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(By Public Information Office)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

AMIS-UN transition

Sudan welcomes AU's decision on Darfur

(*Xinhua/ST* – 11th March, **Khartoum**) Sudan on Friday welcomed the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC)'s decision to extend the AU peacekeeping mission in Sudan's western region of Darfur for six months until Sept. 30 this year.

The council also agreed in principle to hand over its cash- strapped peacekeeping mission in Darfur to the United Nations, according to a joint communiqué issued at the end of the AU-PSC meeting in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Friday.

Abu Zaid al-Hassan, Sudan's Ambassador to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative in the AU, described the decision as "balanced", adding "it met most demands of Sudan."

The decision underlined the UN would not send any peacekeeping forces to Darfur without an agreement of the Sudanese government, he said in a telephone interview with Xinhua from Addis Ababa.

He added that the AU-PSC decision talked on a transition of the AU peacekeeping mission towards a UN mission in terms of principle rather than a final decision.

Official reactions to the AU PSC meeting extending the mandate

(*AlRai AlAam, AP/ST* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) The government of Sudan says the AU decision to extend the AMIS mandate until September this year will be subjected to more study.

This comes following the initial euphoria that came in the wake of the decision to extend.

Presidential Adviser Mustafa Osman Ismail disclosed that the political and security organs of the state will study the decision to see to what extent it complies to the decisions of the National Assembly which draws a red line before prospects for an international military intervention in Darfur.

Mustafa pointed out that the AU decision does not totally rule out an international intervention but gives the government six months which it things the government needs in

order to review the situation and set its priorities straight and focus on a political solution in Abuja. He said however that the National Assembly will have the final say on whether or not international forces should replace the AMIS forces.

On his part, foreign minister Lam Akol said the AU decision is victory for the government because it meets most of the demands of the Sudanese government for an extension of the AU mandate and non-deployment of international forces. He described the extension as a blow to those who thought that the AU could be controlled by proxy. He said the Sudan does not oppose the UN from coming in but after a peace agreement is reached like was the case for the south and not before that.

Taye Zerihon, the deputy U.N. representative to the AU, stood alongside Akol at a briefing for reporters and said: "It looks like a transfer will happen at the appropriate time."

He said the U.N. may need up to nine months to prepare a mission to Darfur and added he will advise U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to begin contingency planning.

Other reactions to the AMIS extension

(*AlWahda* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) Political forces in the opposition have held different views on the recent decision by the AU Peace and Security Council to extend the AMIS mandate up to September this year.

Umma Party leader Sadiq el-Mahdi says it is a wise decision and gives the parties time to take proper rational decisions. "We in the Umma Party do understand the underlying reasons for such a decision; the situation in Darfur has deteriorated very much in the last year and the numbers of IDPs and victims of the war have increased and a number of organisations have withdrawn from the area".

This, he said, is coupled with the fact that the AU has confirmed it is financially unable to provide funds for the AMIS operations or logistic support.

On national sovereignty, the Umma Party leader pointed out that national sovereignty has largely been compromised and the uproar over international intervention is baseless and misguided. He said his party will send four messages to the AU, the Security Council and the forthcoming Arab League summit meeting underlining the need to put the interests of the people of Darfur first.

The Umma leader described the threats by some Sudanese government officials that Darfur will be the burial ground for international forces should they come in and the declaration of a "Darfurian *Jihad*" marks the return of the "Talibanic" stage of this regime's existence – a stage that brought the Sudan into much suffering and ushered in internalisation of the problems of the country.

He also said that US or NATO invasion of the Sudan only exists in the minds of those who seek to bring Sudan into more disrepute.

On his part, the **leader of the Communist Party of the Sudan, Farouk Kadouda**, described the AU decision as a middle ground between the positions of the government of Sudan and the UN.

“The six months extension is a test of commitment and gives the government the chance to resolve the crisis in Darfur and gives the UN the time needed for preparing for a transition,” he says.

