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Highlights

NCP & SPLM officials say close to resolving differences (Dailies & Sudan Tribune)

Al-Ayam daily (13/12) reports as well as the major local media that SPLM revealed progress towards agreement between the two partners and anticipated that the agreement would be concluded in few hours if the NCP shows political will. Meanwhile, the First Vice President called for accountability for those responsible of arrest of SPLM leaders. The SPLM Parliamentary group voiced commitment to abide by instructions issued by its leadership and added that resumption of parliamentary activities is subject to what would result from the Presidency meeting.

Al-Ray Al-am (13/12) daily adds that the SPLM Deputy Chairman Governor Malik Agar said the meeting between the First Vice President and six Southern Political Parties discussed repercussions of last Monday's procession in addition to the SPLM-NCP discussions on the amendment of laws. Commenting on the SPLM-NCP discussions, Agar said "we reached the shore but we have not yet departed" particularly with regard to agreement on laws. "Differences on laws are confined to one or two articles", Agar said.

On the same subject Sudan Tribune (12/12) reports Senior officials from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) said that they are inching closer to resolving outstanding disputes on a package of democratic reforms bills ahead of next April's elections and on a procedural law for the south's referendum scheduled for January 2011.

The SPLM's Vice president Malik Agar told reporters in Khartoum that the positions of both sides are getting closer with few details to iron out in the coming hours. Nafi Ali Nafi, the NCP's Deputy Chairman for Partisan Affairs echoed the same call at a party's convention with Southern youth and students.

Nafi added that disagreements over the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is not related to the laws, borders or oil revenue but the insistence of some on forcing its ideological views when interpreting the accord to say that Sudan should be a secular state.

Sudan leaders reach deal on disputed reforms - SPLM

Reuters (13/12) reports a senior south Sudanese official said on Sunday his group had reached a deal with the main northern party on laws related to democratic reforms that had threatened a peace deal in oil-producing Sudan.

"We have reached agreement on three very important laws which have been grounds for serious disagreements between the two parties," Sudan People's Liberation Movement secretary general Pagan Amum told reporters after a meeting with President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who heads the National Congress Party.

Amum said the laws covered the national referendum, a consultation exercise for people living in boundary areas between north and south Sudan and a referendum on whether the oil-producing region of Abyei should join the south.

GoNU partners agree on 55% majority to decide on secession

In another development today's *Al-Sahafa* daily (13/12) reports that the two partners succeeded in surpassing their differences over the Referendum Act and agreed on the 55% quorum to decide on secession of Southern Sudan. Informed sources revealed that the joint legal committee had almost reached an agreement on all laws. The source added that the committee opted for a compromise between the choices of the two partners and agreed on 55% quorum to declare the South independent. In another development today's

Nafie threatens of decisive and fierce response to coalition procession

Al-Wifaq (13/12) daily reports the Presidential Assistant and NCP Deputy Chairman Nafie Ali Nafie threaten to use force against the Juba parties' procession scheduled next Monday.

Addressing a rally organized by NCP-affiliated Southerners in Khartoum, Nafie accused the Juba parties of using Southern Sudanese in its plot to topple the regime.

Yesterday's *Al-Ray Al-Aam* (13/12) reported that Nafie, accused the organizers of the demonstration of receiving external money with the aim of toppling the government. "We have offered 40,000 martyrs and are prepared to offer 100,000 martyrs," Nafi added.

Sudan Tribune (12/12) reports the Minister of Interior, Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid, has issued strong statement warning against another demonstration set to take place in Khartoum by opposition parties on Monday December 14. "If people go on other processions or any demonstrations without approval or permission from the concerned authorities, it will be considered a 'challenge to the law and sovereignty of the country,'" said Minister Ibrahim.

The website revealed that the Sudanese government today accused France of standing behind the demonstrations staged this week by a coalition of Northern opposition parties along with the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM). The Sudanese presidential adviser Mustafa Ismail who is also the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) Secretary of External Relations spoke of "pilgrimage" by politicians to Paris to weave plots against the regime.

