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Highlights

Local Arabic and English Language Press

Adequate documents submitted to The Hague – NCP official

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports the Abyei Area Administration has urged the Messeriya and southerners to return to attend Christmas celebrations to demonstrate peaceful co-existence. Abyei Deputy Chief Administrator Rahma Abdul Rahman Al-Nur said the security and humanitarian situation in the area is good, citing the return of a large number of traders and IDPs. "The crisis between the police and the JIUs in the area has been resolved," he said.

Meanwhile, NCP official Al-Dirdiri Mohamed Ahmed said the submission by both sides of documents to The Hague was an important step in the Abyei arbitration process. "Sudan Government submitted adequate documents," he said, affirming the Arbitration Panel's assessment of the documents would be respected. He said parties should wait for court's decision rather than raising the issue in the media.

Government to consult with international community on peace

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports the Sudan Ambassador to UN Abdul Mahmoud Abdul Haleem as saying that intensive consultations would be conducted during the coming weeks within UN and other capitals including the new US Administration on the future of peace in Sudan. He told the paper about an increasing conviction of the international community, UN, AU and the Arab League that the Sudan peace process, Darfur in particular, would be affected should President Bashir be indicted by the ICC. He did not rule out an extraordinary meeting of the SC if the indictment takes place.

President Bashir to attend SAF Air Force exercise today

Sudan Radio broadcast that President Bashir is to attend today's SAF Air Force exercise in the Um Sayala area, 80 km west of Omdurman. SAF fighters, bombers, air carriers, heavy artillery and strategic weapons will take part in the parade. SAF spokesperson Office announced that the parade which is part of SAF's 54th Anniversary celebrations, is also intended to demonstrate air strength.

Government ready to negotiate peace in Darfur

Sudan Vision reports Sudan government is hopeful that the Arab League will be able to fix a date for the upcoming round of negotiations with Darfur rebel factions in Qatar. "Sudan government views with satisfaction arrangements by Qatar to secure international support for the initiative," says State Minister for Foreign Affairs Alsamani Al-Wasila.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Information Kamal Obeid told **Al-Sahafa** that a meeting would be held in Qatar in mid January as part of Qatari initiative to resolve Darfur crisis.

UN destroys tons of UXO in Malakal

Al-Sahafa reports UN as saying that its troops destroyed last Thursday the last quantity of unexploded ordinances in a JIU barracks in Malakal. According to an UNMIS press release, the destroyed UXO included 550 landmines, 230 grenades, 1700 howitzers, 725 rockets, 7000 artillery shells and more than 12000 kg of ammunition of small arms.

Sudan notifies UNAMID of rebel military movements

The Citizen reports UNAMID as saying that Sudanese authorities warned them of unusual military movements by Darfur rebel groups near the western border. An unidentified UNAMID official told the daily London-based **Al-Sharq Al-Awsat** newspaper that the alert was made last Friday. The official said security level has consequently been raised. "All parties must know that UNAMID is not part of the conflict but is here to accomplish stability and security in the region," the official added.

MFA spokesperson Ali Al-Sadiq told the paper that security authorities have monitored JEM movement on the border. He said Sudan government is in constant contact with UNAMID so that both sides can be ready for any eventuality.

Post-CPA child mortality low – UNICEF

Al-Sahafa reports UNICEF Representative in Sudan Ted Chaiban as saying that mortality of children below five is down to 112 compared to 156 cases before the CPA among each 1000 children born alive.

Ted Chaiban, who addressed a press conference yesterday on expiry of his tenure, said UNICEF cooperation with Sudan government would continue to further bring down child mortality rate in both the south and the north.

Government requests UN to assist Eastern refugees

Al-Sahafa reports Sudan Government urged UNHCR to provide assistance to Eritrean and Somali refugees in eastern Sudan. About 18000 refugees mostly Eritreans are in eastern Sudan. Refugees Commissioner Mohamed Ahmed Al-Aghbash told **SMC** that the Government requested UNHCR for urgent assistance.