He further pointed out that failure to reach agreement by the parties in the Abuja talks will make victors of the proponents for a foreign military intervention in Darfur and will only prove to the world that “we Sudanese are unable to solve our own problems”.

The ball, he says, is now in the government court and government should respond to the initiatives tabled top of which is to change its representatives in the Abuja talks.

On the NDA and DUP side, **Ali Mahmoud Hassanein, the deputy leader of the NDA parliamentary bloc** said that AMIS or UN forces are two faces of the same coin and described the AMIS forces as “African in face but UN content” because they are receiving support from the UN and their point of reference is the Security Council.

He said his group is against international intervention and the only solution is finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in Darfur.

UN

Slow donor response forces WFP to cut rations for Sudanese

(*Xinhua/ST* – 11th March, **Nairobi**) The UN World Food Program (WFP) said Saturday that a critically slow donor response to appeals for its emergency operation in Sudan have forced it to cut rations of pulses, sugar and salt for up to 3.5 million people immediately, to help limited stocks last longer.

In a statement issued in Nairobi, the UN agency said while supplies of some commodities such as cereals, which form the major part of general food distribution rations, are not yet affected —complete breaks in the supply of others are now imminent.

"Ration cuts are a last resort, but we simply have no alternative," said Bradley Guerrant, WFP Sudan Deputy Country Director in the statement.

"We are cutting amounts of these three items in general food distributions so that we can keep some supplies going for longer. And we need to set aside stocks for the highest priority groups," Guerrant said. "In particular, we are earmarking remaining sugar for feeding centres across Sudan to make sure that malnourished children and pregnant and lactating mothers get this vital part of their diet," he said.

WFP said towards end of last month it had only four percent of the 746 million U.S. dollars it needed to feed more than six million people across Sudan in 2006.

Currently, it said assistance received totals only 15 percent of the target, leaving it critically short of the funds it needs to sustain the life-saving operation.

The UN agency said another 234 million dollars is needed immediately to allow WFP to ensure supplies of food aid continue in the critical months ahead.

"While the latest donation from the United States — which brings their total contribution to 114 million dollars — is extremely welcome, we are urgently appealing for more cash so that

we can continue to move food stocks into place in Sudan, in advance of the rainy season," said Guerrant.

"We are working in some of the most remote and inaccessible locations in the world in Sudan, and it can take four to five months to translate a donation into food assistance on the ground," Guerrant said.

The WFP statement follows an announcement by the refugee agency UNHCR on Friday of a 44 percent reduction in its 2006 program budget for Sudan's Darfur region citing deteriorating security that has severely limited its operations and access in Sudan's strife-torn region.

In a revised appeal cutting the amount from 33 million dollars to 18.5 million dollars, the UNHCR noted that the steady erosion of security had forced it to downsize its operations and relocate staff.

The agency said its work in the region is "extremely difficult when direct access to beneficiaries is limited" and blamed lack of security and confidence in the Sudanese government as the main obstacles for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to return to their villages.

Among those receiving food assistance from WFP and its cooperating partners in Sudan are the displaced, eking out an existence in camps across Darfur, and returnees who, in the wake of last year's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, are now trekking back home in southern Sudan and the three areas (formerly known as the transitional areas).

Often arriving in their home areas with little or nothing, these people are returning to one of the most impoverished regions in the world, said WFP.

UNHCR cuts Darfur budget on safety concerns

(*AP/ST* – 9th March, **United Nations**) The U.N. refugee agency announced it will slash its 2006 budget for Sudan's troubled Darfur region by almost half because safety concerns have severely restricted its operations.

Thursday's move comes two months after the United Nations imposed new safety restrictions on staff in Darfur, forcing UNHCR to withdraw some of its workers in the violence-wracked region, site of one of the world's worst current humanitarian crises. For 2006, UNHCR has reduced its budget for Darfur from \$33 million to \$18.5 million.

