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(By Public Information Office)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

UN

SRSG says AU troops to remain in Darfur for a further one year

(*AlRai AlAam, AlSahafa* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) The UN rules out possibilities that the requests for a transition of the AMIS to a UN operation will be met without the consent of the government in Khartoum.

SRSG Pronk told a meeting in Abu-Shouk camp yesterday with representatives of political parties, the local administration and the IDPs that the AU force will remain in Darfur for another one year.

These representatives urged the SRSG to pressure the government and the rebel groups in Darfur into reaching a peace deal in Darfur and called upon the international community to support the AU forces in Darfur.

The representatives however expressed their rejection to the deployment of an international force in Darfur to replace the AU forces.

According to *AlSahafa*, Pronk who is on a tour of the states of Darfur also said that donors have stopped their support to the AU for political reasons but did not elaborate. He also agreed to a proposal by the governor of South Darfur for the formation of a joint committee to carry out a security and health assessment of the situation in the area and rectify past mistakes.

US must play role in Sudan peacekeeping mission -Annan

(*AP/ST* – 10th Feb. **United Nations**) U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he will ask U.S. President George W. Bush for the United States to play a major role in a peacekeeping force in Sudan's Darfur region.

Annan told reporters Thursday that Darfur's plight is too severe for rich nations, including the United States, to simply fund the mission while third world nations contribute troops _ a practice that is largely the norm for U.N. peacekeeping missions around the world.

"It is not going to be easy for the big and powerful countries with armies to delegate it to third world countries," Annan said. "They will have to play a part if we are going to stop the carnage that we see in Darfur."

Annan said he planned to raise the issue with Bush during a White House meeting on Monday. The United States currently pays about a quarter of the U.N. peacekeeping budget, which topped US\$5 billion (A4.18 billion) in 2005, but provides a very small percentage of troops or police.

Annan said the Darfur mission will need a "completely different force." That means highly trained troops with solid logistical support, backed by air power, with the ability to move quickly.

The U.N. mission must send a message to those responsible for the violence "that we have a force that is capable to respond, a force that is everywhere and a force that will be there on time to prevent them from intimidating and killing the innocent civilians," Annan said.

Asked specifically what he would seek from Bush, Annan told reporters: "I will share with him the facts that I have shared with you, the needs that we have and the countries that I think can supply those needs, and that would include the U.S."

On Thursday, the U.N. Security Council authorized planning for the United Nations to take over peacekeeping duties in Darfur from the African Union, whose 7,000 troops have been hampered by shoddy equipment, poor training and lack of funds.

The AU troops have made a difference in the areas where they are stationed, but have been unable to bring lasting peace to Darfur, where an estimated 180,000 people have died in violence since 2003. The United States and several other nations have said genocide occurred in Sudan.

The United States will be reluctant to send its troops because of its commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has also been far more reluctant to contribute troops since 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in clashes with gunmen in 1993 during the peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

U.S. Mission spokesman Richard Grenell would not comment on whether the United States planned to contribute troops.

"The American people have provided an incredible amount of money to support the AU force and an incredible amount of money for the humanitarian response, and the American people have also been very generous to peacekeeping operations and disasters around the world," Grenell said.

U.S. officials in Washington have said the United States envisions combining the AU force in Darfur with the 7,000 U.N. troops monitoring a separate peace agreement between southern rebels and the Sudanese government.

While wealthy nations once provided the bulk of peacekeeping troops, they have done so less frequently in recent years. Instead, they fund the missions, while poor nations like

Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Nigeria provide the troops, in part because they receive much-needed cash for it.

Last month, the top U.N. envoy in Sudan, Jan Pronk, called for a U.N. peacekeeping force of up to 20,000 troops to disarm marauding militias and provide security so over 2 million refugees can return home in Darfur.

Human Rights First sent letters to Bush and Annan on Thursday urging them at their upcoming meeting to support the appointment of a prominent public figure as a U.N. envoy to provide new impetus to find a political solution to the Darfur conflict. Pronk has said he opposes a new envoy.

CPA

Implementation of JAM projects to start

(*AlAyaam* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) The government and the Donors' Fund have agreed to flag off the first phase of the JAM projects on 1st July this year. This first phase will run for three years.