Current Assembly session ends in December - Speaker

Local dailies report the National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir as saying that the current Parliament Session will end in December and will not be extended. However, he explained that MPs would be on the standby to debate and approve any law should the Assembly be summoned to convene.

Elections depends on harmonious laws - SPLM

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports the Chairman of GoSS Legislature James Wani as telling a student workshop yesterday that SPLM participation in the upcoming elections depends on passing the necessary laws which should also be in harmony with the constitution. He has reiterated SPLM stance on the national security law.

SDG 42 m for CPA celebrations in Malakal

Khartoum Monitor reports the Upper Nile State Finance Minister Stephen Dino as saying that GoSS allocated SDG 42 million as contribution for the upcoming CPA Anniversary celebrations scheduled to be held in Malakal.

Websites/International News Coverage

Nhial Deng Nhial appointed southern Sudan Defence Minister

Sudan Tribune website reports FVP Kiir appointed Nhial Deng Nhial as Minister for SPLA Affairs. Nhial Deng, former GoSS Minister of Regional Cooperation, is the Southern Sudan

army's defense minister with effect from yesterday, December 21, 2008.

The appointment comes after a statement by the Governor of Lakes State, Kuol Manyang Juuk, that he had been approached by Salva Kiir to fill the position, which had been vacant since the death in a 2 May plane crash of former SPLA Affairs Minister, Dominic Dim Deng. .

From the Dinka Bhar El-Gazal region, Nhial Deng is the son of the William Deng Nhial, who was assassinated in 1968 by the Sudanese army. William Deng led the exiled Sudan African Nationalist Union (SANU). He returned to Sudan just before his death to take part in the 1968 elections.

Nhial Deng completed his education in Khartoum, earning a law degree in the early 1980s. His resignation from GoSS ministry of regional cooperation in May 2006, just a few months after being appointed, generated controversy and debate about why he left. Some said it was because his ministry was financially neglected, that there was rampant corruption inside the government; others attributed it to the significant funds spent on the integration of the SPLA with the SSDF armed groups. Neither Nhial nor any other official explained his reason for quitting. Subsequently, he went to England for two years where he continued his law studies.

As a result of continual attempts by his SPLM comrades, especially Pagan Amum, Nhial returned to Juba earlier this year, where he caused surprise by declaring his candidacy for the SPLM chairmanship at the party's second convention in Juba last May. Since then, he has been seen accompanying Salva Kiir on his travels inside and outside the Sudan.

His appointment is likely to be welcomed by a southern army dominated by generals who believe they are heirs to SPLM founder Garang's legacy. Nhial's close ties with Garang once sparked rumours that Salva Kiir could be ousted as deputy chairman of the movement.

This SPLA budget passed in Juba this week gives the army 40% of the GoSS annual budget -- 400 million Sudanese pounds (US\$187 million).

Sudan ex-PM acknowledges failure of his agreement with NCP

(Sudan Tribune website) Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Umma party, the largest Northern opposition party in Sudan, has acknowledged for the first time that the agreement he signed with the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) last May has failed.

The Umma party and the NCP signed an agreement known as the "National Reconciliation Agreement" which largely outlines a number of fundamental principles that both sides share the same views on. "We tried to reach a comprehensive consensus through National Reconciliation Agreement and then the People of Sudan initiative" Al-Mahdi told his followers during the weekly Friday prayers. "In both cases the hawks inside the regime and within the opposition have killed it" the former prime minister added. It was the first time Al-Mahdi made such remarks on two initiatives he had staunchly defended previously.

The "National Reconciliation Agreement" has come under fire from other opposition parties who viewed it as a step towards a political alliance between the NCP and the Umma party, something which Al-Mahdi had strongly denied. At the time Al-Mahdi blasted other opposition parties and advised them to join the agreements "before it is too late".

On the indictment of Al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC) Al-Mahdi predicted that an arrest warrant will be issued shortly.

The Umma party chief said he took part in a forum that included other Sudanese political parties as well as representatives from US, UK, France and the deputy prosecutor of the ICC.