Aid groups and many international diplomats have warned that the crisis continues unabated in Sudan, where three years of violence has left some 180,000 dead - most from disease and hunger - and displaced another 2 million from their homes. Sudan's government and rebels in Darfur have made little headway in peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria.

"Armed clashes, banditry and attacks targeting civilians, including internally displaced people, continue to occur with increasing frequency," UNHCR said.

U.N. Humanitarian Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland expressed frustration with the lack of a decision, and warned that Darfur could see "massive loss of life" if an agreement isn't reached soon. He said aid workers were being forced to withdraw, leaving civilians even more vulnerable.

"We're hanging in by our fingernails and it's slipping in many areas at the moment," Egeland told a news conference. "We could see a dramatic increase in the loss of life very soon."

SPLM students condemn NC students statement on Pronk

(*ST* – 9th March, **Khartoum**) The Sudan People's Liberation Movement's Youth and Students secretariat (SPLM-YS) has issued a statement distancing itself from the statement issued by the General Union of Sudanese Students (GUSS) which warned against intervention by international troops in Darfur.

The SPLM-YS statement pointed out that the GUSS did not represent Sudanese students and that it consisted of bodies loyal to the ruling National Congress Party. It pointed to the GUSS statement in which the head of the GUSS offered a 100,000 US dollar reward for the killing of the UN secretary-general's representative to Sudan Jan Pronk.

The SPLM-YS went on to ask where the GUSS had obtained such an amount and announced its condemnation of the statement calling it an incitement to a crime that was punishable by Sudanese criminal law.

The SPLM-YS's statement further said that as one of the branches of the SPLM, they were not hostile towards the UN because it was the primary guarantor of the peace agreement and had played a big role in achieving it.

In addition it said the UN agencies of UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR and FAO were all working in different sectors in Sudan.

The SPLM-YS statement questioned what was new in the matter as UN troops had been present for over a year in Khartoum, southern and eastern Sudan, southern Blue Nile and the Nuba mountains.

Sudan arrests two journalists for incitement

(*Reuters/ST* – 9th March, **Khartoum**) Sudan arrested two journalists after they published a story which reported on an offer to pay for the assassination of a top U.N. envoy, an employee of their newspaper said on Thursday.

The independent al-Watan paper this week quoted the head of the pro-government student's union, Mohamed Abdallah Sheikh Idriss, as saying the body would pay \$100,000 for the head of U.N. envoy to Sudan Jan Pronk.

"The editor-in-chief (Sidahmed Khalifa) was arrested yesterday," said Khaled Sati, managing editor of al-Watan. He added the authorities had accused Khalifa and the journalist who wrote the article, Mustafa Abu al-Azaim, of incitement.

Al-Azaim was also detained.

A spokesman for the student's union denied Idriss had offered a ransom for Pronk's head.

The National Press Council was not immediately available for comment.

CPA

Blue Nile may join South Sudan if peace deal not implemented - official

(*Khartoum Monitor* – 9th March, **Kurmuk, Blue Nile region**) The minister of cultural and Social Affairs in Blue Nile State, Abbas Haj Hamad, has threatened that his state would join the south Sudan government and establish a Funj State in case the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which stipulates legitimate rights for popular consultation, is not properly implemented.

In an interview with Khartoum Monitor in Kurmuk — Southern Blue Nile State near Ethiopia — Hamad said if the government of National Unity (GONU) continues to delay the implementation of the CPA, the people of the Blue Nile will take appropriate action.

The minister also warned GONU not to forget the fact that if south Sudan secedes there will be a south of the new Sudan comprising Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains and Abyei, and that like the old south, it would be backed by the new state. He said the CPA is not being implemented in Blue Nile State after the elapse of one year.

He also said the SPLM would deal with the GONU through the long arm of the law in case the other party is not serious about the implementation of the CPA and GONU must not forget that there will be elections after 3 years.