The two sides underlined the need to cooperate and reach a common understanding on the objectives, activities and the requirements for implementation.

Minister of Cabinet Affairs chaired a meeting held yesterday with a team of local and World Bank experts and discussed the approved projects and the mechanisms for funding.

Government of National Unity

Presidency of the Republic to evaluate implementation of the CPA

(*AlSahafa* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) The Presidency of the Republic (President Bashir and V-ps Kiir and Taha) started closed-door talks yesterday evaluating the implementation of the CPA.

Also present in the talks were the governments of Unity, Blue Nile and South Kordofan states who briefed the president and his deputies on the implementation of the CPA in their respective states.

President, two deputies review preparations for donor conference in Paris

(*SUNA* – 11th February, **Ljubljana**) President of the Republic Bashir, First Vice-President Lt-Gen Salva Kiir Mayardit and Vice-President Ali Othman Mohammad Taha were briefed on the preparations of the joint national team for the meeting of the international donors, scheduled for 9-10 March in Paris.

Co-chairman of the joint national team Yahya Hussein said in a statement to SUNA following the meeting that the donors meeting would review progress in implementation of the Peace Agreement and the rehabilitation projects besides donors' fulfilment to their pledges made in Oslo conference last year.

Member of the team Kosta Manibi, on his part, explained to SUNA that the donors hold regular meetings every six months, pointing out that the joint national team has prepared the necessary reports in this connection.

Government rejects deployment of international forces to Darfur

(*AlSahafa* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) The government has renewed its rejection to an international intervention in Darfur under the guise of maintaining security and called for support to the AU forces in the region. He said that the recent mini-summit held in Tripoli also shared the position against an international intervention in Darfur and had blamed the AU Commissioner over notifying the UN that the AU Commission is preparing to discuss a transition of the AMIS to a UN operation.

Mustafa Osman Ismail, an advisor to the President of the Republic, said the government has not given its consent to the deployment of a UN force to Darfur.

“No decision has been taken by government on the issue and it is still under discussion”, he told reporters yesterday. He pointed out that the position is to support the AU forces in Darfur especially now that there is some progress in the Abuja talks.

“Should the parties reach an agreement in Abuja, then the obligation would be to support the AU presence there,” he adds.

Salva Kiir to head SPLM delegation to Abuja next Wednesday – vows to cooperate with Bashir and Taha

(*AlSahafa* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum, Abuja**) First Vice-president Salva Kiir told in an exclusive interview that he was keen to continue cooperating with President Bashir and Vice-president Taha on the implementation of the CPA.

Mr. Kiir denied allegations that the SPLM had abandoned its calls for a united ‘New Sudan’ and pointed out that the SPLM will continue its political activity in all parts of the country. he said he was not worried about the discordant voices within the SPLM because that only reveals that there is real democracy within the SPLM.

The V-p expects the sides to the Abuja talks to soon reach a peace deal through an SPLM participation. He commended Egypt on the role it envisages in bolstering the rehabilitation and development process in southern Sudan and disclosed of a visit he intends to undertake to Egypt.

Asked to comment on the recent statements in Washington by Rebecca Garang in which she accused the government of dragging its feet in the implementation of the CPA, Vice-president Salva Kiir said he was not aware of such a statement but added that Mrs. Garang is in Washington through arrangements of the GoSS.

Kiir also urged donors to meet their pledges made at the Donors’ Conference in Oslo.

Vice-president Salva Kiir will be travelling at the head of an SPLM delegation to Abuja to give impetus to the talks.

Hamis political bureau chief visits Sudan Sunday

(*Xinhua/ST* – 11th Feb. **Khartoum**) Khalid Mashal, political bureau chief of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamis), is to start a visit to Khartoum on Sunday after the group’s landslide election victory, the state-run SUNA reported.

Mashal, who is based in the Syrian capital Damascus, will head a Hamas delegation to Sudan and is scheduled to hold a series of talks with Sudanese officials and the political forces during the three-day visit, the report said.

Meanwhile, Gamal Mohamed Ibrahim, spokesman of the Sudanese Foreign Ministry, told a press conference held here on Saturday that Sudan would respect the results of last month's Palestinian parliamentary elections, in which Hamas scored an overwhelming victory.

