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Highlights

Sudan fortified against conspirators – President Al-Bashir

Addressing the 26th Arab Boy Scouts' Conference in Khartoum yesterday, President Al-Bashir said that Sudan is moving firmly towards peace and stability, *Al-Ahdath* reports.

He pointed out that much progress has been made and Sudan's name and honour are held in high esteem internationally despite efforts by hostile media to soil its name. He also pointed out that the steadfastness of the people of Sudan and the strong foundations of its society has fortified the country against conspirators and has contributed to its stability.

Al-Bashir went on to call upon boy scouts to play a role to help resolve key problems the world is facing such as global warming.

New UN rights expert on first visit to Sudan

Sudantribune.com Khartoum, 24/01/10 – The newly appointed Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in the Sudan, Justice Mohamed Chande Othman, began his first official visit to Sudan on Saturday 23.

The Tanzanian national will be holding a series of close meetings for the next 17 days with various stakeholders in Khartoum, Southern Sudan, the Three Areas and Darfur.

The Independent expert during his one-year mandate will attempt to gather first-hand information on the human rights situation in Sudan, to engage in constructive dialogue with the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan on human rights concerns and to follow up among others on the recommendations made by the Group of Experts on Darfur.

In interview with press today (24/01/10) in Khartoum, he audibly pledged interest and commitment seeking better working together with local authorities as well as government of the host country.

"I look forward to working very closely with all stakeholders to fulfil my mandate" he said, adding that he feels honoured to have been given such a challenging assignment.

Among his priorities are the general human rights protection issues since June 2009, new developments and future events that may have impact on human rights in Sudan and technical assistance/cooperation with the Government of Sudan.

Mr. Othman's visit is coordinated by UNMIS, UNAMID and the Government of Sudan Advisory Council on Human Rights and will end 11 February.

In another development, consultations are underway at the level of the Presidency to nominate members to the Sudan Human Rights Commission, *Al-Ayyam* reports. Formation of the rights body is pursuant to the provisions of the Interim National Constitution and the CPA.

Quoting the *SMC*, the paper reveals that the parties to the CPA are consulting over the nomination of 15 members to the independent body that will be tasked with safeguarding and improving the human rights situation in the country and with receiving and studying complaints related to rights violations.

Misseriya leader doubts impartiality of UNSG's report on Sudan

Mohamed Abdullah Wad-Abuk, a prominent Misseriya tribesman, has expressed doubts over credibility and impartiality of reports of the UNSG on Sudan, reports *Akhir Lahza*. This comes

following the recent UNSG report that the Misseriya leader says accuses the Misseriya of hampering the Abyei border demarcation activities and of impeding the implementation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's (PCA) award on the Abyei boundaries.

Wad-Abuk pointed out that it is the parties to the CPA that requested a PCA ruling on the issue that are to blame for not implementing the award. "We do not have mechanisms for implementation of the PCA ruling," he said.

"None of the two sides (NCP or SPLM) approached us to say they wanted to implement the PCA ruling. We are therefore not party to the implementation," he added.

Salva Kiir submits candidacy application

Sudantribune.com Juba, 24/01/10 - The President of the Government of Southern Sudan and SPLM's candidate for the position of president in the region for the upcoming April elections is scheduled to submit his candidacy application to the Southern Sudan High Elections Committee on 25/01/10, two days before the deadline on Wednesday, 27th January as set by the National Elections Commission (NEC) for submission of the applications.

Chairman of the SPLM Youth League and member of the party's Political Bureau Akol Paul Kordit on Sunday issued a televised statement urging citizens in Juba to come out in the morning on Monday between 9:00 and 10:00a.m. to escort the President to the premises of the Southern Sudan High Elections Committee where he will submit his candidacy application for scrutiny by the Southern branch of the Elections Commission before further being submitted to the NEC headquarters in Khartoum to make sure that all the requirements are met.

One of the requirements which recently left the public of Southern Sudan rather confused is the issue of Kiir's military status. The law requires that any candidate aspiring to contest for public office while in the military must resign from the military. Kiir is a general in the army and heads the recently formed SPLA Command Council composed of more than 40 senior military officers, but his aide says he was already retired since 2005.