Governments of Bahr-el-Ghazal and South Darfur to launch joint committee for repatriation – sources report heightened tensions in IDP camp

(*AlAyaam* – 12th March, **Nyala**) The Governor of South Darfur said that a delegation from the government of Bahr-el-Ghazal visited South Darfur recently and reached an agreement with their hosts for the formation of a joint committee to facilitate repatriation of southern Sudanese IDPs from the Billeil IDP camp east of Nyala town.

Governor el-Haj Atta-el-Mannan also disclosed that his government has promised to guarantee safety on the return route up to SPLM controlled Sufaha town and to provide some assistance to the returnees.

On the other hand, informed sources say that the security situation in the Billeil IDP camp is so tense and may soon explode. The sources said that the IDP camp is totally cut off and people can not go out of the camp. The only people going in, adds the source, are kaky-clad members of a local militia group who are also camped in the nearby fields. Thousands of IDPs who managed it, fled to Deien and Sufaha where they are living under very bad conditions.

It is worth noting that these southern Sudanese IDPs in South Darfur mainly fled from Aweil in Bahr-el-Ghazal around mid-1988 and settled in those areas until the outbreak of the Darfur crisis and number up more than 2,000.

GoNU

Khartoum State Police tightens security measures

(*AlSahafa* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) Khartoum State police has started implementing tighter security measures in the state to curb insecurity and prevent the mushrooming of squatter settlements.

Assistant Police Chief Mohamed Najeeb has called for cooperation with the citizens to help the police in the work.

Sudan security and intelligence chief is promoted

(*AlAyaam* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) President Bashir has issued a decree promoting the Chief of National Security and Intelligence to the rank of General.

The head of the public information department at National Security and Intelligence said Gen. Salah Abdallah Mohamed's promotion was well received within the ranks and shows the President's trust and confidence in the organ.

Sudanese security chief visits London - BBC

(*ST* – 11th March, **London**) A top Sudanese official suspected of involvement in mass killings in Darfur province has been on a secret visit to London, the BBC reported.

Salah Abdallah Gosh, head of Sudan's national security and intelligence service, was in London last week to get medical treatment.

Gosh is said to be the third in command in the Sudanese hierarchy dealing with Darfur.

He also had close links with Western intelligence agencies, particularly with the US Central Intelligence Agency.

In April 2005 Sudan's intelligence chief held secret meeting in Washington aimed at cementing cooperation against terrorism.

CIA and Sudanese Mukhabarat (intelligence) officials have met regularly over the last few years, but Gosh had been seeking an invitation to Washington in recognition of his government's efforts, sources told *The Los Angeles Times*. The CIA, hoping to seal the partnership, extended the invitation.

The US embassy in London declined to comment last night on whether any US officials had met Mr Gosh during his stay in London.

V-p Taha in talks in Libya over Sudan-Chad row

(*AlAyaam* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) Vice-president Taha stopped in the Libyan capital yesterday en route from a tour of Europe.

While in Tripoli the Vice-president held talks with the Libyan leader of the crisis in Sudan-Chad relations, reports Muttrif Sidiq, the Undersecretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sudan, who also described the visit as a success.

Darfur/ Abuja talks

African mediation maintains SLM's Nour in spite of latest rebels split

(*ST* – 10th March, **Abuja**) Following the latest split within the rebel Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) AbdulWahid al-Nour stream, the African Union mediation team said it will not

"interfere in the internal problems" of the rebel groups and maintain al-Nour and Minnawi as representative of the SLM in the peace talks.

The spokesperson for African Union peace mediators in Abuja, Noureddine Mezni, in a press statement said that the AU Mediation deplored the latest crisis within SLM which has come "at a time when strenuous efforts are being made to focus the minds of the Negotiators in Abuja, on their stated commitment to bring the Abuja Talks to a successful conclusion".

The AU mediation team justified its decision to go ahead in the talks with the current delegations by referring to "the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council at its 43rd meeting on 22 November 2005".

