



Local News Headlines

- President Bashir reiterates rejection of ICC (**Al-Akhbar**)
- ICC decision imminent - SRSG (**Akhbar Al Youm**)
- Government ready to deal with JEM – Obeid (**Al-Akhbar**)
- Abyei not to break the country's back – Rahama (**Al-Rai Al-Aam**)
- SAF redeploys from Kauda, Mendi and Nuba Mountains (**Al-Quwat Al-Musalaha**)
- LRA leader wants peace talks resumed (**Al-Rai Al-Aam**)
- NCP, SPLM agree to postpone elections – NDA official (**Al-Sahafa**)
- NCP, Umma agreement a bouncing cheque –Arman (**Al-Rai Al-Aam**)

Websites/International Headlines

- Sudan president steps up rhetoric against ICC, France (**ST**)
- Sudan army denies link between war games and ICC indictment (**ST**)
- Sudan tries a man accused of spying for the ICC (**ST**)
- JEM denies planning to attack government positions (**Miraya FM**)
- JEM spokesperson plays down statements about imminent attacks (**ST**)
- Sudan VP Kiir to visit USA on 5 January (**ST**)
- South Sudan reinforces troop deployment to secure borders (**ST**)
- Sudan's army to create unit to remove children from its ranks (**ST**)
- UNAMID military component reaches over 60% (**UN News Centre**)
- SC demands that Ugandan rebels sign peace accord (**UN News Centre**)
- Sudan to host regional summit 30 December (**SUNA**)
- Expectations: What's in store for 2009? (**Commentary**)
- Nhial appointment to South Sudan Defence is laced with controversy (**Commentary**)

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Highlights

Local Arabic and English Language Press

President Bashir reiterates rejection of ICC

Al-Akhbar reports President Bashir reiterated yesterday his rejection to deal with the ICC. "We will not hand over even a nail of a Sudanese national," he told a rally in the north Darfur village of Sulinga "They want Ahmed Haroun and Ali Kushayb handed over to save me but we will not hand over even a nail," the President declared, according to **Ray Al-Shaab**. "We will not change our policies to please the west," he said, according to **Al-Intibaha**.

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports the President as saying that he would not hand over a Muslim to be tried by a "Kafir". "I am not afraid of the anti-Sudan powers," he said. He attacked the west, Denmark in particular, citing insult to the Prophet. "The west has become bankrupt and the dollar is being printed like newspapers and is losing value," he added. He said his presence in El Fasher was a message for those who are living in hotels and selling out the country in return for a handful of dollars. He said development and services in Darfur would continue, noting that the signing of the western road contract confirms the government's commitment to implement the recommendation of the People's of Sudan Initiative Forum. The President also inaugurated several projects in north Darfur.

According to **Sudan Radio** broadcast, President Bashir appealed to anyone carrying weapons among the Darfur people to come to their senses, return to the country and join the peace process. Turning to the ICC, the President said Sudan's intellectual resources and beliefs were being targeted, as part of efforts to pressure the country to change its policies. "Sudan will not change its position, rather it will continue to respond by pressing ahead with the implementation of more developmental projects," he declared.

Meanwhile, the GoSS Cabinet decided last Monday to set up a committee to follow up the issue of the ICC indictment of President Bashir. GoSS spokesperson Gabriel Chang said the Cabinet stressed the need to address the ICC crisis and was of the view that the GoNU should engage in a serious discussion with the international community to end the crisis.

ICC decision imminent - SRS

Akhbar Al Youm reports **Al-Gezira Net** as saying that the Special Representative of the Secretary General in the Sudan confirmed that the ICC would take a decision regarding the charges directed against wanted Sudanese including President Omer Bashir very soon.

Ashraf Qazi said, "UN is fully cooperating with the ICC and will accept any decision issued by it because any decision issued by the court should be respected, bearing in mind the consequences of any decision"

Editorially, the paper said that by confirming an imminent ICC decision, the SRS had joined the game of making statements on behalf of the ICC.

Government ready to deal with JEM – Obeid

Al-Akhbar reports the State Minister for Information Kamal Obeid has warned JEM against targeting military positions in the country. "Authorities concerned are ready to deal with any

attack,” he told journalists at the NCP HQs yesterday.

Meantime, MFA spokesperson Ali Al-Sadiq said, “We would like to confirm to all foreign diplomats, international organizations and NGOs and personnel as well as all sections of the Sudanese people that we have the capacity to protect them”

He described a JEM warning as “empty threats,” according to ***Al-Wifaq***. “Security authorities have been alerted, they are monitoring and ready for any eventuality” he added.

