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Polling into Day III

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Highlights

Polling into Day III:

Sudan polling extended by two days amid chaos, 'mistakes'

AFP Khartoum, 12/04/10 – The National Elections Commission (NEC) said on Monday it was extending voting for two days after logistical problems marred the beginning of the country's first competitive elections in 24 years.

"The number of voting days has been extended by two further days in all of Sudan" from three days to five, NEC Spokesperson Salah Habib told **AFP**.

Earlier top election monitor Jimmy Carter said in the south Sudan capital Juba there was "not much doubt" polling would be extended after a chaotic start on Sunday prompted cries of foul play and forced officials to admit "mistakes."

"There were some serious problems with the election process in some voting places where lists have been very difficult to find your names, where voters have difficulty finding their names," Carter told reporters.

"In some cases, wrong ballots were sent to other places in southern Sudan," the former US president said after visiting about 20 polling stations and meeting south Sudan leader Salva Kiir.

Monday's second day of polling appeared to proceed generally smoothly.

Queues - one for men, one for women - formed in stifling heat at voting stations in central Khartoum even before polling opened.

On Sunday both the queues and tempers were short as electoral officials battled with logistical problems, inadequate or incorrect voting material and irate voters who could not find their names on the lists.

Officials said much of Sudan was calm on day two, although some problems were reported in a few areas.

An AFP correspondent said some outlying districts of Juba were still awaiting voting material on Monday, despite assurances they were on the way.

Party officials, meanwhile, said that while voting had finally begun in some villages in the eastern area of Kassala, the locations of some polling stations were changed without notice.

Several sources said tension was mounting in the state of Bahr-el-Ghazal in the south where an independent candidate's popularity appeared to threaten the seat of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) candidate.

Police on Monday said there had been no major incidents linked to the poll, however.

The NEC on Sunday acknowledged there had been "mistakes" in distributing ballot papers in some areas.

Asked on Monday whether the election results would be legitimate, Carter replied: "It depends on whether or not the mistakes are corrected."

'No rush' to vote in Sudan after polling extended

AFP Khartoum, 13/04/10 – KHARTOUM — Sudanese trickled into polling stations on Tuesday to vote in the country's first competitive elections in 24 years, after polling was extended by two days due to a chaotic start.

"There are few people this morning. There is no rush because people have two more days to vote," said Fawzia Ahmed Mirghani from a polling station in Khartoum.

There were no queues as just a handful of people went into the polling station in a local school to cast their ballots in the landmark election where Sudanese are asked to choose a president, as well as local and legislative representatives.

"There are 1,020 people registered voters in this office. In two days, about 450 people have voted," said Yassir Abdallah, who oversees registration.

"The pressure is off now because of the extension. People don't have to rush in, they can take their time," said Ghada Abdelbaset, one of the staff on hand.

Carter: 60% voter turnout at the polls

Former US President Jimmy Carter told reporters at Juba Airport yesterday that voter turnout has reached 60% despite the delay in the opening of several polling stations, **Sudan Vision** reports. He noted that the challenges are big but the situation is stable and the process is proceeding smoothly based from reports from observers in the different states.

He added that the problems on the first day of polling were not that serious and were resolved. Carter noted that these problems were expected in a country that has not seen multiparty polls for some 24 years.

Political parties sigh in relief over extension of polling days

The decision by the NEC to extend polling days by two more days has been received by widespread relief, especially so among voters and political forces in Nyala, reports **Al-Raed**. The South Darfur capital has reportedly seen a large voter turnout as polling went into its second day with reports of fist-fights between party agents and candidates in some constituencies.

Al-Sahafa reports however that some polling stations in South Darfur remained closed for business for the second day yesterday because ballot cards had not yet arrived. Voters reportedly continued to gather at the stations as they waited for the ballot cards.

Network of local elections monitors calls for a re-run at some polling stations

The network of local elections monitors has noticed that some ballot cards especially for the legislative polls are missing from some constituencies in Khartoum State, reports **Al-Sahafa**. Tarig Mubarak, the Spokesperson for the group, told a press conference yesterday that the administrative and technical mistakes reported in the second day of voting would not affect the process in other parts of the country.

Sudan opposition accuses US of backing "flawed" poll

AP Khartoum, 12/04/10 – Sudan's opposition parties have accused the United States of backing the country's elections despite the deep flaws favouring the government.

The US is one of the main sponsors of the peace deal between the north and south and has been heavily involved with the two partners to ensure the elections and the subsequent referendum, which the south wants to use to gain independence, take place.

A group of opposition parties who boycotted the voting have accused the United States of backing the "flawed" elections, in exchange for the central government allowing the referendum - and the south's eventual secession - to happen.