Peaceful processions do not require authorities' permission – Opposition

Al-Wifaq daily (13/12) reports that SPLM Secretary General told a rally organized by Juba forces in Haj Youssif yesterday that his movement stressed on the amendment of all restrictive laws. Meanwhile, the Juba parties said that the rights to peaceful assembly and to free speech are guaranteed by the National Interim Constitution. The parties argued that according to these articles stipulated in the Constitution, staging peaceful processions does not require obtaining a prior permission from the authorities.

Al-Sahafa (11/12) reports the Forces of National Accord [Juba Alliance] on Thursday handed Khartoum State's police a new notification informing the force that it intends to stage a peaceful march to parliament next Monday 14 December.

However, police responded saying it was not familiar with the alliance and that it was necessary to file for the request under the name of a registered party. Also according to reliable sources, some sides of the alliance expressed their reservations over the timing of the march. This will be decided during a meeting today at the Sudan People's Liberation Movement's HQ in Khartoum.

Opposition leaders plan to hold procession on Monday

Radio Miraya (12/12) reports Leaders of political parties of the Juba Conference confirmed their

readiness to go on a peaceful march on Monday. This came after a meeting with the First Vice President Salva Kiir Mayardit on Friday. They said they have notified the Khartoum state authorities concerning the procession. The most prominent topics agreed upon by the opposition leaders during their meeting with Salva Kiir, are democratic transformation, including elections, referenda and the Darfur crisis.

The meeting brought together leaders of the Umma Party, Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Popular Congress, Hassan al-Turabi, the Umma- Party Reform and Renewal, Mubarak al-Fadil, and Mohamed Ibrahim of the Communist party, in addition to the chairman of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Minnie Arco Minnawi.

After the meeting, Al-Mahdi said that the party leaders agreed to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, CPA. Meanwhile, Turabi said that the opposition would pressurize the government to disseminate public freedoms so as to get free and fair elections.

Voters Registration positively accomplished –NEC

Al-Khartoum (13/12) reports that voter registration was accomplished in accordance to the law without complaints or malpractice that hindered the process. Meanwhile, NEC Chairman is open today the media center which will provide journalists and media practitioners inside and outside Sudan with required information on elections.

Suggestion for a “Wise-man” Panel for Abyei

Al- Raed daily (13/12) reports a group of workshop participants organized by the committee responsible for tribal reconciliation between the Misseriya and Dinka Ngok in north Kurdofan suggested the formation of an Elderly Panel, to address challenges facing the border demarcation process in Abyei. The Elderly panel would include key leaders from the Misseriya and Dinka Ngok to follow with the ruling on the Abyei Border dispute.

Democracy experts propose simplification of Sudan election system

Sudan Tribune (11/12) reports Democracy Reporting International (DRI), a group of mainly European experts, recommends that Sudan may simplify its electoral system ahead of the planned April 2010 voting. DRI made this conclusion in a just released report titled “Assessment of the Electoral Framework” of Sudan.

"There are serious questions whether the electoral systems used are too complex for a post-conflict election: The election administration must correctly print and distribute 1,268 different types of ballots. Voters, many of whom have never voted before, will have to mark up to 12 different ballots. A simplification of the electoral systems may be a solution," stated Michael Meyer, the co-coordinator of DRI.

DRI proposes that it is possible to simplify the district-by-district, first-past-the-post system of distributing parliamentary seats, also eliminating the ballots for party lists and women lists.

The DRI report states, "Given cumbersome electoral systems with voters receiving up to 12 ballots, there is a serious risk the elections may fail on logistical grounds. There is consideration of only holding elections to executive positions while postponing those to legislative bodies. However, that would do little to promote pluralism and would strengthen the already powerful executive branches of government further. A simplification of the electoral systems may be a more appropriate solution."

DRI says that Sudan can significantly simplify the ballot system "by dispensing with the

majoritarian component and introducing a full PR [proportional representation] system. A voter in the north would then have to mark four ballots, a voter in the south six ballots. The number of ballot types would be reduced from more than 1,268 to 54. This solution could also solve the census dispute as far as it relates to elections and address some problems of IDP voting."

