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(By Public Information Office)

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UN

UN troops in South Sudan engage attackers, kill 3

(Reuters/ST – 22nd Mar. **Khartoum**) An attack on a U.N. site in south Sudan, most likely by Ugandan rebels, pushed peacekeepers into their first deadly exchange of fire, a U.N. official said on Wednesday.

Three attackers were killed and two U.N. soldiers were wounded, he said.

A more than 10,000-strong U.N. force is being deployed to lawless southern Sudan to monitor the implementation of a peace deal signed last year to end Africa's longest civil war.

But the Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has sought refuge in neighboring lawless southern Sudan for years, has increased attacks on civilians in recent weeks as their supply lines have been cut off by the cessation of hostilities in the south.

The attack on a U.N. building in Yambio, near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on March 19 injured two Bangladeshi U.N. troops and three of the attackers were killed, said new U.N. force commander Jasbir Singh Lidder.

"Two of our soldiers got wounded, three attackers went in...from their features we have reason to believe that these were from the LRA," Lidder said.

The International Criminal Court issued its first arrest warrants for five LRA commanders last year. The group, which had large bases in the wild south Sudan region, then broke up into small groups and moved west, terrorizing civilians on their way.

The attack is the latest in a spiral of violence in southern Sudan, where a bitter north-south civil war claimed two million lives, mostly from famine and disease.

Earlier this month, a government-allied militia ambushed former southern rebel troops in the central oil region of Abyei, killing around 12 and injuring more than 20 with many still missing.

Lidder said the government was refusing to allow the United Nations to be involved in an investigation into the attack for reasons he said he could not understand.

"I feel this is a ceasefire violation and the U.N. has to be a party to the investigation," he told reporters in Khartoum. "Then only the investigation will be credible, acceptable, transparent."

The former southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) agree the U.N. should lead the investigation into the attack, which was the first fatal clash between the former foes since the deal was signed in January 2005.

Sudan opposes UN's participation in S. Sudan ambush

(*ST* – 22nd Mar. **Khartoum**) Sudanese government opposed the participation of the UN force in a probe on the alleged ambush on a military convoy belonging to the Southern Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) in Abyei region over two weeks ago.

The joint military committee today held an emergency meeting in Khartoum to discuss the alleged ambush.

During a press conference today, the commander of the UN forces in Sudan and chairman of the military committee, Lt-Gen Jasper Singh Lidder, said the meeting centred around setting up a probe committee into the incident.

He said that the decision to set up the committee had not yet been made because of differences in points of view regarding the UN's participation in investigations.

"The armed forces' representative has rejected the UN's participation in the probe committee saying investigations into the Abyei incident was a pure duty of the joint defence committee, which includes the government and the SPLA", he said.

The joint military committee includes the Sudanese armed forces, the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the UN.

"Our view is that it is necessary for the UN to participate in the investigations so it may ensure fairness. The peace agreement says the UN should intervene in such cases", Lidder added.

Lidder said the deployment of the armed forces and the SPLA was progressing slowly. He said the SPLA had not yet withdrawn from eastern Sudan because of obstacles.

Lidder said the armed forces had promised to help the SPLA move its forces from the east.

SRSB Pronk says western Sudanese rebels have forgotten the cause for which they took up arms

(*AlSahafa* – 23rd Mar. **Khartoum**) Speaking to *AlJazeera*, SRSB Pronk said the refusal by the government of Sudan to the deployment of international forces to Darfur is not an issue of principle.

He pointed out that the government had earlier accepted the deployment of UN forces in Darfur and of thousands of AU forces in the Darfur region. He pointed out however that the deployment of UN forces to Darfur will only take place with the consent of the government of Sudan.

He added that such deployment was necessary to protect civilians who have lost trust in Sudanese authorities involved in evicting them from their villages and these people need the presence of international forces to assure them it will never happen again. He said such an international force will only compliment the African troops with some coming in from Asia and the Middle East.

Pronk further said that the armed groups of Darfur do not represent all the people of Darfur and that their divisions have made the talks more difficult.

He accused the rebels of forgetting the cause for which they took up arms and said they do not feel the suffering of the people of Darfur.

The SRSG urged the Sudanese government to rearrange its house internally and to convince the international community it was serious in its efforts to make a difference on the ground.

Germany approves peacekeeping troops to Sudan

(*AP/ST* – 22nd Mar. **Berlin**) The German government on Wednesday approved the extension of the involvement of German troops in the U.N. peacekeeping mission in southern Sudan, a spokesman said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's Cabinet approved the extension of the German involvement for six months, spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm said. Parliament must also approve the step.

