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Highlights

Wanted Bashir sworn in as Sudan president

Reuters 27/5/10 - Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, the sole sitting head of state wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court (ICC), was sworn in on Thursday after his re-election in voting marred by boycotts.

Bashir, who rejects charges of ordering mass murder, rape and torture in western Darfur, is due to preside over a January referendum on secession for south Sudan, which many analysts believe will bring the oil-producing region independence.

Wearing a flowing white robe and white headdress, Bashir welcomed heads of at least five African states attending the ceremony, including Mauritania, Chad and Djibouti.

"This phase will mark a fresh start," Bashir told a packed parliament hall. "No return to war, and there will be no place for undermining security and stability," he said.

But the pomp and circumstance honouring the controversial leader, especially as tensions persist between Khartoum and the semi-autonomous south and fighting continues in Darfur, put European diplomats and UN officials in a quandary.

The EU supports ICC efforts to bring Bashir to justice but is also keen to maintain dialogue to ensure the referendum does not trigger a renewal of Sudan's decades-long civil war.

The United Nations said it would send its top two diplomats in Sudan despite criticism from human rights advocates.

"Diplomats attending al-Bashir's inaugural would be making a mockery of their governments' support for international justice," said Elise Keppler, International Justice Program senior counsel at U.S.-based Human Rights Watch.

Bashir's swearing-in follows his easy victory in an April election -- he won 68 percent of the vote -- that was marked by opposition boycotts and allegations of widespread fraud.

Bashir's party and allies also won around 95 percent of parliamentary seats in the north, giving them more than the required two-thirds majority to make constitutional changes.

The former southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) won most of the southern seats, around 20 percent of the total parliament. South Sudan President and SPLM leader Salva Kiir, who appeared at the inauguration in his trademark giant cowboy hat, is in talks to form a government with Bashir.

Bashir, who took power in a 1989 coup, was last sworn in after a north-south peace deal in 2005 that ended Africa's longest civil war, a conflict that claimed some 2 million lives and destabilised much of the region.

That inauguration was attended by senior foreign figures, including then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and ministers from Western nations.

On Thursday, major nations like Britain and the United States were not expected to send their heads of missions, who are both out of the country. Embassies said they would follow protocol and send diplomatic representation to the ceremony.

Yet outside powers are hoping that officials from both the north and south can work together to carry out the southern vote on independence, now set for Jan. 9, 2011.

With much of Sudan's oil wealth lying along an uncertain north-south border, the stakes are high and there is no guarantee the road to the referendum will be smooth.

In the meantime, the ICC is trying to increase pressure. On Wednesday ICC judges told the U.N. Security Council that Sudan was protecting ICC suspects rather than arresting them, a move aimed at increasing pressure on Khartoum to cooperate.

Political parties in talks to participate in new government – Al-Bashir

Al-Akhabar 27/5/10 – Hours before taking oath of office, president Al-Bashir revealed ongoing talks between the NCP and unnamed political parties which boycott the recent elections for participation in the upcoming government. President Al-Bashir said despite his previous stance, special considerations motivated him to accept offer by some political parties to join the new government. However, President Al-Bashir pointed out that “the government would not tolerate participation and opposition”. “A political party should either join the government and share the responsibility or remain in the opposition,” he said.

Khartoum says ICC move “desperate attempt” to divert attention from inauguration

Al-Sahafa 27/5/10 – Sudan Government source has described the latest ICC move as a “desperate attempt” by the Court to divert attention from today’s inauguration ceremony of President Al-Bashir. “The step by the ICC judges is intended to overshadow the inauguration. These are desperate and futile allegations. The government will continue its course and will not care about such moves,” the source said. “The timing of the request is intended to incite sedition. No body on earth can force Sudan to cooperate with the ICC,” Ambassador Omer Dahab, Director of the Directorate of Crisis Management said.

Clashes over cattle theft leave 4 people dead in Unity State

Sudan Tribune website 26/5/10 - Deadly clashes over cattle theft in the southern state of Unity involving forces from the SPLA has left four people dead and others wounded.

This came following reports alleging that armed criminals operating in the territories of Parieng County in Unity State entered the eastern part of Heglig six days ago where a number of Arab nomads of Palata origin were seeking water and grazing lands for a total of 1500 herds of cattle. The Arab nomads followed the footprints of their cattle to Parieng and subsequently reported the incident to the local authorities for immediate recovery. After having learned the presence of armed criminals in the area, local authorities dispatched police forces to confiscate the stolen cattle from cattle raiders. Clashes occurred as the cattle raiders reacted violently to the police.

