR has not heeded to their demands for after-service benefits and holds a negative attitude towards the more than 112,000 refugees in eastern Sudan.

CPA

Waves of refugees start voluntary repatriation from Kenya, Uganda and the CAR

(*AlAyaam/SUNA* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) The Commission for Refugees has announced that Sudanese refugees in Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic have started registering for voluntary repatriation.

Commissioner for Refugees, Mohamed Ahmed el-Aghbash, says these returns are spurred by the agreements reached between the Sudanese government and the governments of these states.

He said that the repatriation may halt for some time during the rainy season as most of the repatriation with the exception of the refugees returning from the CAR are returning by land.

El-Aghbash says that refugees are also coming in from Eritrea and Chad but these returns burden the government as there is very little assistance from the international community and the government has to bear the larger portion of the burden.

Compounding this, he adds, is the fact that such movements across the Eritrean and Chadian borders also constitute a security concern in light of the situation in those areas.

He said that no agreement has been reached for the repatriation of Sudanese refugees from Chad because this is pegged to the Abuja process but said once an agreement has been reached in Abuja then the CoR will start preparing areas of return to receive these refugees.

SPLM to present proposals to resolve Abyei problems

(*AlRai AlAam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) The NCP and the SPLM have resumed discussions on the implementation of the CPA.

The leader of the SPLM delegation to the joint committee, Tilara Deng, said that among proposals the SPLM intends to present to the Presidency of the republic are proposals on Abyei, amendments to a number of laws (including those on National Security and Intelligence, civil service and the Police Act)

Tilara said the NCP leadership office may meet with the SPLM Political Bureau during this month to consolidate trust between the two partners and discuss the progress in implementation of the CPA.

National Congress Party says it will not resort to majority vote over capital

(*AlRai AlAam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) The speaker of the Khartoum State Legislative Assembly, Mohamed el-Sheikh Medeni, says he does not think the National Congress party will resort to a majority vote to pass the draft Constitution for Khartoum State.

“If the NCP wanted to do so it would have put the issue to rest right from the second day of the debate over the constitution,” he said.

He further pointed out that the Khartoum State legislature is currently studying the report of the experts and has come up with two facts; that Khartoum is a northern Sudanese state as per the Interim Constitution and, as such, should be administered through the Islamic Laws. The second fact is that Khartoum is the national capital with non-Muslim residents as well and the constitution stipulates respect for the rights of non-Muslims.

He pointed out that the delay in the ratification of the said constitution would hamper the development process and hurrying it through will cause irreversible harm.

GoNU

Committee of those affected by the Meroe Dam warns of security lapse

(*AlAyaam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) The committee of those affected by the implementation of the Meroe Dam project have threatened to clash with the local police brought in by the Meroe Dam administration to preserve security following some recent unrest caused by rejection of the eviction policies.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, the head of the committee said they may clash with the police since efforts to resolve the problem through the state authorities have failed. He said the authorities at the dam have put them in this inevitable situation as they now feel their lives and property threatened by the police force that numbers up to about 3,000 armed with heavy weapon and after the police have refused people to travel between the villages.

The head of the committee says they have sent copies of their protest to UNMIS, leaders of political parties and the civil society. He added that they are not against the construction of the dam but have their worries about the place to which they are supposed to relocate. These concerns, he adds, emanate from the rumours that the Wadi Mugaddam area in question was a dumping site for nuclear waste in 1985.

DUP starts preparations for the return of Mohamed Osman el-Mirghani

(*AlAyaam* – 16th Apr. **Kassala**) The Democratic Unionist Party says it has started contacts with the opposition political parties and those in government to arrange for the return of DUP and NDA leader Mohamed Osman el-Mirghani.

The DUP's deputy Secretary-General said el-Mirghani's return was delayed by the delay in the return of the el-Fateh (DUP) forces that are already on their way to Kassala (in another story in the same newspaper, the said forces are said to have reached Kassala yesterday and were received a warm welcome).

He also called for commitment from the National Congress Party to the implementation of the Cairo Agreement.