"Sudan stands on the side of the Palestinian people's choice", the spokesman said.

He also noted that the Palestinian National Authority has played an important role on the path of realizing peace and safeguarding the Palestinian people's rights.

After winning the 25 January parliamentary polls, Hamas is expected to form the next Palestinian government.

The group, sworn to Israel's destruction, has been under mounting pressures to renounce violence, recognize the existence of Israel and accept previous Palestinian agreements with Israel including the internationally-backed road map peace plan.

Hamas leaders have said that the group will visit regional Arab countries to explain its position and seek support.

Hamas, listed as a terrorist group by the U.S. and the EU, is expected to form a new Palestinian cabinet later this month after the inauguration of the Palestinian Legislative Council on 16 February.

Bush meets with Sudanese leader's widow

(AFP/ST – 10th Feb. **Washington**) US President George W. Bush, under mounting pressure to play a more aggressive role in helping end violence in Sudan, met with the widow of Sudanese rebel leader John Garang.

Rebecca Garang is "here to talk about the Sudanese peace process, talk about Darfur," National Security Council spokesman Fred Jones said before the meeting.

But Jones reiterated Washington's position that it was "premature" to discuss whether the United States would take part in a UN peacekeeping force to replace the beleaguered African Union (AU) contingent in Darfur.

The meeting came three days before Bush meets with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who has served notice he wants "big and powerful countries" to play a broad, active role in building such a force.

Garang, Sudan's minister of transportation, roads, and bridges, was among 161 members of parliament appointed in line with a January peace deal that ended more than two decades of north-south civil war, which left some two million people dead and displaced twice as many from their homes.

Her husband, a former southern rebel leader, was one of the architects of the January 9 agreement which his group, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), signed with the Khartoum government.

Under the deal, John Garang was appointed first vice president and president of the south in a grand ceremony in Khartoum on July 9.

He died in a July 30 helicopter crash, after only three weeks on the job.

Ahead of Bush's meeting with Rebecca Garang, who was a guest at his State of the Union speech in late January, Human Rights Watch urged the president in a statement to give teeth to any UN force for Sudan.

Bush "should make it clear that the US will provide the necessary support for a UN mission in Darfur. And he should call on other countries to do the same," said Peter Takirambudde, the group's Africa director.

"The United States should push for the strongest possible UN mandate to disarm the Janjaweed militias and protect civilians, using deadly force if necessary," he said.

Rebecca Garang also met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and with her deputy Robert Zoellick, who had seen the Sudan minister a week ago. At that time Garang brought a basket and said she needed to fill it with US aid.

Zoellick recalled the basket and presented one of his own from Darfur, containing a single sheet of paper detailing 460 million dollars in US aid to Sudan for the 2005-2007 fiscal years, a State Department official said.

"I am pleased we are able to fill your basket for the south. But please remember this is a basket from Darfur and Darfur is still in crisis and we need your help," the official quoted Zoellick as saying.

The official, who asked not to be named, said Garang volunteered to travel to Darfur to meet with key people and discuss violence against women. He quoted her as saying she would also go to Abuja, Nigeria, to help inject new life in peace talks.

Arab League chief in Khartoum to discuss summit preparations

(KUNA/ST – 11th Feb. Cairo) Arab League secretary general Amr Musa will arrive Sunday to Sudan on a two-day visit for talks with President Omar Bashir and his top aides over preparations for the Arab League summit.

The summit is due to start in Khartoum on 28 March.

AL Assistant undersecretary for political affairs and responsible for the Summit's file, Ambassador Ahmad bin Hilli told reporters Saturday the visit was to mark the beginning of practical and serious preparations for the summit.

He said Moussa would discuss with Bashir and his foreign minister the draft agenda of the summit, due to be discussed by the Arab foreign ministers on March 4 in Cairo.

Among the issues in the draft agenda, he added, would be the Middle East peace process, Iraq, establishing an Arab court of justice, establishing an Arab council for peace and security, and clearing the Middle East region from weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Rights consultative council urges forward endorsement of human rights commission act

(AlRai AlAam – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) Ahead of the impending visit to Sudan by human rights rapporteur Sima Samar, the Human Rights Consultative Council has urged the Government of National Unity to meet its obligations towards the people of the Sudan and the international community by putting the National Commission for Human Rights Act and an end to the Darfur conflict at the top of its priorities.