The AU Security Council "directed that the Mediation should invite the two Groups in the SLM/A led by Mr. Abdulwahid El Nour and Mr. Minni Minawi, to the 7th Round of the Talks. Until that decision of the AU Peace and Security Council is changed, the Mediation will continue to recognize and deal with the leadership of the Movements as constituted at the beginning of the 7th Round of the Talks."

Divisions among Darfur rebel groups become a source of concern for the AU mediators and the International community.

The statement said that this new crisis "will not do anything to address that concern or meet the aspirations of the people of Darfur for peace, security and stability in their homeland".

Darfur JEM rebels say 27 killed by gov't, militias

(Reuters/ST – 11th March, Abuja) A rebel group on Saturday accused Sudanese government troops and their militia allies of killing 27 people and stealing livestock in attacks on villages in the Darfur region of western Sudan.

The attacks, which took place on Friday according to the rebel group, came as diplomatic efforts intensified at the African Union (AU) and the United Nations to speed up peace talks and solve a row over a proposed U.N. presence in Darfur.

Ahmed Tugod, chief negotiator for the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) at peace talks in the Nigerian capital Abuja, gave the names of six villages in the Gereida area of South Darfur which he said were attacked by troops and Janjaweed militiamen.

"These villages have been completely destroyed. They killed 27 people, 17 are injured and six are missing including children," he said, adding that he had obtained this information by telephone from JEM members in the area.

"They took 150 heads of cattle and 300 sheep," Tugod said.

A government army spokesman in Khartoum said the army and Popular Defence Forces, the official militia, had not moved into the area.

"This is absolutely false. There is always fighting in this area between the (rebel) movements themselves," he said. "We are not even there."

Security in Darfur has deteriorated recently to the point that vast areas are now off-limits to aid workers.

Gereida was named as a contentious area in an AU communiqué on Friday, which called for the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), a larger Darfur rebel group, to withdraw from the area.

The AU on Friday extended its mission in Darfur until Sept. 30 to buy time to break an impasse over the transfer of peacekeeping duties from itself to the United Nations.

Khartoum opposes the transfer, but the AU said Sudan was prepared to accept it "after and as part of the conclusion of a peace agreement" in Abuja. The AU communiqué set a deadline of end-April for a peace deal to be struck.

The parties and the mediators at the talks appeared pessimistic on Saturday that the deadline could be met.

Sam Ibok, head of the AU mediation team, expressed "deep dismay" at the new split and said it was a distraction. He declined to say whether the end of April was a realistic target.

He said the response from the parties to "preliminary soundings" on proposed compromise solutions had not been encouraging. He expressed hope that new, more detailed proposals due in the coming week would receive a more positive response.

The JEM's Tugod accused the government of inflexibility on the key issue of power-sharing. He said Khartoum was resisting granting Darfur sufficient representation in national institutions.

He added that if these matters could be resolved, the other two areas of negotiation, wealth-sharing and security, would be easily wrapped up.

A government delegate, who did not wish to be named, said rebel disunity was the main obstacle to a deal. "The question is not whether to sign a peace deal or not. The question is, with whom are you signing it? There is chaos in the movements."

Chad sacks 70 army officers after defections

(Reuters/ST – 10th March, N'Djamena) Chad's President Idriss Deby on Friday sacked 70 army officers who have deserted over recent months, taking refuge in Sudan's violent Darfur region and joining insurgents bent on ousting him.

Deby said in a presidential decree that two generals, Sedi Aguid and Ishaq al-Diar and four colonels were among those dismissed. The two generals, who quit the army last month, were the most high-profile defectors so far.

"They will not have the right to a pension, nor to a reintegration payment nor to any sort of compensation whatsoever," the decree said.

A large group of army officers, including members of Deby's family, deserted in September. They took refuge over the border in Darfur and later joined an alliance of nine Chadian guerrilla groups, the United Front for Democratic Change (FUC), which says it has thousands of well-armed troops along the border.