Darfur/ Abuja talks/ Chad

Taha and Minnawi exchange views to transcend outstanding issues in Abuja

(*AlAyaam* – 16th Apr. **Abuja**) Vice-president Taha held talks yesterday with the SLM/A leader Minnawi focusing on the outstanding issues on security arrangements and the reintegration of SLA forces.

Sources say Minnawi then held an emergency meeting with members of the SLM negotiating team and briefed them on the issues discussed.

He described the meeting as positive.

Chad's conflict threatens Darfur aid workers

(*Irish Independent/ST* – 15th Apr. **Dublin**) An Irish charity is warning its workers will have to pull out of Darfur in Sudan just as the area faces what the UN has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The evacuation alert has been called as increasing conflict in neighbouring Chad spills over the border, endangering both refugees and aid workers.

Angela O'Neill, Concern's regional director for Sudan, told RTE radio: "The crisis in Darfur has been going on now for over three years and the insecurity there is just getting worse and therefore delivering aid and operating in the area is becoming increasingly more and more difficult."

She said heavy gunfire and mortar shelling had been heard in the area by aid workers on Thursday.

"The worry is that the rebels fighting the Chadian government will cross the border, if they are not successful, back into Darfur.

"There is a possibility of the Chadian government soldiers will come after them."

She said the resultant battle could lead to a response by Sudanese soldiers, with the region then descending into chaos.

Ms O'Neill said all aid agencies were currently on standby to evacuate its staff.

She said sustained international pressure was needed in a bid to resolve the conflict in the Horn of Africa but this pressure had stalled over the last six to eight months.

"There is a continuing precarious situation for over 2m people living in aid camps along the border."

Chad's rebels say govt using mercenaries, deny Sudan support

(*AFP/ST* – 15th Apr. **Paris**) Rebels trying to overthrow Chadian President Idriss Deby on Saturday denied receiving support from the government in neighbouring Sudan and accused him of recruiting European mercenaries and rebel fighters from Sudan's Darfur region to stay in power.

"Following the very serious accusations made against Sudan by Idriss Deby, we categorically deny any intervention by neighbouring countries," the rebels said in a statement.

"We are independent from Sudan like from all other foreign countries," the statement said, adding that their movement was "a popular uprising."

The statement was issued jointly by the rebel United Front for Change (FUC) and a dissident faction of the opposition Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad (MDJT).

Chad broke off diplomatic relations with Sudan on Friday, accusing it of arming FUC rebels who tried to storm the capital N'Djamena on Thursday. Clashes between the rebels and the armed forces killed around 400 people.

The MDJT long fought to overthrow Deby before signing a peace deal with his government in August 2005. But a dissident faction of the party still refuses to accept that peace deal and now appears to have joined forces informally with the FUC.

Deby, who is fighting for his political life after 16 years in power, has also threatened to expel some 200,000 refugees who fled to Chad from the Sudanese region of Darfur, in retaliation for the rebel offensive on Thursday.

Darfur is in the throes of a civil war pitting Janjaweed militia loyal to the Sudanese government against rebels, some of whom come from the same Zaghawa ethnic group as Chadian President Deby.

The FUC is alleged to be supporting the Janjaweed militia in Darfur.

On Saturday the FUC and MDJT faction accused Deby's regime of recruiting fighters from among the Darfur rebels.

"We have proof — we have captured several prisoners from Darfur's armed rebel movement," they said.

The two groups also accused Deby of recruiting European mercenaries to fight them, with the help of former French gendarme Paul Barril.

Barril denied the charges.

"It's totally false," he said.

He said he had "never been in the mercenary business" but was "a technician in the fight against terrorism" who advised several heads of Arab states and other countries.

Sudan, Chad to remove misunderstanding: embassy

(*Xinhua/ST* – 15th Apr. **Khartoum**) The Chadian Embassy in Sudan said on Saturday that what was happening between Chad and Sudan was only a "misunderstanding," which should be removed.

"I hope that the two countries will manage to overcome the current misunderstanding between them," Kabrous Dummy, charge d'Affaires of the Chadian embassy, told Xinhua.

"We don't expect that the Sudanese authorities will take any measure harming the interests of the two brotherly peoples," he said.

"The historical relations extended to cultural and social fields between the two sides can not be abrogated by political regimes," he said.