Earlier, two senior officials issued contradicting statements when Dr. Luka Biong Deng said Kiir was retired since 2005 by late Dr. John Garang and the SPLM Secretary General was quoted by a local newspaper, **The Juba Post**, saying Kiir would retire from the military as the law required.

NCP requests suspension of talks with SPLM over outstanding issues

Local dailies report today that the joint NCP, SPLM High Political Committee meeting yesterday has failed to make any headway into the outstanding issues of the census results and the redistribution of geographic constituencies.

Speaking to the press following the meeting, SPLM Spokesperson Yien Mathew said that the meeting co-chaired by VP Taha and GoSS VP Riek Machar failed to break the deadlock over those issues, **Al-Ahdath** reports. He also revealed that the NCP team has expressed its unwillingness to discuss any of the outstanding issues until after the elections. The Spokesperson said that the SPLM was stunned by this revelation and will have internal discussions over this development.

According to **Akhir Lahza** daily, NCP member and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Mohamed Al-Hassan Al-Amin pointed out that the NCP did not accept the SPLM request to revisit the voter registration in Southern Kordofan State following allegations of irregularity. The SPLM has reportedly threatened to boycott the elections in those parts as a result but the NCP member pointed out that his party was not part of the voter registration process. He pointed out that the elections would go ahead whether or not the SPLM participates in the Southern Kordofan polls.

HRW calls for more elections observers

Sudantribune.com Washington, 24/01/10– The New York-based Human Rights Watch today issued a paper saying that violations of political and civil rights by Sudanese security forces are undermining the prospects of a free and fair election in April 2010. The rights group called for more international elections observers as one way to address these concerns.

"The Khartoum government is still using its security forces to harass and abuse those who speak out against the ruling National Congress Party," said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "That is no environment for holding free, fair, and transparent elections."

HRW's brief new report is called "Sudan: Abuses Undermine Impending Elections." Aside from reporting and commenting on the violent crackdowns on the SPLM-led rallies in December 2009, the rights group also writes on some less documented human rights violations from other regions of the country.

Human Rights Watch claimed that political parties' election observers were subjected to restrictions on their freedoms of movement and speech, particularly when they complained of actions by ruling NCP members and members of 'popular committees', which are groups of local leaders who certify residency.

Heavyweight parties name presidential nominees

Sudantribune.com Khartoum, 24/01/10 - The Umma National Party has announced today that it is in the process of filing the nomination form for party leader Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi. In another development, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has nominated its spokesperson Hatem Al-Sir ending speculations on endorsing Bashir as some reports have mentioned.

The Umma party Secretary General Sidig Ismail met today with the National Elections Committee (NEC) chief Abel Alier and told Sudan's official news agency, **SUNA**, that he wanted to review the progress of its work and ensure fair and free elections. Ismail said he is confident of the integrity of the NEC saying the Umma Party hopes to see this continue throughout the elections.

In a related development the former head of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Kamil Idris, said in a press conference that he will also run independently for president in the elections.

Idris, who stepped down from WIPO following investigations into falsifying his date of birth — making himself seem nine years older when he joined the agency 25 years ago — said he wants to improve the image of Sudan and reverse the deteriorating situation in the country in all aspects whether political or economic.

In a separate development, **local media** have it that Yassir Arman would be presenting his endorsements for nomination for president later today. **Al-Ahdath** quotes SPLM Spokesperson Yien Mathew as boasting that their candidate has so far the largest number of endorsements (56,656 votes) from 25 states and the Abyei Area.

Opposition parties fail to reach coalition deal

Opposition parties concluded a meeting late last Saturday without reaching a coalition deal aimed at defeating the NCP nominee for president, the incumbent President Al-Bashir, with the major parties believing they have greater chances going it alone, reports **Al-Khartoum**.

Informed sources intimate that National Umma Party leader Sadig Al-Mahdi said at a recent party meeting that he believes his party could garner 30% of the constituencies up for grabs (i.e. 50 representatives in the National Assembly). "Why strike a coalition deal if my party alone can win 50 seats in parliament," he reportedly asked.

The other opposition parties have reportedly cited similar aspirations that are likely to bring to rest

talk about a possible coalition against the NCP.