The rebels attacked the Chadian border town of Adre in December, prompting Deby to accuse its eastern neighbour, Sudan, of supporting the guerrillas. N'Djamena then declared a "state of belligerence" with Khartoum.

Libya, which has good relations with both countries, hosted a summit in Tripoli last month to try to ease tensions. Both sides agreed to ban rebels from establishing bases, although the remote border area is largely unsupervised.

Chad accused Sudan on Wednesday of backing a cross-border raid by militia fighters this week, the first such attack since the Tripoli meeting. Sudan denies supporting insurgents.

Eastern Sudan

SPLM accuses government of increasing SAF presence near Hamesh Khoreib

(*AlSahafa* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) The SPLM says it will protest to the UN and inform the leadership of the Sudan Armed Forces of renewed assembling of SAF near Hamesh Khoreib.

Bior Ajang, the spokesperson for the SPLA, said that the SAF has reinforced its presence near Hamesh Khoreib by two battalions without notifying the SPLA forces inside the town.

He expressed much concern over this development and pointed out that these SAF forces are so close as to enable the SPLA troops to see them. He said this constitutes a threat and imposes pressure on the SPLA forces in the area. The SPLA, he pointed out, has to fully redeploy from there by the 15th of March with possibilities of a delay due to logistics reasons but this is not reason for the SAF build-up in the area.

On the situation in southern Sudan, the SPLA spokespersons revealed that six civilians were killed by the LRA in different places in the south. He renewed accusations of government continued support to the LRA pointing out that the LRA could not continue to survive in the south without support.

On the other hand, the Office of the Spokesperson of the SAF has denied the reports of a build-up and pointed out that it is within the confines of the region it has the right to be in as the region is not under SPLA control and they see no reason for the protest.

“This is a natural military presence in areas under our control,” adds the SAF spokesperson.

East Sudan opposition says five members detained

(*Reuters/ST* – 11th March, **Khartoum**) Five members of the main opposition group in eastern Sudan were arrested or detained, party officials said on Saturday, in a move they said hindered any chance to start long-delayed peace talks.

The east Sudan strife, overshadowed by bloodier regional conflicts in Sudan’s south and western Darfur region, has simmered for about a decade. The government last year agreed for the first time to peace talks but they have yet to begin.

Abdallah Moussa Abdallah, secretary-general of the Beja Congress Party in the main town of Port Sudan, said two leading members were arrested three days ago in the el-Gadaref region.

"Two were arrested in el-Gadaref, al-Amin al-Hajj, the president there and Hassan al-Masri, the treasurer," he told Reuters from Port Sudan. "Three were detained for investigation in Kassala," he added.

Abdallah said he did not know why authorities had arrested Hajj and Masri, and government officials were not immediately available to comment. Abdallah said the three in Kassala had been questioned on Friday and again on Saturday over travelling to the rebel-held area of Hamesh Koreb on the border with Eritrea.

"But they went there to hold consultations with commanders because they are members of the negotiating team for the talks," he said, adding this hindered progress towards convening the talks.

Beja concerned by suspension of humanitarian aid in eastern Sudan

(*ST* – 11th March, **Khartoum**) Members of the opposition Beja Congress have expressed dismay at news that the international non-governmental organization (INGO) the International Rescue Committee (IRC) are planning to suspend operations in the rebel-controlled area of eastern Sudan.

An IRC press release has stated that the organization 'has decided to suspend humanitarian aid programs in opposition-controlled region of north-eastern Sudan'.

According to the press statement this move follows 'a request by the UN Mission in Sudan to cease cross-border activities from Eritrea in light of negotiations underway with Sudanese authorities to gain access to the region from Sudan'.

The area where the IRC has been in operation for several years is one of the poorest areas of the world. The population of the area is mostly from the Beja tribe, members of which have been in opposition to Khartoum governments for over forty years, claiming severe marginalisation.