Al-Mahdi said that “serious discussions” took place on the issue of justice during conflicts but added that he will not disclose the contents of the forum.

The former prime minister reiterated his call for roundtable conference that includes all political powers in the country “with no preexisting partisan agenda”.

The opposition leader has previously been one of the supporters of the ICC. However following the indictment of Al-Bashir he appeared to have shifted his position.

Al-Mahdi was ousted as prime minister in a bloodless military coup in 1989 by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and has been one of the most outspoken critics of the government ever since. However, lately he has taken a more favorable position saying the government has become more tolerant of other political parties.

Loan from China needed for budget deficit – official

(Sudan Tribune website) The Sudanese government has limited options to deal with the growing budget deficit, former finance minister Abdel-Wahab Osman has told the pro-government Al-Rai Al-Aam daily. “The only option before the government to face the drop in oil prices and clear the budget deficit is to receive an external loan particularly from China”, Osman said, pointing to China’s foreign currency reserves of more than \$1.8 trillion.

The price of oil plunged under \$34 last Friday for the first time for more than four and a half years despite huge production cuts initiated by OPEC. This is in sharp contrast to the all-time peak price of \$147.27 reached July 11. Oil exports represent 65% of revenue for Sudan.

Sudan adopted a new 2009 budget that forecast a 44% drop in oil exports revenue, down from \$6.4 billion to \$3.6 billion in 2009. This year’s budget introduces tax hikes to offset the shortfall in oil revenue. The changes include a 20 % increase in telecoms VAT, up from 15% in 2008, and a new 5% "development tax" on some imports.

According to Al-Rai Al-Aam a committee within the ministry of economy is looking to ways to deal with falling oil revenue. However an unidentified government official told the newspaper that it is unlikely that there would be any new tax increases or public borrowing.

Sudan reiterates support to deployment of UNAMID

Sudan Tribune website, 21/12/08, KHARTOUM –The Sudanese government defended its record on facilitating the deployment of UN peacekeepers in Darfur saying it fulfilled all its obligations in this regard. Sudan’s envoy to the UN Abdel-Haleem Abdel-Mahmood told the Security Council that his government had set up an office at the peacekeepers’ headquarters to streamline approval procedures. “There is no room for talk about any obstacles on the part of the Sudanese government with regards to the deployment” Abdel-Mahmood said.

DPKO USG Alain Le Roy told the Security Council on Friday that the Darfur peacekeepers have been “much too slow in providing real improvements for the ordinary citizens on the ground and inadequate in resolving the Darfur crisis”.

Sudan has placed stiff conditions on the composition of the force insisting that it is all recruited from African countries.

Le Roy accused Khartoum of violating the unilateral ceasefire it declared last month saying aerial bombardments were carried out in Darfur.

But Abdel-Mahmood dismissed the allegations saying that violence was provoked by the rebel groups.

“We would like to reiterate our commitment to the ceasefire declared by the president. It is well known that some rebel movements meant to attack some police and military units as soon as the ceasefire was announced” he said.

“We hope that this council will press the rebels to accept the ceasefire” the Sudanese diplomat added and stressed that Darfur movements must be forced to attend peace talks mediated by mediator Djibril Bassole.

Abdel-Mahmood welcomed announcement by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes earlier this month holding rebels responsible for most attacks on humanitarians and their property.

He noted that Sudan has extended facilitating the work of humanitarian organizations until January 31st 2010.

Bari complain of ill treatment in South Sudan

(Sudan Tribune website) The Bari community in Khartoum issued a statement last week voicing strong criticisms of the Government of Southern Sudan, which rules autonomously over the diverse peoples of Sudan’s vast and fertile southern reaches.

The Bari are an agricultural people residing mostly in Juba district of Central Equatoria. Like other southern peoples, some of the Bari moved to Khartoum as they sought new opportunities or fled fighting from Sudan’s decades of wars.

The statement listed 12 grievances and threatened to reject South Sudan’s landmark 2005 comprehensive peace agreement. Moreover, the key demand in the document was to move the capital of GOSS from Juba to any other city in the south.