Mariam Sadiq, a senior member of the Umma party, said there is a deal to separate the north from the south by ensuring that Al-Bashir wins re-election.

Al-Bashir's victory "is meant to separate the south by electing an agreed upon political figure," Sadiq said.

Farouq Abu Issa, a spokesman for the opposition groups, told a press conference in Khartoum that Washington is "seeking to manage the elections in Sudan the way they managed them in Iraq."

Speaking to reporters in Washington, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said he would not comment on the elections until later in the week, but applauded them as part of the implementation of the peace agreement.

Polls boycott has breathed new life to the Juba Alliance - Arman

The differences within the Juba Alliance of opposition parties over participation at the elections would not affect coordination between the parties, party representatives noted. **Al-Sahafa** reports that SPLM Deputy Secretary-General Yassir Arman told a joint press conference in Khartoum with Umma Party Reform and Renewal Party's Mubarak Al-Fadhil yesterday that the opposition parties are coordinating efforts to emerge with a view that would "serve the interests of the Sudanese public".

He pointed out that the polls boycott by some opposition parties has given the opposition parties a "breathe of life". Arman pointed out that the opposition parties had the option to either boycott the polls or come out in popular uprising should they confirm foul play by the NCP.

In a related story, **Sudantribune.com** (12/04/10) reported that SPLM Deputy Secretary-General Yassir Arman has denounced the poor conditions of the general elections in Sudan saying his boycott served to maintain social peace in the country.

"What we are witnessing today bypassed the worst expectations on the running of the electoral process in the country," Yassir Arman told **Sudan Tribune** today. He added that "electoral fraud" practiced by the NCP is now quiet clear, leaving no room for doubt

Arman said if he participated in the presidential race there would be clashes now between the security forces massed in Khartoum streets and the angry crowd.

"The boycott has served to main social peace," he emphasized. He added the security troops mobilized in the capital are more in number than the voters.

In similar remarks the head of opposition National Consensus Forces, Farouk Abu Eissa, on Monday echoed Arman statements saying if "we were participating in this election we would reject the security measures as result of our rejection of these violations," he said, adding the withdrawal has spared violence in the country.

Sudanese police said they have deployed 100,000 elements to secure the electoral process all over the country. Some twenty thousand are in Khartoum. Also the NCP figures and media organs warned that any attempt to protest or disturb the elections will be severely repressed.

Yassir Arman also said he fears that the NCP chairman now would work to derail the 2011 referendum.

Arman also regretted the position of the former US President Jimmy Carter who showed his support to the elections despite the irregularities and delays that a report of his centre had spotted since last March.

"It is unfortunate that there are major figures, such as President Carter, contributing to cover these scandalous fraud and chaos of the National Election Commission," he said.

The Sudanese opposition officials in press conference held Monday also slammed the support of US President special envoy Scott Gration and the former President Carter to the electoral process despite the irregularities. They accused them of working to divide the country.

Carter Centre in a report released on March 17 had warned that the poor preparation could impact negatively the process and suggested to delay briefly the electoral process. The opposition forces had made similar objections and asked to delay it to November.

Arman further said that the outcome of these elections would complicate the resolution of Darfur conflict "because it will bring a group of unwelcome people who contributed in raising the fire of sedition in Darfur," he said.

Asked about what their post-elections plans Arman, who also heads the SPLM northern Sudan sector, said they are consulting with the opposition forces to adopt a joint position.

Political Parties threaten polls boycott if NEC fails to address “irregularities”

The National Consensus group of political parties participating at the polls has threatened to boycott the polls unless the NEC halts the polling process in all parts of the country, fine-tunes its performance and resolves the mistakes in the process so far, *Al-Sahafa* reports. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Popular Congress Party (PCP), the Sudanese Alliance party and the Sudan Congress Parties sent a memorandum to the NEC yesterday citing “irregularities and major fraud in the polling process”. A member of the group pointed out that the two-day extension of polling days is not acceptable because these irregularities still continue.

The National Consensus Group says it will make a decision on whether or not to continue participation at the polls after they receive a response to their petition from the NEC. The NEC, they said, has promised to respond to their petition later today.

Sudan vote errors hit southern turnout - officials

Reuters Khartoum/ Juba, 13/-4/10 - South Sudanese officials said on Tuesday poor logistics were preventing hundreds of thousands of southerners from voting in their first election in 24 years, with some early turnout figures below 10 percent.

"The elections so far have been a slow process with many pockets of confusion and polling stations facing major obstacles in logistics," Anne Itto, a senior member of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), told reporters.

Itto said many people in the underdeveloped south were turning out to vote only to find their names missing from voter lists.

"People are too impatient to walk to seven different locations and not get their names ... In (one area of) Torit town for example, the total number of registered voters was 1,323 but the number of people who voted (on the first day) was 29, only two percent."