Germany has 28 soldiers supporting the mission, whose U.N. mandate runs out March 24. The U.N. Security Council is working on a resolution to extend it, Wilhelm said.

The mission to help enforce a peace deal between the government and rebels in southern Sudan. It is separate from the African Union mission to restore peace in a separate conflict in Sudan's western Darfur province.

GoNU

Government reserved over EHCA

(*AlRai AIAam* – 23rd Mar. **Abuja**) The government delegation to the talks in Abuja has described the Enhanced Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement tabled by the mediators last week as violating all past agreements and has requested the mediators to review it.

A member of the government team in the security arrangements committee said that the government's reservations start right from the title because the ceasefire agreement was indeed enhanced as per the last protocol signed in Abuja.

He said they had expected the paper to talk of a permanent ceasefire but were disappointed.

He also pointed out that the paper gives the AU more powers than those in its mandate and gives the rebel movements more leeway in protecting the IDP camps.

CPA

SPLM quits constitution committee

(*Khartoum Monitor* – 23rd Mar. **Khartoum**) SPLM representatives at the Khartoum State Legislative Assembly have declared their withdrawal from the committee drafting the constitution of the National Capital.

Paul Deng who heads the SPLM parliamentary bloc in the local legislature said that the SPLM is convinced that the draft tabled for discussion is not valid as a basis for discussion because it contains clauses identical to those of the 1998 constitution.

He said that the SPLM bloc then presented a memo to the Speaker requesting a withdrawal of the draft but this was rejected on the grounds it was unconstitutional.

He said the SPLM has therefore decided to boycott the meetings for twenty four hours.

Darfur/ Abuja talks/Chad

NMRD's Djibril killed in fighting in West Darfur

(*AlAyaam* – 23rd Mar. **Khartoum**) The commander of the National Movement for Reform and Development, Colonel Djibril AbdelKareem, has been killed in clashes with JEM forces in Abou-Surouj, sources say.

A source who preferred not to be named said that arrangements are in place to nominate a successor to the slain leader and that the NMRD will soon issue a statement on the issue.

Chadian capital deserted after shooting near presidential palace

(*IRIN/ST* – 22nd Mar. **N'Djamena**) Schools, businesses and offices were deserted in the Chadian capital, N'djamena, Wednesday after shooting near the presidential palace sent people fleeing.

Gunfire heard between 10.30 a.m. and 11 a.m. on Wednesday near the presidential palace prompted people to flee workplaces and pull their children from schools, one Chadian said from home after quitting his office.

"The shooting caused panic. Everyone thought it was a coup," he said.

But the government swiftly put out a statement acknowledging only a minor incident over "a misunderstanding related to salaries" and said that the entire country "is under the control of the government security and armed forces."

The statement said all has returned to calm, "contrary to tendentious and alarmist rumours spreading about the trouble seen this morning in the capital." The government appealed to citizens to stay calm and return to their normal activities.

The events come amid heavy anxiety in Chad, where on Monday government forces attacked a rebel post in the east and days earlier the government announced it thwarted a coup plot against President Idriss Deby.

Deby is currently in eastern Chad, not far from the site where the government went after rebels this week.

"The incident of this morning has nothing to do with the national army's offensive in eastern Chad," the statement said.

Deby is set to run in presidential elections scheduled for 3 May, but a swelling rebel movement has vowed to put him down by means other than the ballot box.

The N'djamena resident said tensions are mounting ahead of the crunch poll, "The closer we come to the date, the higher the tension."

Southern Sudan/GoSS

GoSS insists on granting concessions to White Nile petroleum

(*AlAyaam/Agencies* – 23rd Mar. **Khartoum**) The Government of South Sudan has confirmed commitments to grant concessions to the disputed Block BA to the White Nile Petroleum Company.

According to Kenyan newspapers, studies are now being carried out in preparation for drilling in the Adak area.

A delegation of investors recently visiting southern Sudan were assured by GoSS Vice-president Dr. Riek Machar that the dispute over the said block has been resolved in favour of White Nile Petroleum.

Other Developments

MONUC captures LRA commander

(*Khartoum Monitor* – 23rd Mar. **Khartoum**) The UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC and the national army there captured a senior LRA rebel commander in Garamba on Monday.

Cpt. Bosco Atubo's capture in the north-eastern Congolese town of Aba is the first tangible confirmation of the rebel group's presence in the DRC.