Mayik Nyok, a local official from Parieng, told Sudan Tribune that, on Tuesday at 6 am, joint forces from the local police forces and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA); have twice clashed with cattle raiders in the area, resulting in the death of two cattle raiders, one SPLA officer and one Arab nomad.

7,000 HIV positive in Southern Sudan

Miraya FM 26/5/10 - About 7,000 people are HIV/AIDS positive in Southern Sudan. The Chairman of the Southern Sudan Network of People Living with HIV, Lole Laila, told Radio Miraya that figures were obtained through the network's offices in the different states in the region, adding that figures can fluctuate depending on several factors.

He noted that despite the support given by partner NGOs, lack of funds remain a persistent challenge that hinders the organization's activities.

The statements came during a three day workshop organized by the Southern Sudan Network of People Living with HIV in Juba.

Sudanese president's power to be tested

If the oil-rich south secedes, the stability Bashir provides could be in danger.

Los Angeles Times 27/5/10 - His image shining on billboards promising highways, schools and wealth, President Omar Hassan Ahmed Bashir takes credit for all that glitters, turning oil money into skyscrapers that rise above his palace in this sweltering capital.

Khartoum reflects his aspirations to add a splash of Dubai-inspired architectural panache to an African nation long troubled by famine and war. But the skyline here glimmers only so far; beyond it looms widespread poverty, bloodshed in Darfur and the prospect that in January the mainly Christian south will secede, robbing Bashir of the oil reserves the Islamic north craves.

A proud man easily angered, the president smiles at Chinese investors but recently threatened to cut the fingers off election monitors. The International Criminal Court wants to try him on charges of war crimes in Darfur, accusations Bashir brushes aside as if they're mosquitoes buzzing along the Nile.

His power rests with the army; his political instincts shrewdly divide and intimidate his enemies, including onetime ally Hassan Turabi, an opposition chief who was reportedly arrested last week.

Few world leaders want to be caught shaking Bashir's hand, but at home, where international condemnation carries little influence, the president represents a degree of stability.

That may seem odd: Peace talks in Darfur have broken down, and Bashir is widely distrusted. Yet the 66-year-old former paratrooper has skirted US-backed sanctions and kept an anxious peace with the semiautonomous south. Many Sudanese, whether they revile or love him, don't see a stronger personality on the horizon.

"The question is, what is the alternative?" said Hassan Maki, vice chancellor of the African International University in Khartoum. "The opposition is made up of old people approaching the graveyard."

Bashir, a farmer's son who often waves his trademark walking stick, won reelection last month in a poll regarded internationally as marred by fraud. But among his supporters, the outcome gave a sense of legitimacy to the president and his ruling National Congress Party. Bashir will need that in coming months as he faces the economic and political consequences of an independent south, which fought a two-decade civil war with the north that left more than 2 million people dead.

The president has promised he will honor the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the

Sudan People's Liberation Movement, which controls the south's government. That would finally dash his dream of unity and possibly trigger other separatist movements. It may also mean that the south, home to most of Sudan's oil reserves, could deprive the north of billions of dollars a year in development.

Under the peace agreement, north and south share oil revenue. Oil is pumped from southern fields and transported through a northern-controlled pipeline that stretches to Port Sudan. If this scenario holds, the south will pay the north taxes and shipping fees. That may be enough for Bashir. But a final agreement has not been negotiated, and some analysts predict that the president, who seized power in a 1989 coup, will not allow southern oil wells to slip further from his grasp.

Oil has changed Khartoum's fortunes and made Bashir one of China's best friends. Beijing owns 40% of Sudan's Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Co., based in Khartoum; Chinese contractors and engineers have fanned out across the country to work on water, road and other infrastructure projects. In return, Bashir's government has bought from Beijing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of weapons, including tanks and fighter jets, to keep him in power.

"US sanctions are pushing Sudan toward China," university official Maki said. "The Chinese have become great beneficiaries of U.S. policy."

If sanctions continue for years and oil revenue slackens, however, Khartoum's building boom and economic growth may diminish and upset the balance of power.

"Many Islamist businessmen need normalization with the international community, especially the U.S. and Europe," Warag said. "They know that Bashir is a burden. He's blocking this. But these same businessmen like Bashir because he keeps out Western values and allows them to act without transparency."