Abyei not to break the country’s back - Rahama

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports Abyei Deputy Chief Administrator Rahama Al-Nur as saying claims about the CPA being derailed by the Abyei issue were politically motivated. “Abyei will be a model for peaceful coexistence,” he said. He told the paper that Abyei would not plunge the country into a new war, citing ongoing Abyei Administration efforts to re-knit the social fabric and to prevent any recurrence of last May’s incidents. He said he expected the Abyei investigation committee to submit its report to the Presidency soon.

Meanwhile, ***Al-Wifaq*** also reports that the Ministry of Finance has sanctioned SDG 2 million for Abyei area. Health Minister Tabitha Boutros Shokai pledged at a meeting of the Ministerial Council of Services to provide urgent assistance to area.

SAF redeploys from Kauda, Mendi and Nuba Mountains

Al-Quwat Al-Musalaha reports DG of SAF spokesperson office Lt. Col. Al-Sawarmi Khalid Saad as saying that SAF has withdrawn from Kauda, Mendi and Nuba Mountains. Dismissing claims of an SAF presence in the area, he said that the SPLA retains 22000 soldiers in the area.

LRA leader wants peace talks resumed

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports rebels’ spokesperson David Matusanja said LRA leader Kony escaped an attack launched by regional armies but he is still hopeful of a peace agreement to end the war. Matusanja said Kony asked him to inform the world that he is ready to resume peace negotiations in a neutral country like Tanzania or South Africa under a new mediator.

Meanwhile, ***Al-Intibaha*** reports that the GoSS Cabinet has decided to suspend its mediation role in the Uganda-LRA talks. GoSS chief mediator Riek Machar the SPLA would disarm LRA fighters who cross the border into southern Sudan.

NCP, SPLM agree to postpone elections – NDA official

Al-Sahafa reports NDA official Ali Al-Sayed as saying that there is an undeclared agreement between the NCP and SPLM to postpone elections. He said the two partners are not serious about holding elections on schedule.

NCP, Umma agreement a bouncing cheque – Arman

Al-Rai Al-Aam reports that SPLM official Yassir Arman has described the NCP-Umma Party national reconciliation agreement as a “bouncing cheque”. “SPLM has nothing to do with this agreement,” he told journalists yesterday.

Websites/International News Coverage

Sudan president steps up rhetoric against ICC, France

Sudan Tribune website, 23/12/08, KHARTOUM –President Al-Bashir reiterated his position on

the ICC and accused France in particular of targeting the Sudan. He also rejected any compromise to hand over suspects wanted by the ICC. "If Bashir extradites Haroun and Kushayb he does not deserve to be a president of Sudan and the Sudanese who refuse to see their homeland and people attacked" he told a rally in North Darfur. "We are not prepared to hand over the nail of a Sudanese to the ICC" he added.

Al-Bashir yesterday blasted France specifically saying it has hidden agendas in Sudan. "Those who target Sudan and its president, especially the French and Denmark, have and still are insulting the Prophet because they have no morals. Their plans will fail" He declared their "targeting" of Sudan was intended "to derail the country's Islamic orientation, [to] stop the development projects and take over the vast natural resources that we enjoy".

Sudan army denies link between war games and ICC indictment

Sudan Tribune website, 22/12/08, Khartoum -- The Sudanese army today dismissed speculation that war game manoeuvres over the weekend involving ground and air units are linked to the upcoming ICC decision about President Al-Bashir.

Unidentified sources in Khartoum told the London-published **Al-Sharq Al-Awsat** the military exercise was "precautionary in light of what could happen in case the judges issue an arrest warrant against President Bashir". However, Lt. Col. Abdel-Samee from the army's spokesperson's office told the newspaper that the exercises were being held to celebrate the 54th army anniversary and had "nothing to do with the ICC or anything else". He noted that they had been scheduled for August 14th but were postponed to January 15th. The exercises come amidst warnings by Khartoum that Darfur JEM is preparing a new attack on the capital.

Sudan tries a man accused of spying for the ICC

Sudan Tribune website, 22/12/08, Khartoum -- A Sudanese man appeared in court today in Khartoum North accused of collecting some documents on a minister suspected of Darfur crimes and passing them to the ICC. Mohamed Alsary Ibrahim is the first person to be prosecuted for cooperating with the ICC. He faces the death penalty if found guilty.

An army intelligence officer, Omar Abdel Faraj, who testified against Ibrahim, told the judges that the suspect had offered money to obtain documents incriminating the State Minister for Humanitarians Affairs Ahmed Haroun. The security officer said Ibrahim tried to solicit information about special police in Darfur, men trained and paid by the government and supervised by the former state minister of Interior.