The spokesperson of the Consultative Council said Samar will be here on a routine visit spanning 10 days starting from the beginning of next week and will be meeting a number of officials in the human rights domain.

Darfur/ Chad

SLM's Nour says ready to negotiate peace deal alone

(ST – 10th Feb. **Abuja**) The chairman of one of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) two factions, Abdelwahid Mohamed al-Nour has stressed the readiness by his faction to sign a just and comprehensive peace agreement with the Sudanese government.

Nour said the SLM would sign the agreement on its own without involving the other movements, pointing out to the alliance between the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and “Menni Minawi’s group”. He further said this alliance does not reflect seriousness in respect of the current peace talks.

UN envoy to Sudan Jan Pronk, and the AU’s envoy to the Sudanese peace process, Baba Gana Kingibe, said Darfur rebel SLA Minawi faction hindering peace talks and perpetrating violence in the region. Also, the rebel lack of interest in peace, and the continuing shifts of positions during the talks, all these provoked some disappointment among the mediators community.

In a press conference held today at the Sheraton Hotel in Abuja, he suggested to involve the IGAD in the AU sponsored peace talks. Also, he called up on the leaders of the others rebel factions asking them to be present in the talks to boost peace process.

Abdelwahed further demanded Khartoum to be more serious and make effective concessions to achieve peace.

Sudanese government tried to capitalise on the disenchantment of the peace mediators. The spokesperson of the Sudanese government delegation to Darfur peace talks, Amin Hassan Omar, has accused the rebel groups of being evasive and not serious about reaching a peace in Darfur.

Abdelwahed who belongs to the biggest Fur tribe, seems frustrated by the recent alliance between the two Zagawah leaders: Khalid Ibrahim of JEM and Menni Minawi.

Regarding the future of his movement, Abdelwahed said that his group will hold a comprehensive conference for all the tribes and acting forces in Darfur to transform it in a political movement in case of signing a peace with the government.

In Darfur, observers and AU force are convinced that SLM-Abdelwahed is disciplined and represents Fur, Massalite and others African ethnic groups. While JEM and SLM-Minawi faction, both represent the Zagawah ethnic group.

Government announces readiness to sign peace with AbdulWahid

(SMC – 11th Feb. **Khartoum**) Government Chief Negotiator to Abuja Dr. Majzoub Al-Khalifa predicts that the few weeks should be decisive with regards a peaceful settlement in the region.

He said the government delegation has agreed on proposals presented by international community and AU on power sharing but highlighted some reservations.

On the other hand the government has announced it is ready to sign peace with any armed faction in Darfur in clear reference to the declaration made by SLM-AbdulWahid that its movement could possibly reach a deal with the government.

SLM Commanders Prevents Dr. Khalil from Entering Mohajeriah

(SMC – 10th Feb. **Khartoum**) SLM sources loyal to Mani Arkoy disclose that a field commander has prevented JEM leader Dr. Khalil Ibrahim and his Commander in Chief Abu Bakr Hamid from entering SLM-controlled Muhajeriah.

Commander of south Darfur sector Issa Azrak said that the commanders in the field were not informed about the visit of JEM leaders to the area.

He said "SLM commanders are not bound by what they called integration agreement with JEM and SLM under the name Revolutionary Forces. He said those who signed the agreement have to come and meet to determine their stand outside the movements camps.

Adviser upbeat about prospects for Slovene president's Darfur peace plan

(*Slovene News Agency* – 11th February, **Ljubljana**) The foreign policy adviser to Slovene President Janez Drnovsek is optimistic about the prospects that representatives of the Sudanese government and three rebel groups could set the terms of a peace agreement at a meeting in Slovenia, which according to the daily Vecer could be held as early as Sunday [12 February].

Agreement could be reached on the final wording of the peace agreement that was drawn up by Drnovsek and which both sides have labelled as an acceptable basis, Ivo Vajgl told Vecer on Saturday, hopeful that the accord might actually be initialled.

