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(By Public Information Office)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

AMIS-UN Transition

Kiir says UN troops may deploy to Darfur before peace agreement is reached

(*AlSahafa* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) First Vice-president Salva Kiir Mayardit says UN troops may deploy to Darfur if its mandate is clear in order to ease the burden off the AU forces that suffer lack of funding in Darfur.

Kiir who was speaking to Reuters said that UN forces may come in even before a peace agreement is reached for Darfur on condition that it has a clear mandate and does not become a party to the conflict.

“There is no such danger on UN deployment to Darfur but there is only a public misunderstanding of the issue with a belief that it cause the talks to deviate from its path”, said the V-p

He pointed out that the first thing to do would be to agree on the status of these forces because any UN force must have a clear-cut duty.

Arab meeting delegates Amru Musa to consult with Secretary-General Annan over Darfur

(*AlSahafa* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) An Arab minister participating in the Arab League summit meeting said he does not expect the summit to issue a resolution opposing the UN resolutions on a possible AMIS-UN transition but said the participants however support the Sudan government’s pleas for support to the AU effort in Darfur.

Arab League Secretary-General Amru Musa told reporters in Khartoum that the Security Council resolution should be given a careful study and must be studied from the perspective of Sudanese sovereignty and its effects on the Abuja talks.

He said he may be asked by the Arab League summit meeting to consult with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Darfur issue.

US says Sudan must not waste time over UN force

(*Reuters/ST* – 27th Mar. **Washington**) Sudan’s government must not waste any time in agreeing to a U.N. force to stabilize its western Darfur region, where the situation is daily becoming more troubling, said a senior U.S. official on Monday.

"There is no time to waste. There are people suffering and dying every day and we need to do what we can immediately to address the security situation," said Chris Padilla, chief of staff for U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick.

Padilla told Reuters the U.S. government was in almost daily contact with the authorities in Khartoum, where some officials have so far resisted a U.N. force and would prefer more funding to be given to the ailing African Union mission.

"We have repeated that there is no time to waste and that the international community stands together in saying we should move ahead with a U.N. force," said Padilla.

Last Friday, the U.N. Security Council voted to accelerate planning for a new U.N. peacekeeping force to be sent to Darfur later this year. The Bush administration had been pushing for weeks for such a move and Padilla said he was relieved a time limit had been placed on preparing options.

The resolution adopted unanimously by the 15-nation council gave Secretary-General Kofi Annan until April 24 to prepare a range of options for a U.N. operation in Darfur.

Sudan's government has said it does not want U.N. troops in Darfur until a peace agreement is reached in talks taking place in the Nigerian capital Abuja, an argument Padilla rejects.

"We need to have a sense of urgency on both tracks, both in the talks and in a peacekeeping force" said Padilla.

African troops have been trying to monitor a shaky ceasefire agreement in the region, where 2 million people have been driven from their homes by a campaign of rape, killing and looting, called genocide by Washington. Tens of thousands of people have died in three years of fighting between government-backed Arab militias and non-Arab rebels.

The United States has not as yet offered any troops for a U.N. mission in Darfur and Padilla said Washington would like any such force to be "African at its core" and to be led by a military commander from the continent.

He suggested any U.S. involvement would be in providing support for logistics, communications and training rather than actual U.S. boots on the ground.

AU official visits Darfur to assess needs, eventual UN takeover

(*ST* – 27th Mar. **el-Fasher**) An African Union delegation visited Sudan's war-torn Darfur region to inspect AU peacekeeping force and to assess needs and plans for the handover to U.N. troops at the end of the next September.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, Patrick Mazimhaka, and a delegation comprising, Corentin Kidoulaye, the Head of the Darfur Integrated Task Force (DITF), on 26 March, 2006 concluded his two-day visit to Darfur.

In el-Fasher the delegation inspected AU force. It was briefed by the command officers on the security and humanitarian situation, challenges, constraints and problems, logistics and administrative issues across the mission area, a press statement received from AMIS said.