How Bashir, who perpetually switches between a white turban and a military man's hat, navigates the oil conundrum and the likelihood of an independent south could affect the stability of Sudan's neighbors.

Opposition parties and human rights groups criticized the U.S. for accepting the outcome of last month's Sudanese elections, but Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Washington was facing a complicated situation.

"The United States could back off and say, 'We won't deal with these people. We're not going to have anything to do with them. Bashir is a war criminal,'" Clinton said recently. "I don't think that will improve the situation. So along with our partners ... we are trying to manage what is a very explosive problem."

Darfur peace talks to resume in June

Sudan Tribune website 26/5/10 - Darfur peace talks will resume during the first week of June, announced today the Qatari state minister for foreign affairs, after a meeting with the Sudanese Presidential adviser Ghazi Salahueldin.

The talks will resume on June 6, and all the parties including JEM will be called to Doha for the negotiations, an informed source confirmed to Sudan Tribune.

Qatari state minister Ahmed bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud told reporters that invitation letters would contain a question on whether they wish to add something on the proposed agenda.

"The Justice and Equality Movement is part of the negotiations and we hope that they will reconsider their position and join the negotiations," he further said.

The Qatari minister released positive signals about the possibility of granting Khalil Ibrahim travel documents to move out of Libya to Doha directly if he wishes to participate in the negotiation.

"It is the duty of the United Nations but also our duty that if the brothers (in the Justice and Equality Movement) want to come, the mediation would provide them with travel documents to come to Doha," He further said that "the Justice and Equality Movement is part of the negotiations and we hope to reconsider its position and continue the negotiations".

Bassole echoed Al-Mahmoud remarks saying the mediation is ready to issue travel documents for the rebels to return to the venue of the process. He also said they are in touch with all the parties.

However, JEM rebels said they would not go to Doha unless the mediation guarantees the return of their leader Khalil Ibrahim to Darfur.

However, Ghazi Salah Eddine, Presidential adviser in charge of the peace process said the government is not concerned by those who do not want to negotiate.

Now we are not interested in negotiating with a group that is not willing to negotiate. ... The government would negotiate with the group that has shown serious willingness and sincerity in reaching a solution," Ghazi said.

"We are not concerned and not interested in the positions of the Justice and Equality Movement, especially as it has no real desire to negotiate for peace," he added.

34 passengers survived aircraft accident at Khartoum airport

Al-Intibaha 27/5/10 – Civil Aviation Authority spokesperson Abdul Hafiz Abdul Rahim said 34 passengers escaped death yesterday at Khartoum airport. The aircraft, Antonov 26, flew to Khartoum from Wau but while landing at the airport the wheels burst and it skidded off the runway, no fire or casualties reported.

Pre-referendum

Presidential adviser briefs SRSG on CPA partners' efforts on referendum

Al-Raed 27/5/10 – Presidential Adviser Mustafa Osman Ismail yesterday met with SRSG Haile Menkerios. Ismail told reporters that the meeting focused on preparations and plans by the UN to assist the CPA partners to implement the remaining CPA benchmarks including preparations for the referendum and the post-referendum phase. He said the SRSG would represent the SG at President Al-Bashir's inauguration.

For his part, the SRSG said Mr. Ismail briefed him on the prospective consultations between the NCP and the SPLM in Khartoum, adding a tangible progress has been made on the issue of formation of a referendum commission and post-referendum arrangement.

Workshop discusses popular consultations in Blue Nile

Miraya FM 26/5/10 - A number of representatives from political parties and civil society sectors

have attended a workshop on popular consultations in Edamazin, Blue Nile State on Tuesday. A Member of the Blue Nile State Legislative Assembly, Al Tayeb Abu Zamil Al Tayeb, said that the workshop focused on the security arrangements, power and wealth-sharing and other issues relating to the process.

South Sudan independence “major problem”: AU chief

AFP 25/5/10 – AU Commission chief Jean Ping voiced concern Tuesday about south Sudan voting for independence in a referendum due in January, saying it would be a "major problem" for other African nations.

"From the outset we've argued in favour one of the options, making (Sudan's) unity attractive," Ping told journalists during events marking Africa Day.

"That's a major problem for all African countries which could be confronted by similar situations, that's what concerns us," Ping said.

"Such a decision could lead us again to a number of major difficulties, including war." However, Ping said that if the referendum does go forward "we have no other choice than to respect the decision of the Sudanese."