According to Vajgl, a former career diplomat and foreign minister, the meeting is the result of months of coordination, agreements, the search for compromise solutions and rallying of international support. He said several representatives have confirmed their attendance, while several other confirmations are pending.

"We have assessed that this is the right moment to take this step; that way the international community and the UN would have to take greater responsibility," Vajgl explained, adding that an accord is but the first step in the implementation of the peace agreement.

Vajgl also emphasised that the responses of several leaders to Drnovsek's peace initiative (including from France's Jacques Chirac and Russia's Vladimir Putin) are more than an act of courtesy. They are full of programming points and readiness to achieve concrete measures, he said.

For Vajgl, the very fact that the pace of efforts to help Darfur has picked up so much after Drnovsek's appeal is bordering on a major achievement: a meeting of the warring sides is coming up, a peace and donor conference are being organized, and the activity of the UN and African Union has accelerated.

According to reporting by the Maribor-based daily, the meeting looks likely to take place on Sunday and perhaps continue into Monday. The sides cannot meet later next week because Drnovsek is starting a tour of Asia.

US willing to send military planners for UN Darfur mission

(AP/ST – 10th Feb. **United Nations**) The U.S. is willing to send military planners to help prepare for a United Nations peacekeeping force in Sudan's Darfur region, according to a letter sent to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan this week.

In the letter to Annan, dated Wednesday, U.S. Ambassador John Bolton wrote that the U.S. Military Staff Committee at the U.N. has offered to send military planners to aid in preparations. It said the planners were prepared to arrive before Monday, Feb. 13. There was no other offer of troops.

Annan said Thursday that when he meets with U.S. President George W. Bush on Monday he will ask for the U.S. to play a major role in a Darfur peacekeeping mission. Annan said the Darfur mission will need a "completely different force." That means highly trained troops with solid logistical support, backed by air power, with the ability to move quickly.

Bolton said in his letter that Annan's meeting Monday with Bush "would be an ideal venue for you to raise your views concerning Darfur and to outline possible solutions."

Annan said Darfur's plight is too severe for rich nations, including the United States, to simply fund the mission while third-world nations contribute troops - a practice that is largely the norm for U.N. peacekeeping missions around the world.

"It is not going to be easy for the big and powerful countries with armies to delegate it to third world countries," Annan told reporters. "They will have to play a part if we are going to stop the carnage that we see in Darfur."

Annan said he planned to raise the issue with Bush during a White House meeting Monday. The United States currently pays about a quarter of the U.N. peacekeeping budget, which topped \$5 billion in 2005, but provides a very small percentage of troops or police.

On Thursday, the U.N. Security Council authorized planning for the United Nations to take over peacekeeping duties in Darfur from the African Union, whose 7,000 troops have been hampered by shoddy equipment, poor training and lack of funds.

The African Union troops have made a difference where they are stationed, but have been unable to bring lasting peace to Darfur, where an estimated 180,000 people have died in violence since 2003. The United States and several other nations have said genocide occurred in Sudan.

The U.N. mission must send a message to those responsible for the violence "that we have a force that is capable to respond, a force that is everywhere and a force that will be there on time to prevent them from intimidating and killing the innocent civilians," Annan said.

The United States has been reluctant to contribute troops since 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in clashes with gunmen in 1993 during the peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

U.S. Mission spokesman Richard Grenell would not comment on whether the United States planned to contribute troops.

Eastern Sudan/ Sudan-Eritrea relations

Eritrea distances it self from eastern Sudan talks, seems angry

(*ST* – 9th Feb. **Asmara**) While the Eastern Sudan rebels demand the Eritrean participation in the Libyan sponsored peace talks as a sine qua none condition, Eritrea distanced it self from this talks saying it does not asked to attend these talks.

A press statement issued by the ministry of Foreign affairs said “the government of Eritrea did not ask at all to join this meaningless and futile dialogue gimmick; neither will it ask for participation in the future”. This Eritrean move came after the refusal of the Eritrean involvement in Eastern Sudan peace talks.

Kamal Obeid, the head of the government delegation for the talks said that the Sudan has “clearly and directly told the Libyan mediators that it does not wish to see an Eritrean participation in the talks”.