The Congolese army handed over Atubo to MONUC who in turn handed him over to the Uganda government on Monday. Of the LRA rebels now in the DRC, Atubo is the second officer to be captured. Second Lieutenant Richard Odong was captured early this month on the Yei-Juba road.

Odong said they do not carry guns or wear uniforms in the DRC but move freely in Aba and Faradje in the DRC posing as Sudanese refugees.

The head of the UNHCR in Yei, Ahmed Warsame, said the LRA presence in Congo has disturbed villages and camps where the Sudanese refugees are.

Manaseer leaders say governor is seeking to politicise their plight over the Meroe Dam

(*AlAyaam* – 23rd Mar. **Khartoum**) The group of people affected by the implementation of the Meroe Dam project in northern Sudan has accused the Government of River Nile State of trying to politicise the issue.

They say the governor's attempts to form a committee to negotiate instead of recognizing the democratically elected committee from their side is an attempt to sow dissent amongst the people.

The leader of the group says they have no political agenda.

Asked on why they brought the issue to the attention of the United Nations Mission in Sudan, the leader said, "we lack justice from the state after all avenues [for redress] were closed before us".

He described the situation they face as an issue that falls within the UNMIS mandate in light of the rights violations they are subjected to.

Advocacy group calls to suspend Meroe Dam construction

(*ST* – 23rd Mar. **London**) An advocacy group called to suspend the construction of Meroe Dam in northern Sudan urging to address negative environmental impact of this project.

In a report published today, the U.S.-based International Rivers Network (IRN) calls on the companies that are developing the project - China's CCMD Consortium, Alstom, Lahmeyer International and ABB - to suspend project construction until the environmental impacts have been adequately addressed.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Meroe Dam in Sudan, the largest hydropower project currently under construction in Africa, is of poor quality and does not address many of the project's potential impacts on the environment.

These are the main findings of an independent review of the EIA which was just published by EAWAG, the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology.

The main conclusions of the EAWAG review are: poor quality EIA, the strong fluctuations will erode the river banks, making it difficult for farmers to collect water and fish in the river and reservoir, sedimentation will seriously diminish the capacity of the project to generate electricity, the dam will block fish migration.

Regarding water quality and health "the pollution and the decomposition of organic matter may create public health hazards for people drinking water or eating fish from the reservoir" the report said.

Finally on the climate change: the Meroe Project will emit roughly the same amount of greenhouse gases as a natural gas project generating the same amount of electricity.

International Rivers Network (IRN) received a copy of the confidential EIA in 2005, and encouraged EAWAG to conduct the independent review.

Peter Bosshard, Policy Director of International Rivers Network, says: "The Meroe Dam will have serious environmental impacts on the Nile Valley, the lifeline for Northern Sudan. The project violates Sudan's Environmental Protection Act and all internationally accepted environmental standards.

The Meroe Dam could not be built in most other countries, and is a test case for the commitment of leading hydropower companies to the minimal standards of environmental stewardship. The companies that are developing the project should suspend construction until the serious environmental impacts have been adequately addressed."

The Meroe Dam on the Nile is the largest hydropower project currently under construction in Africa. Once completed in 2008/09, the dam's reservoir will be 200 kilometres long.

The dam will produce some 1250 megawatts of electricity and eight transmission lines with a combined length of 1760 kilometres (1100 miles) will connect it to the national grid via a station in Meroe.

The project, located about 350 kilometres north of the capital, Khartoum, already had displaced 50,000 people from fertile land along the Nile to the Nubian Desert where the land is barren with little groundwater supply.

The \$1.5 billion Meroe Dam, designed by Lahmeyer International of Germany and built by CCMD of China, is to produce 1,250 megawatts of electricity and provide water for the irrigation of the potentially very fertile Dongola reach of the Nile valley.

The Chinese CCMD joint venture, made up of the China International Water & Electric Corporation and Sinohydro Corporation (formerly China National Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering Corp.), has beaten world-renowned construction contractors to win the bid.

Arab financial institutions, including the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, the Saudi Fund for Development, and The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, are providing 700 million dollars in project financing. More than 300 million dollars is coming from The Export-Import Bank of China, which is backed by several Western commercial banks. Sudan's government is covering the remaining 500 million dollars.

On the net:

The review of the Merowe Dam EIA is available from IRN, and will be accessible from www.eawag.ch Nature is covering the review of the Merowe EIA in its March 23 issue. See www.nature.com/journal/v440/n7083/index.html

For more background information about the Merowe Dam, see www.irn.org/programs/merowe/ (IRN) and www.merowedam.com/en/index.php (project authority).

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