He said that the Chadian ambassador to Sudan was currently in the Chadian capital N'Djamena and is waiting for return to Khartoum at any time.

Chadian President Idriss Deby announced on Friday that his government had decided to break off diplomatic relations with Sudan, accusing it of supporting rebels who attempted to storm N'Djamena but were defeated by the army.

He also threatened to expel some 200,000 refugees from Sudan's restive western region of Darfur out of the Chadian territories in retaliation for the rebel offensive on Thursday.

More than 350 people, including troops, rebels and civilians, were killed and 271 rebels captured in Thursday's offensive on N'Djamena, according to a Chadian cabinet minister.

The Central African Republic on Friday announced the closure of borders with Sudan in order to block the way, by which the Chadian rebels from Sudan marched to N'Djamena.

The Sudanese government, however, denied any involvement in the fighting in eastern Chad, reiterating its commitment to the Tripoli agreement signed by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Chadian President Idris Deby during a mini African summit in the Libyan capital of Tripoli on Feb. 8.

The two countries promised in the agreement that they would not harbor rebels on their territories or conduct mutually hostile activities.

Under the mediation of the African Union, the Tripoli agreement was reached at the key time after N'Djamena declared "a state of war" with Sudan and started a general mobilization preparing for a military escalation.

"The Sudanese government remains committed to the Tripoli agreement, and it is the time for the Chadian side to prove its commitment to the agreement instead of sending signals contrary to it," the Sudanese Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The ministry said that it has summoned the Chadian diplomatic representative in Khartoum to ask him about his country's decision on cutting off diplomatic relations with Sudan.

"The Sudanese government will determine what step it will adopt after receiving an official notification on the decision from the Chadian side," the statement added.

It said that recent statements issued by regional and international organizations had affirmed that Sudan had nothing to do with the incident in Chad, which has been considered by Sudan as an internal affair.

Meanwhile, the United States asked Chad not to expel Sudanese refugees, urging N'Djamena "to uphold its responsibilities, as outlined by the United Nations, and international obligations to provide protection for these refugees as well as to provide international access to the refugees."

U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack criticized the Chadian president's decision to sever diplomatic relations with Sudan, saying that Washington was unable to confirm whether Khartoum was involved in the fighting in Chad.

Hassan Mekki, a professor of the Sudanese African University, ruled out the possibility of a further deterioration in Sudanese-Chadian relations, saying that the two countries would surpass differences between them.

He called on the Sudanese government to pacify Chad's anger and react rationally to Chad's decision in an effort to avoid a war of wording with its west neighbour.

The professor warned that an escalation between the two countries would negatively affect the situation in Sudan's troubled Darfur region, as two dozens of tribes live along the 1,600 km-long border.

Chad threatens to cut off oil pipeline

(*AP/ST* – 15th Apr. N'Djamena) Chad on Saturday threatened to cut off the flow of oil if the World Bank does not release funds frozen in a bank account in London.

The announcement, made in a statement from the government spokesman, followed a late night meeting between President Idriss Deby and his Cabinet ministers to discuss how to react following a rebel attack Thursday on the capital.

The government gave the World Bank until Tuesday to unfreeze the bank account or else it would shut down the pipeline that carries Chadian oil through Cameroon to terminals on the Atlantic Ocean.

The amount of oil Chad exports — 160,000 barrels per day — is very small by world standards, but the threat demonstrates the government's desperation for international intervention in the country. While a rebel attack Thursday on the capital was defeated, the rebels are believed to be regrouping nearby and the threat of a violent overthrow of Deby's government has not diminished.

As Africa's newest oil producer, Chad had reached a deal with the World Bank for the financing of a pipeline on condition that most of the revenues would be used to alleviate poverty. Earlier this year, Deby broke that deal so he could use the money to finance his military and the World Bank suspended US\$124 million (A102.5 million) in aid to his government.

An Exxon Mobil-led consortium exported 133 million barrels of oil from Chad between October 2003 and December 2005, according to the World Bank. Chad, which receives a 12.5 percent royalty on each barrel exported, earned US\$307 million (about A250 million), the bank said.