He pointed out that despite the recent warming up of relations between the two states; relations between them have not reached the level to allow an Eritrean mediation in Sudan’s internal issues.

Obeid disclosed that contacts between the government and the Eastern Front continue in order to bring an end to this problem.

This development indicates deterioration in the relations between the two countries after a short period of improvement in the bilateral ties.

In October 2005, Eritrea and Sudan announced an end to "more than 10 years of estrangement," and this led to a series of high-level exchanges of visits by senior officials.

But, it seems that the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) is not very enthusiast for normalization with Eritrea, contrary to the other partner in the government of national unity, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement.

Eastern Front to discuss this week the issue of negotiating peace with the government

(*AlAyaam* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) The Eastern Front holds a meeting next week in the areas under its control to discuss the issue of negotiations with the government in Tripoli.

The talks with government were due to take place in Tripoli on the 7th of January but were postponed indefinitely.

A prominent member of the Eastern Front says the meeting will take place next week with participants drawn in from the Eastern Front’s internal and external components and will discuss the negotiations with the view of coming up with a joint negotiations position.

He said the Eastern Front still insists on an Eritrean co-mediation alongside the Libyan hosts and an international presence to monitor the process.

On government's refusal to an Eritrean co-mediation, the source called upon the Sudanese government not to mix between bilateral relations with Eritrea and the negotiations with the Eastern Front and said the issues between the two parties should be resolved through peaceful means.

SPLM to field delegation to talks over the east

(*AlSahafa* – 11th Feb. **Khartoum**) SPLM Spokesperson Yassir Erman says that the SPLM will field in a delegation to the forthcoming talks with the Eastern Front in a bid to reach acceptable solutions that will consolidate the path to the realisation of a peaceful, just and democratic solution to the problems of eastern Sudan.

Erman says the SPLM delegation led by himself and Malik Agar will use its good relations with the Eastern Front and with the governments of Eritrea and Libya to end the conflict in the region.

He described the problem of eastern Sudan as one of the problems caused by political, economic and cultural marginalisation and can be resolved through a framework similar to that of the Naivasha talks with possibilities of adding and subtracting to it.

Asmara denies allegations of training tribes to support Eastern Front

(*AlSahafa* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) State minister for foreign affairs Sammani el-Sheikh has confirmed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sent its consent to its Eritrean counterpart over a proposed visit to Khartoum of an Eritrean government delegation supposed to have taken place last week.

The Eritrean foreign ministry says however that it has not received such a notification and was still waiting for confirmation of the request.

On the other hand, there are reports, denied by the Eritrean side, that Eritrea is training conscripts from the border tribes to join the Eastern Front in its struggle against the Khartoum government in order to enable the Front to negotiate from a position of strength.

A source says Eritrea is keen on pushing for a negotiated settlement of the issue of eastern Sudan.

Southern Sudan

Military plane crashes in S. Sudan, 20 killed

(*Reuters/ST* – 11th Feb. **Khartoum**) A Sudanese military plane crashed at the airport in the southern town of Aweil on Saturday killing all seven crew and 13 soldiers on board, officials said.

"Twenty people were killed — seven crew and 13 others, soldiers," said an army spokesman. He said it was an Antonov 29 plane that caught fire and exploded.

The crash took place at 9:30 a.m. (0630 GMT).

A senior southern army official said the plane crashed on landing at the airport when the front tyre of the plane burst.

"When landing the front tyre burst and they couldn't control the plane so it hit a building near the airport," said Elias Waya Nyipuocs, a senior official in the south Sudanese army.

He added the plane then caught fire. He could not confirm that the plane had exploded. Nyipuocs said it seemed the crash was an accident.

Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has few tarmac roads and relies heavily on air transport.

Old Russian planes are used for both military and commercial flights and air crashes are frequent, often involving cargo planes. At almost every airport, passengers are first greeted on landing by a burnt-out wreck of a plane.

Last year a helicopter crash killed the newly-appointed First Vice President John Garang in southern Sudan, just three weeks after he took office.

SSDF-Pibor Joins SPLM

(*Sudan Vision* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) The South Sudan Defence Forces, Pibor Sector, has announced their merger with SPLM. Leaders of the Forces sector, Brig. Ago Nur at a press conference held yesterday at the Secretariat-General of South Sudan Government said the Pibor forces have joined the SPLM with full conviction to co-work with it to realize stability and boost peace, in addition to translating on the ground the provisions of the Juba Declaration signed between the two.