Just Peace Forum pulls out of elections race

The Just Peace Forum Party's political bureau has unanimously decided it will not contest at any level of the elections, party Secretary-General Al-Bushra Mohamed Osman has revealed. Speaking to ***Al-Ahdath***, the party member said that the party has decided that contesting in the polls would only contradict the party objectives of not doing the SPLM a favour by splitting the northern vote.

Al-Bushra denied media reports that the party had come under pressure from the NCP to withdraw its candidates. He pointed out that the party's views are not in line with many of the NCP views on many issues such as the implementation of the CPA that it opposes while the NCP sees it as a major achievement.

Authorities continue disarmament drive in Ayyod County, Jonglei State

Ayyod County Commissioner Gabriel Dob Lam has called on citizens to fully cooperate with the committee made up of the SPLA, JIUs and UNMIS that has been charged with the disarmament of the civilian population in the area, reports ***Al-Ahdath***. According to the SPLM Deputy Secretary for the area, John Mallut, this is the third disarmament campaign in the area since the CPA. He also said that the operations are expected to conclude today and the firearms thus collected will be handed over to the relevant authorities.

JSRSG Gambari shows willingness to cooperate with Sudan

Sudantribune.com Khartoum, 24/01/10 - The newly appointed head of the United Nations African Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has expressed willingness to cooperate with the Sudanese authorities to establish peace and security in the region.

"We reaffirmed our commitment to work jointly and cooperatively to address the remaining challenges in Darfur, so that we can do everything possible to implement UNAMID's mandate," Ibrahim Gambari said today following a series of meetings with Sudanese officials in Khartoum.

The new chief of AU-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and Joint Special Representative (JSR), Professor Gambari met today in Khartoum with the state minister for foreign affairs Elsamani Alwasila and the Ministry's undersecretary, Mutrif Siddiq, to formally announce his arrival in Sudan and assumption of duty. He also reviewed the humanitarian, political and security aspects of the situation in Darfur.

The Joint Representative stressed during the two meetings that he would work with full transparency and clarity in the implementation of the UNAMID mandate, said Mohamed Abdallah Idriss, the head of the peace department in the foreign ministry. He further said that the two Sudanese officials reaffirmed the commitment of all government agencies and the various competent authorities to cooperate with Gambari to achieve his duties as a head of the joint operation in Darfur.

On Saturday, Gambari attended a reception held in his honour by the Nigerian Ambassador to Sudan, Salihu Ahmed-Sambo. The diplomat noted that Gambari "has the calibre, professionalism, and the experience" to lead UNAMID. The event was attended by ambassadors of the African countries. Similar support was reiterated by the Dean of the African group, and ambassador of Algeria, as well as the head of the AU liaison office in Khartoum.

He also made a courtesy call to UNMIS Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Ashraf Qazi.

The Nigerian diplomat will arrive in El Fasher tomorrow, to gain a first-hand perspective of the situation on the ground. He will then head to the African Union's headquarters in Addis Ababa to

meet with AU Commission leadership and attend the organization's annual summit. Also, he will attend the meeting of the AU/UN/Government of Sudan Tripartite Mechanism, taking place in Addis Ababa on 4 February.

AU urged to review strategies to end Africa's conflicts

Sudantribune.com Addis Ababa, 24/01/10 - As the leaders of African Union countries gather for a summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, an international human rights group has urged the AU to incorporate "civilian protection" and "rejection of impunity" in strategies to end conflicts.

In a letter sent to AU heads of states, the New York based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that, the African Union (AU) should improve its strategies for civilian protection and accountability in its efforts to end ongoing crises on the continent.

"African heads of state declared 2010 the 'Year of Peace and Security in Africa' for compelling reasons," said Aloys Habimana, deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

"Now they need to act, by coming up with long-term solutions for armed conflicts and stronger measures to protect civilians and ensure justice for victims of atrocities."

The AU will hold a Summit meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from January 25 to February 4, 2010.

The rights group called on African leaders to increase their attention to justice for victims of serious crimes, referring in particular to African Union discussion of a proposal to extend the power of the UN Security Council to suspend International Criminal Court activities under article 16 of the Rome Statute to the UN General Assembly.

The HRW warned African leaders to avoid such stance because it would increase the risks of political interference in the court's work. The AU should also focus on making the African Court on Human and People's Rights a more robust institution, the group suggested.