Hourmadji Moussa Doumgor, the communications minister and government spokesman, said that attempts to restrict how the government spends its oil revenues was a violation of Chad's sovereignty. He said government officials would enter into negotiations with the consortium so that oil revenues would no longer be deposited into Western banks, but given directly to the government.

The government presumably wants the frozen funds to finance the military's fight against the rebels. The threat to cut off the oil also puts pressure on the consortium to cooperate, since it has invested US\$4.2 billion (A3.47 billion) in the pipeline.

The government also called for a peace rally in central N'djamena on Saturday to demonstrate Deby's popularity.

Deby had earlier announced that he was severing relations with neighbouring Sudan and he threatened to expel 200,000 Sudanese refugees from his country if the international community did not do more to stop what he claimed were Sudanese efforts to destabilize his government.

Deby repeatedly has accused Sudan of hiring mercenaries to overthrow his government. Sudan has denied the accusation, and in turn has accused Chad of supporting fighters in its volatile Darfur region, where Arab militias and African rebels have fought for nearly three years.

"The international community has been totally deaf and dumb on the situation between Sudan and Chad," Deby said after an emergency Cabinet meeting Thursday. They "need to understand the situation and that enough is enough."

In a press statement read on Sudan's state-run radio Friday, the foreign affairs ministry said the Sudanese government was a good neighbour and had never interfered with Chad's internal politics.

But the Central African Republic said Friday it was closing its border with Sudan after the rebels passed through the northern part of the country while on their way from Sudan to attack N'djamena.

"We were shocked to hear that rebel groups coming from Sudan have crossed the CAR to go and attack a friendly country," Foreign Minister Jean Paul Ngoupande told The Associated Press. "The closing of our border is our way to express our dissatisfaction with Sudanese aggression."

The rebels released a statement on their Web site, again condemning Deby's refusal to negotiate with them. A key issue has been Deby's decision to change the constitution so he can run for a third term as president in elections set for May 3.

"The regime of Idriss Deby is the basis of the crisis in this part of the African continent," the rebel statement said.

Chad, an arid, landlocked country about three times the size of France, has been wracked by violence for most of its history, including more than 30 years of civil war since gaining independence from France in 1960 and various small-scale insurgencies since 1998.

The crisis in Darfur, which Sudan accuses Deby of fomenting, and internal dissension over how to spend oil revenues have weakened Deby, who has led Chad since seizing power in a coup in 1990.

Sudan has accused Chad of supporting rebels in Darfur, where Arab militias and rebels have fought for nearly three years. Some 180,000 people have died in Darfur in western Sudan over the past three years, some at the hands of Arab militias, many from disease and hunger.

While observers believe Sudan has provided at least some support to the Chadian rebels as revenge, the insurgents are led by former senior military officers who until recently served under Deby. There has been enormous dissent within Deby's clan over his decision to run for a third term and over how royalties from recently exploited oil reserves have disappeared.

Army officers first attempted to oust Deby on March 14 by trying to seize power while he was out of the country.

Chadian president says Sudan's al-Bashir "traitor"

(*AFP/ST* – 15th Apr. **N'Djamena**) Chadian President Idriss Deby on Saturday accused his Sudanese counterpart Omar al-Bashir of "genocide" in Darfur and branded him a "traitor", a day after severing diplomatic ties with Khartoum.

"I have asked all the big powers, the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union, all nations who love peace and justice to intervene militarily to save the people of Darfur who are victims of the most terrible genocide carried out by President Bashir," he told supporters in N'Djamena.

It was Deby's most vitriolic attack on al-Bashir since he accused Sudan of fomenting a coup to oust him after rebels launched a major offensive on the Chadian capital on Thursday.

He urged the international community to make Darfur, a region in western Sudan that has been wracked by ethnic conflict since 2003, a UN protectorate.

"The international community must face up to all its responsibilities to resolve the crisis in Darfur and place Darfur under UN protection," he said.

Deby told a crowd of several thousand supporters: "You have shown the international community and the traitors to the national cause that you are not ready to allow your country to be occupied by mercenaries sent by that traitor Beshir."

The Chadian leader, who is fighting for his political life after almost 16 years in power, also referred to al-Bashir in Arabic as "a donkey".