"To maintain the women quota there could be a requirement to place women candidates on fixed positions on party lists. The drawback of this option would be that if elections were not held in some regions, such as parts of Darfur, the overall results would be affected, and voters may be unfamiliar with list-based election systems."

The report was financed by the Kingdom of Belgium. It was researched by an assessment team sent to Juba from May 9 – 20 and Khartoum from August 31 - September 6. The Center for Peace and Development Studies at the University of Juba helped to author the report.

NEC announces beginning of accepting complaints on Voters Registration

SUNA (11/12) reports the Chairman of the Election Register at the National Election Commission, Gen. Al-Hadi Mohamed Ahmed, has announced the beginning of the phase of initial publication of the voters' register and receiving appeals on the register all over the country as of Thursday, December 10. He said in a statement to *SUNA* that this step came in accordance with Article (4) - "1" of the Election Act. He said that the period for publishing the voters' register and receiving of appeals concerning the voters' register will last for seven days and will end on December 16.

Sudanese polls monitoring body lauds voters registration process

Miraya FM (11/12) reported the Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections (*SUNDE*) said that the voters registration process was conducted in a peaceful and transparent manner.

Speaking at a press conference in Juba, the chairman of the organization, Benjamin Lemi, said there were no reported cases of bribery, intimidation or violence at over 90 per cent of the Voters Registration centres in Southern Sudan. He said that organizations observers reported strong cooperation with registration officials. However, *SUNDE*'s chairman said that the voter registration process could have been improved with better planning and preparations by the NEC. "Deadlines for the registration process were released on October 4 less than a month before the process began, and this caused many electoral processes to be delayed or implemented at last minute. This caused voter registration to be delayed in some counties' he added.

SUNDE organization encouraged the National Elections Commission to continue cooperating with the government and the Ministry of Interior to deploy well-trained security personnel to ensure fair and peaceful elections.

UN envoy calls on Sudan's ruling partners to fully implement peace agreement

Miraya FM (11/12) reports the UN secretary-general special representative for Sudan, Ashraf Qazi, called on the two Naivasha partners to work for the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Qazi further urged the National Congress Party, NCP, and Sudan's' People Liberation Movement, SPLM, to pass the National Security bill and other human rights related laws. "We therefore urge all the parties to the CPA and all those who did not sign the CPA to do everything in their part to facilitate the full implementation of the contents of the CPA', Mr Qazi said in his speech on Human Rights Day in Khartoum.

He particularly referred to the passage of the remaining pieces of legislation, in particular the human rights bills such as the security bill. He said the CPA calls for law reform 'so as to bring existing laws in harmony with Sudan's obligations under international human rights instruments that it has ratified."

SPLM leadership approves candidates selection guidelines

Miraya FM (12/12) reported the Deputy SPLM secretary General for southern Sector, Ann Itto, has said that SPLM leadership has passed SPLM candidates selection guideline. Itto said that electoral colleges will be formed in all the states where people interested to contest under SPLM ticket take their applications.

She said that the selection system ensures that one candidate from SPLM contest in the different positions available, including the president of the republic and president of southern Sudan. Itto, who said the system does not give room for independent candidates, urged SPLM members who wish to contest at all levels, to submit their applications.

Security forces kill 15 gunmen in Darfur

Al-Ray Al-Aam (13/12) reports that fifteen gunmen accused of involvement in the assassination of an NCP MP in Darfur were killed in clashes with security forces on Saturday.

According to AFP report, Police and armed forces jointly pursued the unidentified armed men "who killed MP Hassan Tageddine Hassan al-Helw on Thursday" and caught up with them south of Nyala, capital of South Darfur state, said Fath al-Rahman Osman.

Fifteen of the gunmen were killed in the ensuing clashes, he said, without reporting any arrests or casualties among the security forces. A number of the gunmen had escaped.

Helw, an MP from Sudan's ruling National Congress Party, and two others traveling with him were killed when their car was attacked by unidentified gunmen in Nyala.