Rumours have been circulating that the IRC suspension was a result of demands from the Government of Sudan that the INGO leave the area. According to recent Reuters reports, the rebels were given formal notice from the IRC that it was to suspend activities in their area.

The same Reuters report states that journalists were shown a letter by the Eastern Front (a coalition of the Beja Congress and the Free Lions rebel groups) from the IRC saying that Khartoum had ordered the organization to suspend its humanitarian activities there.

Suliman Derar, a lobbyist for Beja rights told reporter that "This shows the criminal intentions of the regime to fight the Beja with hunger and diseases. It (this latest move) will deprive Beja of important services".

The IRC is one of only two INGOs in the area, the other, Samaritans Purse, is still in operation. They are the only international charity groups providing food aid, basic health care, vaccination, safe drinking water and education services as well as training midwives in an effort to curb high rates of deaths during childbirth in the region.

Nicola Smith, who oversees the IRC's aid programs in Sudan has said that "we are now focusing our efforts on accessing this area from Sudan rather than Eritrea and we hope to restart humanitarian services there as soon as possible". She added that in the meantime the IRC is taking steps in the area to ensure that the departure of IRC aid workers would have minimum impact on the communities they serve.

"The IRC remains committed to assisting the population in this neglected area" she said.

Other Developments

World Bank hosts meeting on aid to Sudan

(AP/ST – 9th March, Paris) The World Bank met Thursday with Sudanese leaders and international donors to review development aid amid continuing conflict between the government and rebels in Darfur.

Donors from 60 nations pledged US\$4.5 billion (A3.78 billion) in aid to Sudan over two years in April 2005 after a peace deal ended Africa's longest-running civil war, between the government in the north and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in the south.

The top U.N. envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, said at Thursday's meeting that southern Sudan remained plagued by poverty, health problems and water shortages more than a year after the peace deal — and despite \$485 million (A407 million) in aid disbursed in 2005.

"For the people themselves nothing has changed," he said.

Still, he welcomed the aid, saying it was 95 percent of the money promised for last year.

Pronk appealed donors to not make peace in Darfur a precondition to enable delivery of peace dividends to the South.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, however, said before the World Bank donor talks: "We cannot consider the (funding plan) without addressing the ongoing conflict in Darfur."

In meetings Thursday and Friday, officials from the World Bank, the United Nations, the United States and other donor countries were meeting with representatives of Sudan's north and south to discuss that aid and reconstruction and development efforts.

The group will also talk about "constraints that have held back progress in realizing the immediate goals for the program," according to the World Bank, which is hosting the meetings at its Paris offices.

In Sudan's capital, Khartoum, on Wednesday, tens of thousands of people protested plans to deploy U.N. peacekeepers in Darfur and demanded the expulsion of the top U.N. and U.S. envoys.

Southern Sudanese universities protest budget cut

(AlRai AlAam– 12th March, Khartoum) Southern Sudanese universities with campuses in Khartoum (University of Juba, University of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile University) are preparing to present a protest before the President of the Republic over a cut in funds from the Ministry of Higher Education.

A top official in one of these universities argued that these universities are still under the control of the federal government as neither the CPA state that control be handed over to the GoSS nor did the GoSS itself demand that.

He pointed out that there may be some other sinister reasons for this unjustified cut.

US Senate drafts bill on sanctions on Sudanese officials

(*AlRai AlAam* – 12th March, **Khartoum**) The US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee has endorsed a bill imposing a travel ban (to the US) and asset freeze on Sudan government officials and on rebel and militia leaders in Darfur.

The bill that awaits the congressional nod also calls for sanctions on states that supply arms to the government of Sudan and a cut in US assistance to these states.

It also bars Sudanese registered commercial vessels laden with Sudanese oil or commercial goods from reporting at any US port and sets the conditions that the sanctions only be lifted should the government reach a negotiated settlement to the problems of Darfur and implement the CPA.