The security officer, Faraj, accused Ibrahim of approaching an officer in Sudan's Popular Police Force in June and asked his help to get hold of documents on training camps run by the organization in Darfur. He said Faraj had been in contact with a Jordanian and three Sudanese Americans, including a cousin, who were allegedly trying to help him pass the secrets to the ICC. He added that they found evidence that Ibrahim had emailed a number of documents to Sudanese American contacts.

Ibrahim faces seven charges under Sudanese criminal law including working to overthrow the constitutional government, waging war against the state, dealing with an enemy country, spying and passing on confidential military documents.

JEM denies planning to attack government positions

Radio Miraya, Juba, 23/12/08 – JEM refuted reports that it was preparing to attack government positions. External relations secretary Dr Harun Abd-al-Hamid told **Miraya FM** that the press release attributed to the JEM Deputy leader stated that the movement was ready to respond to

any attack by the Armed Forces on its positions in Darfur. He added that the government continued to violate the cease-fire it announced.

JEM spokesperson plays down statements about imminent attacks

Sudan Tribune website, 22/12/08, London – JEM's Spokesperson played down the importance of statements by one of his movement's officials about imminent attacks on the Sudanese government.

Two statements received by email and published on the official website of the rebel movement warned about imminent attacks on the positions of the Sudanese government in the country and called on the members of the army and regular forces to defect and join JEM. The statements were signed by JEM's deputy general commander, Suleiman Sandal, and the secretary of political affairs, Ahmed Tugud.

However, Ahmed Hussein Adam played down the statements, saying they were intended to alert Sudanese to avoid zones of conflict.

He stressed that Sandal's statement "does not mean that there is an imminent attack in any case." He also pointed out that similar statements had been issued several months ago.

The official spokesperson condemned attempts by the Sudanese government to tarnish the image of the movement by attributing attacks against civilians to the JEM. He further reiterated the adherence of his movement to the principles of international humanitarian law.

As to Ahmed Tugud's statement, Adam said it sought to invite members of the Sudanese army to stay away from the unnecessary war in Darfur and also to remind them that President Bashir wants to use them as shield in a battle that does not concern them.

The rebel spokesperson said, "We will cooperate with the international and regional communities and responsible political forces for the completion of a comprehensive peace in Sudan that resolves the Darfur conflict and lays the ground for the democratization of the country." He also stressed JEM's regular contacts with joint UN-African Union mediator Djibril Bassolé to help efforts for a "just peace" in Darfur.

Kiir to visit USA on 5 January

Sudan Tribune website, 23/12/08, WASHINGTON — FVP Kiir is to visit the U.S. 5-7 January to meet outgoing President George W. Bush, Vice-President Cheney and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He may also meet with President-elect Barack Obama and his aides.

"America is our friend and we very much need our strong collaborative working arrangement with the U.S. to continue if the war in Darfur is ever to end, and if the CPA and its goal of democratic transformation in Sudan is to be fulfilled. That is why I am coming to Washington," Kiir said.

"The political realities inside Sudan are that the crisis in Darfur drags on, the CPA is being undermined by Khartoum and is at serious risk and that Sudan's President Omar Beshir is the only sitting President to face charges by the ICC in the Hague," said the GoSS Mission in Washington.

"Khartoum's actions risk Sudan getting worse before it gets better," said the statement, signed by Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, Head of Mission. He pointed out that SPLM and GoSS "pursued a series of initiatives to help bring peace to Darfur," noting that

President Kiir "continued to offer 10,000 SPLA soldiers as peacekeepers in Darfur, an offer Khartoum continues to reject."

Kiir is also expected to meet Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon about the current situation in Sudan, touching on CPA implementation, Darfur and the ICC.

South Sudan reinforces troop deployment to secure borders

Sudan Tribune website, 23/12/08, JUBA – GoSS has resolved to close and secure its borders and major supply routes leading to Kenya, Uganda and DR Congo as the regional crisis with LRA intensifies. Ugandan government forces have been carrying out both air and ground attacks on the rebel bases in north-eastern DR Congo since mid-December.

Minister of Information and Broadcasting, official GoSS Spokesman Gabriel Changson Chang, told press that Monday's CoSS Council of Minister's meeting also resolved to temporarily suspend mediation efforts between the government of Uganda and the LRA until the two parties are ready to return to peace table and sign the peace agreement.

Some rebels were reported to have entered Southern Sudan territory last week accused them of committing atrocities. SPLA forces are to be deployed at the three borders and along all major supply routes to and from Southern Sudan to protect the civil population and keep trade uninterrupted.