Mazimhaka met with the Governor of North Darfur State and informed him that his visit to Darfur comes in the wake of the recent decision by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) to support in principle the transition from AMIS to a UN Operation, within the framework of the partnership between the AU and the United Nations in the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa. And that in this connection it was imperative to meet and discuss pertinent issues with all those concerned in Darfur in order to chart the way forward.

The North Darfur governor reiterated the current Sudanese stance that foreign forces were unwelcome on their territory and that to this effect only the African Union through AMIS could be trusted to bring about durable peace, security and normalcy in the troubled Darfur region.

Mazimhaka also, met the governor of South Darfur State in Nyala. He visited AU troops in the state.

Yesterday, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir has so far rejected any such transition to the United Nations. He has said the government would only consider it if a peace deal is reached with Darfur rebels at negotiations in Nigeria's capital Abuja.

The U.N. Security Council voted on Friday 24 March to speed planning for a new U.N. peacekeeping force to be sent to Sudan's western Darfur region later this year to relieve underfinanced African Union troops.

A resolution adopted unanimously by the 15-nation council gave Secretary-General Kofi Annan until April 24 to prepare "a range of options for a United Nations operation in Darfur."

But U.N. officials and council diplomats acknowledged they could not send in U.N. troops or even an assessment mission to help in the planning without the approval of the government of Sudan, and they encouraged Khartoum to cooperate in an eventual transition.

UN

Beja Congress sends memo to the UN in Kassala

(*AlAyaam* – 28th Mar. **Kassala**) The Kassala chapter of the Beja Congress has handed a memorandum to the UN offices in Kassala calling for an end to the state of emergency still in force in the area, release of political detainees and protection for civilians.

A prominent member of the Beja Congress said a group of Beja Congress activists staged a sit-in before the UN offices in Kassala and handed a memorandum to that effect to the head of office. He said that the step was taken following failure of the Beja Congress to hold a meeting with the state government.

He also said that there are a number of armed people in Kassala in military attire and roaming around with vehicles without number plates who carry out house searches and extort property from the citizens. He called upon the authorities to protect the people from such people.

CPA

Paulino forces to start to redeploy from Khartoum next week

(*AlRai AlAam* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) The spokesperson for SPLA deputy commander Paulino Matib has revealed that SSDF under Paulino Matib and currently in Khartoum will start to redeploy to Juba by next week.

He said that the first phase of the operation will see 100 of these soldiers redeploy to Juba.

He further revealed that Paulino held a meeting last week with the Chief of National Security and Intelligence. He said the meeting was on Paulino's request and focused on discussing how to put an end to the hostile media campaigns the pro-SAF and pro-SPLA factions of the SSDF have recently been embroiled in.

He said such campaigns only increase tensions between these groups.

This clarification follows recent media reports that the said meeting between Paulino and the security and intelligence chief marked the first steps to Paulino's return to the folds of the SAF – an issue denied by the faction he leads.

Sudan, Uganda and UN sign agreement on repatriation

(*AlRai AlAam* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) Sudan, Uganda and signed in Kampala yesterday an agreement on the voluntary return of Sudanese refugees.

The program is projected to cost 63 million dollars.

DUP [*Al-Fatah*] forces on their way to Kassala from Eritrea

(*AlRai AlAam* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) The Democratic Unionist Party's military wing, the Al-Fatah Forces, have started preparing for the return trip back home from Eritrea.

A prominent member of the DUP said that President of the Republic's amnesty, coordination with the SPLA and Eritrea's commitments to peace in Sudan all contributed to this decision to return home. He said the decision is also in line with the Cairo Agreement.

He said that the 650 soldiers will cross over to Kassala on 15 light and heavy trucks and various kinds of weapons.

The prominent DUP member denied reports that their withdrawal comes as a result of pressure from the Eritrean government.