"The AU has a tremendous opportunity to further the cause of justice on the African continent," Habimana said. "Only by taking steps to ensure accountability for human rights violations can African states contribute effectively to justice, lasting peace, and long-term stability."

JEM wants unity with other groups before Darfur peace talks

Sudantribune.com Doha, 24/01/10 – Following intense consultations by mediators to manage direct talks between the parties to the conflict in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has expressed readiness to hold parallel consultations with the other rebel groups in order to establish one movement before engaging in peace talks with the Sudanese government to end the armed conflict in Darfur.

"We are ready to consult here in Doha with the other factions in order to have one delegation and to continue talks on the ground with them in order to establish one movement before concluding a peace agreement with the government", said Ahmed Hussein Adam, the JEM spokesperson speaking from Doha. He added that JEM has already integrated more than 22 factions in the past. Initially JEM had asked for the resumption of peace talks alongside only one other rebel party, the Sudan Liberation Movement of Abdel Wahid Al-Nur (SLA-AW), which had been involved in the Abuja peace talks in 2006. At the time, JEM and SLA-AW refused to sign a peace agreement accepted then by Minni Minnawi, another SLA leader.

The head of the government negotiating team state minister Amin Hassan Omer said in press statements after a meeting with the mediation they are willing to hold talks with any group ready to negotiate. He further said JEM rebels have no right to determine who will participate and who will not stressing that only the mediation can decide on the issue.

However the Sudanese official said they informed the mediation that the talks should not be extended beyond the third week of March due to the electoral process scheduled to take place in the country for April 11. "There will be no one who wants to continue because it would make no sense to hold a deal with the Government of National Unity that no one knows will return after the elections or in the same form and structure, or whether another government will replace it," the state minister said.

France requests Abdulwahid to join the peace talks

The French government has suggested that SLM leader Abdulwahid Mohamed Nur join the Doha peace talks or else leave its territories within the next two days, reports **Akhir Lahza**. Observers believe that with the dwindling influence on the ground in Darfur, it is likely that the SLM leader would join the peace talks.

Rights bodies call for legal distinction between crimes of adultery and rape

A coalition of activists dubbed the 149 Coalition (composed of representatives of 7 civil society organizations and rights activists) is demanding a clear legal distinction of crimes of adultery from rape and for more stringent penalties on offenders, **Al-Ayyam** reports. The coalition that calls for the abolition of the definition of rape as cited in Article 149 of the Criminal Code (1991) have called for legal amendments on the Laws of Evidence to distinguish the levels of evidence required on rape and adultery charges. They have also called for a legal definition of rape in conflict areas and for special courts for such crimes.

The 149 Coalition issued a statement at the closure of a workshop in Khartoum yesterday underlining the importance of stripping suspected offenders of gender-based violence of immunity and for the introduction of language in the legal code that would take into consideration the psychological effects on the rape victim and for legislature governing sexual violence against minors. They also called for the ratification of the African Protocol on Women's Rights that was endorsed in 2008.

EDITORIAL

Manoeuvring the Presidential race

Al-Ayyam: Nominations for president have been mushrooming over the last few days albeit essentially based on aspirations that have no sound foundations. It remains to be seen how many of these aspirants will be able to achieve the NEC requirements for at least 15,000 endorsements from 18 states around the country. This may be easy for the major parties but puts the smaller parties and independents at a disadvantage. We could therefore not really talk about the nominations for president until after next Wednesday when the doors close on nominations and we would know who has indeed met the requirements.

We expect more presidential nominees to sprout in the coming few days not because they are confident of winning but just for the sake of "splitting the votes" because the presidential race requires a candidate winning by a simple majority vote. Failure to get a simple majority will mean that a second round will have to be staged pitting the two major contenders. Consequently, talk about a coalition may not be appropriate at this time but may come in handy should there be a second round of voting. This means that many nominees will be fielded at this current stage in order to split the vote and increase the chances for a second round and then comes the time for politicking and manoeuvring the votes for the candidate of their choice.

Of course there will be some out there who hope to clinch the prize right from the first round. All things considered, the picture will be clearer from Wednesday onward when it would be revealed which nominees have been endorsed by the NEC.

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