Signed Dec. 15 by Swaka Phillip Lado, the official spokesman of the Bari community in Khartoum, the document complained that GoSS is pushing the Bari “forcefully embrace tribalism (rather) than nationalism.”

According to Lado, members of the Bari community met together in Khartoum State at Takamul on December 13, including Bari Chiefs, politicians belonging to various political parties both in government and out of government, university lecturers, women, youth and Bari Elders. They were joined by the chief of the neighbouring Lokoya people, Augustino Tombe.

The Bari claimed that the Government of Southern Sudan had used legal instruments to grab 70% of the entire land mass of Central Equatoria State and participated in the systematic armed robbery of Bari community property such as livestock.

They also pointed to government corruption and its failure to protect Bari citizens from five murders per day in and around Juba. The Bari spokesman said that the community is “being made to resort to force and violence to enforce its rights.”

Juba women's prison relaxes rules

Sudan Tribune website, 21/12/08, JUBA – Young Christian students expressed surprise at being allowed into the women's prison in Juba for the first time to conduct prayer together with imprisoned mothers along with twelve innocent children held with the women.

"Today is our first time to enter Juba central prison of women to share encouraging words of Jesus Christ with our dear mothers whose innocent twelve children are wrongly imprisoned with their mothers," said the students.

There are 51 women in Juba prison in the capital of Southern Sudan, including one condemned, 28 convicted and 22 awaiting sentences. There are three foreigners from Uganda and Kenya and some of the women are pregnant either from since they entered prison or they arrived so.

The women have no uniforms but they are being overworked by the prison authority, according to one of warders who asked not to be named.

Meanwhile there is overcrowding in the men's prison. Juba Central Prison was constructed in 1947 to hold a maximum of 300 inmates but now holds 807, including some orphans and juveniles ranging from seven to twelve years. The children are detained on alleged traffic offences, but there are indications that prison officers simply wanted to take over the children's reformatory centre for officers training while accusing GOSS of failing to release funds for renovation and construction of a centre for juveniles.

Scopas Taban Lolabang, a former combatant SPLA engineer who lost his right arm in the field, urged prisoners to have faith in God for all their needs.

According to the prison chaplain, Pastor Alex Loboka Wota of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, Juba prisoners lack reading materials such as Bibles, while the televisions have no power and the prison lacks an ambulance for transporting sick prisoners. He appeals to well-wishers to donate a motorbike for mobility, allowing him to visit hospitalized prisoners and encourage their families. Pastor Wota also appeals to well-wishers to help in releasing a disabled person who is detained for the last three years without trial. He also registered appreciation to GoSS for allowing the religious community to daily preach the words of God without hindrance.

The St. Teresa Arabic choir brought six bags of sugar to give to prisoners while holy mass was celebrated by Fr. Julious Oling Wani, a former Juba convict who urged prisoners to become changed.

Prisoner Ebale Simon Ohuro, a 32-year old father of four children sentenced to five years on manslaughter charges reportedly faces demands of payment of 3000 Sudanese pounds before his release, allegedly at the instigation of Commissioner Massimino Alam who is a relative of the victims.

Another prisoner, John Juma Tadeyo, a 45-year-old father of ten children and husband to two wives, was sentenced to five years in 2006 together with his three sisters. One died on December 19, 2007 and they were ordered to pay 3000 SDG. They appeal to well-wishers to rescue them and their neglected children.

Currently the Juba prison accommodates prisoners from all ten states of Southern Sudan, hosting 33 condemned, 317 convicted, 50 foreigners, 34 juveniles, 34 people detained as mentally unbalanced and 339 awaiting trial on various allegations including murder.

Sudan affected by huge internet cable damage

(Suna website) The Sudanese company for telecommunications and internet services, Sudatel, stated that internet services, disrupted since 19 December, should be restored within a few days. Internet services in the Middle East and northern Africa, including Sudan, were interrupted by damage to five undersea cables in the Mediterranean linking Sicily and Tunisia. The Sudatel communications group said over 90% per cent of its internet services had been affected.