According to that declaration, SSDF has agreed to merge into SPLM, under the leadership of Lt-Gen. Paulino Matib, he added. "Ma-Gen. Sultan Ismail Konye, the Commander of the Pibor sector, has opted for joining the Sudanese Armed Forces, hence that delayed merger with the SPLM, he said, pointing out to contacts made with Maj-Gen. Konye who has stuck to his position. Brig. Loro who was deputy to Konye stated that he has accepted the position of commander of the Pibor sector forces after consultations with the military personnel and civilians from the region residing in the Pibor, Juba, Malakal and Khartoum and who demanded their leadership. Noru said the number of his fighters is three thousand. He congratulated the Sudanese nation on the occasion of the passage of one year since CPA has been signed, expressing hope that the New Year will witness more achievements. On the other hand, representative of SSDF political wing, Pibor sector, Grozli Yar Krok, said in the press conference that their joining of SPLM came to boost south Sudan ranks as a step towards realization of unity in the country. Yar said they were warmly welcomed by SPLA/M assuring that they would get their full military and political rights within the framework of CPA. Commissioner of Pibor commended SSDF joining of SPLM, adding that the move would boost unity of south Sudan ranks and contributes to development.

Sudan's SSDF militia denies merger of Pibor sector with SPLA

(*ST, AlAyaam* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) South Sudan Defence Forces militia - Pibor sector has denied merger of its troops with the former rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army, the state-run SUNA reported.

The leader of the SSDF Pibor sector — Upper Nile State — Brig-Gen Agor had announced yesterday 10 January that his troops joint the SPLM.

In a press conference held by leaders of the sector at the secretariat-general of the southern Sudan government in Juba yesterday, Brig-Gen Agor said the Pibor forces had decided in full agreement to join the SPLM and work together to maintain stability and secure peace in order to implement the Juba Declaration signed between the SPLA and the SSDF.

But the Brig Gen Nilang Tegarbin, second chief of the SSDF Pibor sector said they are not concerned by this merger, it just affects the signatories of this declaration.

Last month when Maj. Gen Paulino Matip has announced 8 January that his militia will join the SPLA, Maj. Gen. Gordon Kong, denied this merger and announced its support and the integration of the SSDF troops in the Sudanese Armed Forces.

SSDF Spokesperson Mjr. Gen. Mohamed Shol said that only 3 of their officers who had newly been recruited into the SSDF had drifted to the SPLA and that the reports of SSDF-Pibor joining the SPLA are unfounded. He pointed out that these are not among the founding members of the SSDF and the CPA gives all the right to join reintegrate into either the SAF or the SPLA. He noted however that there are ongoing preparations for the SSDF to reintegrate into the SAF.

This development confirms the power straggle between the current SSDF leadership and its former chief Paulino Matip over the control of the SSDF elements. On the other hand, Matip would continue to attract SSDF elements to join him because he needs to reinforce his new position as the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA. It also indicates that Khartoum has no intention to facilitate the unification of the southern forces.

Southerners warn oil companies

(*Khartoum Monitor* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) Rejections have mounted from southern Sudanese over the ongoing unjustified exploration of its oil by foreign companies in the Upper Nile region.

This is especially so in areas of Malut and Belgoot in eastern Upper Nile where these companies started illegal expansions to their exploration activities beyond the areas specified for them.

“We are warning the oil companies to stop displacing the indigenous people,” stated commander Gathouth, commissioner for Nassir Province. He asked the companies operating in the area to cooperate with the indigenous people to avoid an inevitable clash.

Other developments

Uganda outraged by Turabi’s defence of Kony

(*New Vision/ST* – 12th Feb. **Kampala**) The Uganda embassy in the Sudan has described as outrageous Hassan Al Turabi’s defence of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels of Joseph Kony, the Ugandan *New Vision* reported.

Turabi a former Speaker of the Sudanese Assembly at the time when Sudan supported the LRA between 1996 and 1999, said in an interview with the UK’s *The Telegraph* newspaper recently that Kony does not kill or abduct children.