Deby had his supporters observe a minute's silence for soldiers who were killed in fighting with rebels from the United Front for Change (FUC) on Thursday.

According to the government, about 30 soldiers and 370 rebels died in clashes in the capital.

After the attack, Chad accused Sudan of backing and arming the rebels.

Central Sudan

Armed camel riders attack village in Sudan's Nuba Mountains

(*Khartoum Monitor* – 15th Apr. **Khartoum**) The Commissioner in Tolodi said the village of Warni in the Nuba Mountains in central Sudan was attacked by armed camel riders last Thursday 13 April.

The commissioner told the Khartoum Monitor that the camel riders were made up of 30 men armed with Kalashnikov rifles and GM3 machine guns, adding that the citizens clashed with and resisted the attackers, and as a result one person was killed and another wounded.

He added that the attackers had fled to Warni surrounding mountains and they were still around the area.

"The attackers wanted to cut off water from Warni area", he said, adding that a police force would head for the area from Khartoum shortly.

The commissioner also explained that his country had started implementing the security plan, which was recently announced by the government of South Kordofan State.

It is worth noting that the area of Warni had witnessed a similar attack last March, where two of its citizens were killed.

Eastern Sudan

Government bars 30 eastern Sudanese political figures from convention of the Eastern Front

(*AlAyaam* – 16th Apr. **Khartoum**) Attempts by about 30 prominent members of the Eastern Front to travel to participate in the General Convention of the eastern Front in what they call “liberated territories” have come to naught following refusal by the state authorities to allow them to travel.

They accuse the government of hampering the peace process for eastern Sudan by not allowing these politicians who have shunned violence from attending the convention.

Eastern Front and JEM prepare to launch attack on Hamesh Khoreib

(*AlSahafa* – 16th Apr. **Kassala**) Sources report that there is a JEM and Eastern Front military build-up of about 5,000 preparing an attack on Hamesh Khoreib as soon as the SPLA withdraws.

The source that preferred anonymity said these forces are gathering at Tidai and Telkuk 80 kilometres to the north-east of Kassala town but are closely being monitored by authorities.

The Commissioner for el-Gash the build-up is of little importance as the state has mobilised the people and has opened training camps for recruiting to the Popular Defence Forces

Meanwhile the office of the spokesperson of the SAF insists that the SAF will go into Hamesh Khoreib as soon as the SPLA withdraws.

The SPLA, on the other hand, says it may postpone its withdrawal from the town as the Joint Defence Board is yet to meet to finalise the issue.

Tribal leaders urge Khartoum to negotiate with Eastern Sudan rebels

(*ST* – 15th Apr. **Kassala**) Eastern Sudan traditional and tribal leaders called on the Sudanese government to engage peace negotiations with rebels group, asking Khartoum to consider their participation in the talks for peace in the region

Leaders representing 27 tribes and sub-tribes in eastern Sudan have called on their government to “use all available means” to bring peace to their region in order to create the conditions needed for economic and social development.

The delegates at a two-day workshop adopted resolutions calling for “strengthening the pillars of a peace negotiated between the central government and the armed movements.” They also asked that “the Native Administration and Civil Society organizations be engaged in pushing forward the process of peace and restructuring.” The delegates said a lasting peace was necessary before their impoverished region could develop and they called for the building of schools and health clinics and the creation of jobs.

The calls for peace came as rebels from the Beja Congress attacked government forces 40 kilometres north of Kassala on April 12. Armed conflict has been increasing in the region as the rebel groups oppose the arrival of Sudanese forces in the region as part of last year’s peace agreement with South Sudan

Ibrahim Hamid, the Wali of Kassala state, received the resolutions from the delegates and said he would “seriously consider them.”

Osman Jaffar Abdullah, director of the Kassala branch of the Sudanese Red Crescent, called the meeting a success. “It’s the first time all the tribal leaders have come together to meet in one hall,” he said. “I saw happiness on the faces of the people because of this workshop. Now they will go to their communities and they will talk and that is how things will move forward.”

The workshop was organized by the Sudanese Red Crescent with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Swedish Red Cross.

“We were very pleased to be able to create a neutral space where people could come together for discussions about peace and development,” said Mathew Varghese, Head of Delegation in Khartoum for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.