GoNU

Sudan might try to create nuclear program for electricity - Al-Bashir

(*AP/ST* – 27th Mar. **Kuwait City**) The impoverished and war torn country of Sudan is considering trying to create a nuclear program to generate electrical power, its president told the state-owned Kuwait Television in an interview aired Monday.

President Omar al-Bashir said his government believes its energy resources won't cover an expected increase in needs for electrical power in the next 25 years.

"During that period, nuclear energy comes in to fill the deficit in electrical power generation," al-Bashir said in the interview conducted Sunday. He spoke from the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, where his nation is hosting the Arab League summit that starts Tuesday. He didn't explain how the country might be able to afford such a program.

Sudan has significant oil reserves - a flashpoint of a 21-year civil war that officially ended last year - but isn't a major oil producer at the moment. It could, however, attract more

foreign investment if it were able to end other conflicts that still wrack the country, including violence in Darfur.

The president said his country had contacts with "the agency" in regard to such a nuclear program. He didn't specify which agency, but presumably meant the International Agency for Atomic Energy, the U.N. nuclear watchdog based in Vienna, Austria.

Some have feared the Middle East - which Sudan borders - could suffer a regional arms race and see other countries come forward with nuclear ambitions because of Iran's controversial nuclear program.

Libya's Gadhafi, Sudan's Taha discuss Darfur peace process

(*ST* – 27th Mar. **Khartoum**) Libyan Leader Muammer Gadhafi discussed with Second Vice-President Ali Osman Taha progress of peace talks in Abuja on Darfur and means of pushing them forward to realize a speedy political solution.

Taha pointed out in a statement to the state-run SUNA that the ideas at the meeting were positive and that they felt a sincere desire from the Libyan leader to push forward the negotiations.

He added that the meeting also discussed the anticipated outcome of Khartoum meetings at the summit level and bilateral relations.

It seems that the Libyan leader anticipated his arrival to Khartoum for the Arab summit to hold talks with the Sudanese officials on Darfur Crisis.

Gadhafi, keen to act as a regional peace-broker, organised a meeting earlier this month between the second Vice-President and the leaders of two rebel groups : SLM/A Arcu Minawi and JEM Khalil Ibrahim.

SPLM condemns police crackdowns in IDP areas of Khartoum

(*AlRai AlAam* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) The SPLM regards the draft constitution for Khartoum State as a total violation of the CPA and the Interim Constitution and has threatened to go to the Council of Ministers, the States' Assembly, the National Assembly, the Constitutional Court and to the people for arbitration should the SPLM's partners in the National Congress Party stick to the current draft constitution for Khartoum State.

The head of the SPLM parliamentary bloc, Yassir Erman, described the current draft constitution for Khartoum State as a constitution drafted on 'Talibanic' principles and that it has nothing to do with the CPA and the Interim Constitution.

He pointed out that the SPLM sees the CPA as the only way forward and believes all political issues could be resolved through the implementation of the CPA.

He pointed out that the SPLM made a number of concessions and finally agreed on the 10% share in the NCP government insist on the current draft tabled before them for discussion.

Erman lashed out on the police forces for their crackdown on IDP settlements around Khartoum as they seek to wipe out the sultans' courts. He said these crackdowns were double

standards come to play as the sultans' courts of pro-NCP groups were exempted as the police forces swooped down on the other courts.

Arab Summit Meeting

At least 10 heads of state are skipping Arab League summit

(AP/ST – 27th Mar. **Khartoum**) At least 10 heads of state are skipping an Arab League summit that begins Tuesday, a blow to gathering many had hoped would tackle a series of major challenges facing the region, including Iraq and the creation of a Hamas-led Palestinian government.

In light of the no-shows, the summit was likely to be shortened to one day instead of two, Arab diplomats in Khartoum said, speaking on condition of anonymity because the decision hadn't been announced.