Itto listed six other areas where she said the first day's turnout was between three and 10 percent.

Southern election officials and monitors said early voting had been hit by missing ballot boxes, poorly trained staff and a lack of information on the location of voting centres.

"When people don't get their names, we have to calm them and then send them to look in other places, but they go the wrong way and then come back again for more directions," said Margaret Licho, a polling station observer in Juba.

The National Congress Party (NCP) acknowledged there was low turnout in some regions, particularly in the south, but said participation in Khartoum and other areas was encouraging.

"I think that some areas in the south the turnout may be a bit weaker ... with the logistics problems and transport problems and the high illiteracy rate," senior NCP official Ibrahim Ghandour told *Reuters*.

"But overall, the voting process is going on very well. There is a very peaceful atmosphere and a considerable rush from the voters in some areas."

He suggested the problem in the south was that most southerners had never taken part in an election before.

Khartoum, by contrast, has seen a turnout of 450,000 voters, or 25 per cent of the registered electorate, on the first day, he said.

South Sudan analyst Maggie Fick from the US-based Enough Project said that, in at least some polling stations, fewer people came on the second day, Monday.

"Perhaps it was a word of mouth thing, people were telling each other that it's hard to find your name," she said.

Opposition will continue to call for democratic reform – SPLM's Amum

SPLM Secretary-General Pagan Amum has rebuffed reports of ongoing consultations with the NCP over possibilities of a political deal to transcend the shadow cast by a boycott of the polls by some major parties, reports *Al-Ayyam*. He pointed out that with the elections a fait accompli opposition forces in the north will keep in calling for democratic reform while the people of southern Sudan will work towards exercising their right to self-determination.

Amum said that the NEC has proved it is not capable of organising the polls.

Bona Malwal withdraws candidacy citing intimidation

United Democratic Forum Chairman Bona Malwal has announced he is suspending his participation in the race for the Toj Constituency seat in Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal, *local dailies* report. He pointed out that the SPLA soldiers on about 30 vehicles took control of some 40 voting centres barring voters and party candidates from entering on the first day of polling in Toj constituency. He accused the SPLM of obstructing the elections process in southern Sudan through fraud and the use of military force.

High voter turnout and problem-free polls in Abyei

A local leader in Abyei reports that calm prevails in the area as people braved the sun and walked the long distances to cast their votes at the polling stations, *Al-Khartoum* reports. Sultan Arop Deng said that some people could not who were cut off when the polling station closed for business on the first day returned early yesterday with added zeal and determination, despite the long distances they had to cover to the stations. He said that some 34,000 voters cast their votes yesterday.

Ballot box reportedly broken in Al-Fashir

Political forces in Al-Fashir, North Darfur, have complained to the elections committee saying that they found a broken ballot box in the Al-Fashir South constituency. Its contents had also been tampered with, reports *Rai Al-Shaab*. The guards and elections officials they found at the station told them they did not know how this could have happened and were also surprised by the occurrence.

Party agents said that the elections committee had promised to look into the issue and to respond to their protests. This was not to be, however, they lamented reporting that the police then came in and burnt all the ballot boxes in the constituency as a result of the complaint.

A repeat of the polling has started at the station amidst objections from the voters, sources report.

Other Highlights

Parliament dissolved ahead of new government

Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir has issued a decree dissolving parliament ahead of the new government, **Akhir Lahza** reports.

Notification was sent yesterday to heads of the various parliamentary committees to that effect, informed sources report.

Referendum to take place as scheduled – Muttrif Sidig

At a meeting with the head of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission yesterday, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Muttrif Sidig, says the forth-coming elected government will complete the formation of the Referendum Commission ahead of the 2011 referendum, reports **Al-Sahafa**.

On his part, AEC Chairman Derek Plumbly called on the parties to the CPA to start planning for the post-referendum arrangements.

Four South African peacekeepers kidnapped in Sudan's Darfur

Xinhua Khartoum, 13/04/10 – Four UNAMID peacekeepers have been kidnapped by unknown gunmen, a UNAMID source told **Xinhua** on Tuesday.

The anonymous source said the four South African peacekeepers, two male and two female, were stopped by some 10 gunmen when they were driving from their working site to their private accommodation near Nyala, the capital city of the South Darfur State, on Sunday.

The source quoted witnesses as saying that the four policemen were forced to step off their vehicle at gunpoint.

No armed group in Darfur has made contacts with the UNAMID to claim responsibility for the kidnapping, the source noted.

UNAMID Spokesperson Nouredine Mezni has refused to confirm or deny the kidnapping, noting that the four peacekeepers were reported missing since Sunday.

"I can not confirm or deny this report (of the kidnapping), I have no confirmations on what had happened," the spokesman said on Tuesday.

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