Minister Chang said the Council of Ministers had also discussed the [ICC's] potential issuance of arrest warrant on the President of the Republic, Omer Hassan al-Bashir, and had urged the GNU to cooperate with the international community on the issue.

Sudan's army to create unit to remove children from its ranks

Sudan Tribune website, 23/12/08, KHARTOUM — On the same day that a senior UN official said there are 6,000 child soldiers in Darfur, SAF on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with UNICEF to create a Child Rights Unit in the SAF to enforce the 2007 Sudan Armed Forces Act, which sets 18 as the minimum age for armed forces recruitment.

Ted Chaiban, the outgoing head of UNICEF in Sudan, asserted that the national army, allied militias, the police and Darfur's Central Reserve Police all used child soldiers. "An 11-year-old in this sort of situation basically loses their childhood. It dehumanizes them," he said.

The new Child Rights Unit will help SAF educate personnel about Sudan's child protection laws. UNICEF will fund training and provide technical support to the unit.

Chaiban also said that all of Darfur's main rebel groups used children. Of the estimated 8000 child soldiers in the Sudan, "we estimated that 6,000 are in Darfur," He cited figures Sunday that 2.3 million children have been affected by the conflict in Darfur.

Rights groups and UN officials have repeatedly leveled accusations against JEM in particular for recruiting child soldiers, a charge it vehemently denies, insisting it abides by international legal norms.

The MOU pact was also signed by the National Council for Child Welfare (NCCW). According to a UNICEF statement it "is the outcome of an initial and successful cooperation between UNICEF, NCCW and SAF which began in early 2008 with the training of 180 SAF officers in the Darfur states and in Khartoum State."

UNAMID military component reaches over 60%

UN News Centre, 23/12/08 - UNAMID received an additional 45 troops today, bringing the number of military staff to 12,242 – just over 60% of the total military component of the force. However, this is still far short of the 26,000 uniformed personnel, including police, expected at full deployment.

In his latest report on UNAMID, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote that fighting on the western flank of Sudan “and displacement continue, humanitarian operations are at risk, clashes between the parties occur with regrettable regularity and the parties have not reached a negotiated peace agreement.” In this environment, he added, the peacekeeping mission is hampered by a severely under-deployed force.

The 45 members of the Ethiopian Medium Transport Company that arrived in West Darfur will primarily support the distribution of cargo between sector logistics bases, the movement of bulk cargo, including water and fuel tankers, and provide transport capabilities. The remaining 80 personnel are expected to arrive later this week.

Security Council demands Ugandan rebels sign peace accord

UN News Service, 22/12/08 -- The UN Security Council on Monday strongly condemned recent attacks by the rebel Ugandan LRA in the DRC and Southern Sudan, and demanded that it immediately sign a previously negotiated peace accord.

A presidential statement, read out by Ambassador Nevin Jurica of Croatia, holder of this month's rotating presidency, condemned the repeated failure of LRA leader Joseph Kony to sign the Final Peace Agreement negotiated between the Government of Uganda and LRA.

It recalled that the ICC had issued arrest warrants for “certain LRA leaders” on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape and the enlistment of children through abduction. “The Council reiterates its deep concern at the long-running and brutal insurgency by the LRA, which has caused the death, abduction and displacement of thousands of innocent civilians in Uganda, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” the statement said. “It demands that the LRA cease its recruitment and use of children and that it release immediately all women, children and other non-combatants.”

Noting that “it attaches vital importance to promoting justice and the rule of law, including respect for human rights, as an indispensable element for lasting peace,” the Council reaffirmed that “ending impunity is essential for a society recovering from conflict to come to terms with past abuses committed against civilians and to prevent their recurrence.”

It called on the LRA to sign the peace accord immediately and begin the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to ensure a peaceful, political solution to the 21-year-long conflict.

The Council welcomed the re-establishment of peace and security in northern Uganda, which has seen the LRA disperse into Southern Sudan and eastern DRC, and called on the Ugandan Government to accelerate reconciliation, recovery and development in the north by disbursing anticipated financing without delay.

Last week the Council voiced support for a joint military operation launched by the DRC, Uganda and Southern Sudan to flush the LRA out of a remote national park in north-eastern DRC....

Sudan to host regional summit 30 December

Suna website, 23/12/08, Khartoum -- The Sana'a Cooperation Group will hold a summit in Khartoum on 30 December. The Ministerial Council will meet on 29 December, preceded by a

meeting of experts on 27-28 December. Leaders of Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti will attend.