The absence of heavyweights such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah — as well as the king of Jordan, most likely — promises a lackluster summit in a year where many had hoped to see serious efforts at dealing with regional troubles.

The U.S. State Department urged Arab leaders to "be as supportive as possible of the new Iraqi government" by sending ambassadors and economic assistance to Baghdad.

A resolution to be approved at the summit urges Arab countries to send ambassadors to Iraq, a key demand of the Iraqi government, but the low attendance could undermine the impact of such a call.

A main reason for no-shows was the venue, Sudan. Some of the absent leaders cited security concerns, others have political differences with the Sudanese government.

The U.S. government also asked leaders friendly to it to stay away to prevent a show of support for the Sudanese government, which is under international pressure to allow U.N. peacekeepers in the war-torn region of Darfur, said several Arab diplomats from countries whose heads of state were absent.

"Rarely has an Arab summit been held with as much foginess as the Khartoum summit — assuming it will be completed despite the increasing number of no-shows," wrote Ghassan Tueni, publisher of the leading Lebanese An-Nahar daily on Monday.

The annual meeting of the 22-member body is contending with complex issues involving Iraq's future, Iran's nuclear dispute and how to deal with a Hamas-led government in the Palestinian territories.

Sudan has sought to play down the absence of major leaders and has lined its streets with posters of the leaders and signs of welcome.

"Every Arab leader has his own circumstances, and we respect the circumstances which prevent any Arab leader from attending the summit," Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was quoted as saying by the local press.

The Arab League also dismissed the absences.

"This is not a problem," said Ahmed bin Heli, assistant secretary-general of the league. He insisted those attending are mandated to take positions for their governments. "They act like their heads of state."

Sudan, aware of its image as an unstable country, seems to have made efforts to prove it can provide security for the event.

Guards at the summit venue casually waved in people who set off metal detectors, but the heads of state and ministers seemed well protected.

Leaders were taken from the airport in convoys of bullet-proof cars to a neighbourhood of villas where they are staying, surrounded by up to 7,000 Sudanese forces, including members of the elite Presidential Guards. Snipers were visible on rooftops and helicopters flew overhead.

But the absences were still notable for their number. Most years, only a handful of leaders stay home, often due to illness. In 2003, at least 11 leaders stayed away as the summit came just before the launch of the Iraq war.

Egyptian officials said Mubarak was staying away after being advised by his senior top security and intelligence aides not to attend.

Mubarak hasn't visited Sudan since the 1995 assassination attempt on his life in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which senior Sudanese officials were thought to have been behind. Relations between the two countries continue to be tense.

Saudi Arabia's Abdullah was sending Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz in his place. Abdullah hasn't attended a summit since 2003, when he had a public, televised spat with Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi, who is attending the Khartoum summit.

Jordan's King Abdullah II is also likely not to attend, said members of the Jordanian delegation, without providing an explanation.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was also staying home, apparently after being asked by political leaders to remain in Baghdad to try to keep the momentum of finalizing an agreement on forming an Iraqi government.

Others staying away included the leaders of Comoros and Somalia, Oman's Sultan Qaboos, Morocco's King Mohamed VI, Bahraini King Hamed bin Isa Al Khalifa, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who has accused Sudan of hosting Tunisian Islamic activists.

Foreign ministers drew up a set of draft resolutions to be approved by the heads of states.

The resolution on Iraq pledges that Arab countries will open embassies as soon as possible - though it gave no timeframe. Another promises that Arabs will continue funding the Palestinian Authority despite U.S. calls for a halt of financial aid to a government led by the radical Hamas group.

Southern Sudan

Uganda, Sudan extend military protocol

(*AlSahafa* – 28th Mar. **Khartoum**) A Ugandan delegation is in the country and had talks yesterday with state and military officials.

The talks focused on the extension of the military protocol signed between the two neighbours that allows the Uganda Defence Forces to pursue the Lords; Resistance Army into Sudanese territory.

The two sides agreed to extend the protocol for another two months.