The embassy, in a recent press statement, strongly condemned Turabi's utterances saying it was a futile and shameless attempt by Turabi to whitewash the horrible blood-tinted image of the LRA.

Uganda backed the rebels Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), so Khartoum retaliated by arming the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a fanatical cult ravaging northern Uganda. It used Sudan's weapons to abduct at least 20,000 children.

Asked by the Telegraph on its edition of 30 January whether he had approved of arming them, Turabi said: "It's natural. In all wars people do the same. If there's a state of war between you and the other side, then you arm the other side's opposition don't you?"

Turabi acquitted the LRA of murdering child captives. "They don't kill them by the way, they don't murder," he said.

Probe team may delay its travel to Kampala

(*AlAyaam/SMC* – 12th Feb. **Khartoum**) Members of the team probing the causes of the helicopter crash that killed late Dr. Garang have agreed there may be a need for them to delay their travel to Kampala.

A source says the delay is due to the ongoing campaigns for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections Uganda is currently going through.

The team may probably travel after the 24th of this month to complete its work.

5 die of suspected meningitis in six Sudanese states

(*IRIN/ST* – 9th Feb. **Khartoum**) More than 100 cases of suspected meningitis, including 15 fatalities, have been recorded in six Sudanese states since early January, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) has reported.

The agency said at least 136 cases had been reported in the states of Khartoum, Blue Nile, Kassala, Sennar, West Darfur and Gederef.

"WHO is supporting the enhancement of surveillance systems for meningococcal diseases, and these have been put into place throughout Sudan - particularly in Darfur states - in order to rapidly detect and identify any evolving outbreak," said Emma Fitzpatrick, the agency's public information officer, on Wednesday.

The agency has been using surveillance systems to monitor the transmission of meningitis in Sudan since the latter part of 2005. It has also been collecting data in order to prevent the disease from spreading during the high-risk season, between November and June.

According to WHO records, the disease infected 3,703 people in 14 Sudanese states in 2005, of whom 124 died. Sudan is considered part of the "African meningitis belt", a group of countries particularly vulnerable to meningitis during the high-risk season.

The Sudanese health ministry has established a national task force in collaboration with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), WHO and nongovernmental organisations to stem the spread of the disease.

Meningitis is an infection of the thin lining that surrounds the brain and the spinal cord. The bacteria are transmitted through respiratory secretions. Symptoms include a stiff neck, high fever, sensitivity to light, confusion, headaches and vomiting.

Meanwhile, UNICEF has reported that an outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea in the southern Sudanese town of Yei has grown, with at least 22 fatalities, including three children, recorded so far.

"So far, more than 1,000 cases have been recorded in Yei alone," said Ben Parker, communication officer for UNICEF southern Sudan. "There were at least two deaths on Wednesday, 8 February - one child and one adult."

UNICEF has confirmed that the disease has spread beyond Yei into neighbouring towns and villages.

"Access to the area around Yei is complicated by a long-running security threat posed by the Ugandan rebel movement, the Lord's Resistance Army, which operates in the area," the agency noted.

Medical and water and sanitation stocks are being mobilised as part of a coordinated response by UN agencies and NGOs led by the southern Sudanese government. UNICEF said the exact nature of the outbreak was under investigation, and samples had been collected and would be tested in laboratories in Kenya.

"We are also involved - with WHO, Oxfam and others - in investigating and responding to another outbreak of diarrhoea in Agangrial, Cuiebet County in Lakes state," Parker said.

"Initial reports indicate over 70 cases of acute diarrhoea there," he added. "We have already sent treatment to the area and are investigating the situation to see how best to respond."

Statement by Hussein Khogali (Editor in Chief of *Alwan* daily)

Sourced from Sudaneseonline.com, the article writes against what the writer sees as the plots being designed with the US at the lead for an international intervention in Darfur with the aim of installing SRSG Jan Pronk, as the new High Commissioner for Sudan with his seat at the Republican Palace.

These plots, he writes, are designed to bring Darfur and its environs from the far south to the far north under the SRSG's control.

He laments what he describes as the fact that such an intervention will always find support from within elements of the community who merely seek to forward their own agendas.