They will review the implementation of recent agreements between the Transitional Government and Djibouti-based Islamist opposition group as well as the overall political and security situation in the area, including the piracy threat to navigation in the Red Sea and the situation in Somalia.

COMMENTARIES

Expectations: What's in store for 2009?

International Herald Tribune, Commentary -- Herald Tribune contacted a spectrum of smart people with three questions about what's in store in 2009:

What do you expect?
What do you hope for?
What do you fear?

BAN KI MOON United Nations secretary general

I expect a new era of multilateralism. From my conversations with Barack Obama, I know that we can look forward to a new era of global cooperation. We will see a new and close partnership between the United States and the United Nations. With all nations working together, we will restore the global economy to health, whatever hardships might come. And I believe that we will do so in a spirit of fairness and solidarity. We will not retreat from our commitments to fight poverty and disease. We will defend the right of the poorest nations to grow and share in a renewed and truly global prosperity.

Let us be practical and put aside fanciful hopes for what might be, and focus on what must be. This will be the year of climate change, the one truly existential threat to the planet. We have 12 short months to Copenhagen, where world leaders will gather to hammer out a comprehensive deal to curb global warming. Amid our financial troubles, some ask whether we can afford to tackle climate change. The real question is: How can we afford not to? I hope to send a global climate change treaty to the world's governments - and see it ratified, by the U.S. Senate, among others, by the end of 2010.

Like Roosevelt, I believe the only thing to fear is fear itself. If we give in to fear - if we lose our political will and long-term perspective - we will see a cascading series of crises, spilling from nation to nation. If we turn inward, we will lose chances to make a difference in places like Ivory Coast or Bangladesh, both trying to organize democratic elections, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where war and peace are so delicately balanced. If we turn inward or embrace protectionism, trade and global growth will suffer. If we turn inward, we will miss generational opportunities. This coming year, we have a chance to pick up where Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan left off so many years ago, a hair's breadth away from abolishing nuclear weapons. We must not let fear cloud our vision of the future.

Nhial appointment to South Sudan Defence is laced with controversy

Sudan Tribune website, (Extracts from commentary by Isaiah Abraham), 23/12/08 – GoSS President Gen. Salva Kiir Mayardit has confounded friends and foes one more time and this time, it's in a big way. Mr. President has made one of his usual belated decisions to appoint Gen. Nhial Deng Nhial one of the bright leaders of South Sudan to become the next second

Southern Defence Minister, after the ill fated plane killed Gen. Dominic Dim Deng in May this year. This is a [coveted] covetous ministry each senior member or regions jostle to convert. ...

There are troubles in the army especially issues to do with reorganization and financial management as well as training. A new Defence Minister will have a lot to do to ensure that our army meets the challenges of a true conventional army. In the face of internal and external challenges, the people of Southern Sudan shall watch closely the man in charge of our security; a huge force bloated at the top -- many generals and officers with less training and [an] unscreened large army. How is Gen. Nhial going to make changes direly needed by the army right now is another thing, time will tell. Does he have enough military skills and even character to reign over wild Generals who are in hurry with their lives, busy buying companies and houses abroad and inside using 40% army budget? There are rigorous issues in that army that put question to this assignment given Mr. Nhial absence from uniform. We shall wait and see...

Gen. Nhial's appointment back to the cabinet is big news to the people of Southern Sudan. Gen. Nhial is an upshot of the liberation struggle and has what it takes to lead Southern Sudan not just a ministry. He talks sense and butter, but also walks his talks. He has tireless[ly] stood to ensure that the rights of his people are guaranteed and it came to pass. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is one of his achievements. [He] also ...managed to bridge negative perception or ideological differences between the USA and the SPLM while serving as [SPLM's] foreign chief, when [SPLM] was accused of being a communist movement. Now that his resume has been topped up with the defence portfolio, who shall stop this man from going up to the top after Gen. Kiir and Gen. Dr. Machar retire? He is now a breath away from power, is he going to play it fair and focus or would he throw it away when untouchable generals near him there start to choke his plans, the same [way the] late Dr. Justice did.... Make no mistake, Gen. Nhial might not sack anyone but he will use his legal skills and intellectual weights to frustrate our corrupt generals.

.... Gen. Oyai Deng Ajak (Southern Sudan Chief of Staff) did start an excellent deployment criterion (mixture of tribes in the army); it must be followed religiously. Soldiers are soldiers; they belong to no group or tribe: their mixture is critical and it has to go like that! I saw my younger cousin John Loryam Lokwar coming from Aweil this week speaking a bit of Dinka and was surprised how quickly that boy changed. By then he (we) thought these people are 'animals'....

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