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(By Public Information Office)

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Highlights

UN/ Agencies

Government Calls on UN and Donors to Extend Material and Technical Support for Disarmament, Demobilization and Integration Programme (SUNA)

Khartoum, Feb. 17 (SUNA) - The government has called on the United Nations and donors to extend material and technical support for success of the programme for disarmament, demobilization and integration in Sudan. The call was expressed Sunday by the Commissioner for Disarmament, Demobilization and Integration in North Sudan, Dr. Sulaf-Eddin Salih, in a press statement after the inaugural sitting of the National Council for Demobilization and Re-integration. The council's meeting was chaired by the Minister at the Presidency of the Republic, Gen. Bakri Hassan Salih, in the presence of the representative of the UN Secretary General to Sudan, the Country Director of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UNICEF Country Director and the Ambassadors of Japan, Britain and the European Union. Dr. Salih said that the Minister at the Presidency of the Republic has assured the government concern with implementation of the programme for disarmament, demobilization and integration. He said that the minister appreciated the role of the UN and the donors in support of the programme. He indicated that the National Council for Demobilization and Re-Integration will discuss the performance of the two Commissions for Demobilization and Re-Integration in North and South Sudan in the past period, in addition to the programmes for the year 2008. Dr. Salih said that the UN is a major partner in implementation of the demobilization and integration programme. Meanwhile, the representative of the UN Secretary General to Sudan affirmed at the meeting the organization's support to the national leadership of the programme for disarmament, demobilization and integration in Sudan. He said that implementation of the programme is necessary to guarantee permanent peace in the country. MO/MO

UN assures its support for disarmament programme in Sudan (Sudan Vision)

UN has proclaimed its support to the government of Sudan in the field of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Deputy of Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary- General for Sudan Taye-Brook Zerihoun said after his meeting Monday with the Minister at the Presidency of the Republic,

Gen. Bakri Hassan Salih, that the United Nations is ready to cooperate with Sudan and the National Unity Government in implementing the re-integration and disarmament programmes that were approved by the National Council for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.

In a press statement after the meeting, the UN official said that they discussed the general situation on implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the issue of demobilization and re-integration programmes, adding that he assured the UN readiness to cooperate with Sudan in these fields.

Zerihoun said that the donors' community has shown readiness to extend funding for implementation of these approved programmes in a manner that would be the basis for cooperation between the UN and the National Unity Government.

He appreciated the return of the Ministers of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to work in the framework of the National Unity Government, indicating that the two partners have shown keenness and political will to surpass challenges. The UN senior official said that there are still pending challenges facing the two parties, but the prevalent political will among them would enable them to overcome these challenges.

Meanwhile, representative of North Sudan for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, Dr. Sulaf Eldeen Salih said that he has appreciated the meeting between the Minister at the Presidency of the Republic and the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Sudan, stating that the UN official was fully informed about the disarmament and reintegration programmes.

Salih said that the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General was given a copy of the national disarmament plan, which was prepared through cooperation between the representatives of the North and the South and the UN mission in Sudan.

He said that the Minister at the Presidency of the Republic affirmed at the meeting the full readiness of Sudan Government to cooperate with the United Nations in implementation of the programmes.

He said that the meeting also tackled the progressing relations between Sudan and the United Nations and stressed the necessity of funding and support to guarantee the continuity of peace.

GoNU (CPA, DPA, ESPA)

President Al-Bashir appreciates Japan's development assistance (SUNA)

Khartoum, Feb. 17 (SUNA) - President of the Republic, Field Marshal Omer Al-Bashir, Sunday expressed Sudan's appreciation to the development assistance being extended by Japan to the Sudan in all economic and humanitarian domains. This came when the President of the Republic received at the Republican Palace Sunday the President of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Ms. Sadako Ogata, who briefed him on the projects being implemented by JICA in Sudan as well as the prospective plan of its office in Khartoum. Meanwhile, the President of JICA affirmed in a statement to SUNA following the meeting keenness of Japan to consolidate peace and development in Sudan. Minister of International Cooperation, Dr. Al-Tigani Salih Fedail, commended the effective contribution of Japan in the implementation of development projects in Sudan, referring to Japan's contribution in Oslo Conference for donors besides its contributions in the bilateral cooperation programmes in domains of development, health, education and infrastructures. He also enumerated the projects being implemented by JICA in Kassala and Juba besides rehabilitation of Ibn Sina Hospital besides vocational training and development of human resources. MF/ BT

Consultative Council on Human rights says no political detainees in country

(Al-Rai Alaam)-The Rapporteur of the Consultative Council on Human Rights Dr. Abdulmoneim Osman said that the council has been revising, in collaboration with the UN, some articles on the criminal code, which are claimed to violating human rights.

He denied existence of defects on the Sudanese laws, indicating that four conventions, among them Anti Torture and Protection of Expatriates Labor, were tabled before the Cabinet for endorsement.

Osman noted that the draft of the National Security Law would be discussed on by concerned authorities prior to submission to the National Assembly.

He stressed that the Council would open the prisons for the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights during her up-coming visit, pointing out to the mechanism between Sudan and the European Union to ensure non torture of the detainees.

Presidency meeting adjourned due to travel of FVP Kiir

(**Alsudani AlRai AlAam**)-The Presidency meeting, scheduled to meet Sunday, was postponed due to the travel of Kiir to Southern Sudan to attend the funeral ceremonies of late Governor of West Equatoria State, said GoSS Cabinet Affairs Minister Dr. Luka Biiong.

However, the meeting would had been devoted to review the means of implementing Abyei Protocol and the clashes recently occurred in the area of ethnical interaction.

GoSS hints that SPLA may intervene to protect Abyei people

(**AlSahafa**) Government of Southern Sudan hinted that SPLA might intervene to retaliate to any attack targeting the people of Abyei after the Meseriya gave them an ultimatum, till Saturday, to hand over the administration of the area to the a new administration set up by Mohamed Omer

Al-Ansari who has told AlSahafi that he would arrive in Khartoum today aboard special plane for consultations with security authorities, he declined to reveal.

GoSS Presidency Minister Luka Biong, said yesterday that SPLM/A and GoSS are responsible for the safety of any citizen in Abyei, whether Meseriya or Dink Nygok, adding that GoSS would react to any attack on any Abyei ethnic group, and accused what he described as 'NCP elements' of seeking to escalate the situation in the area.

NCRC fails to meet to resolve on elections bill

(AlSudani)The National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC) failed to convene Sunday to approve the pending items on the draft Electoral Bill due to the absence of the NCP-SPLM from the meeting.

The NCRC notified those, who attended other than the NCP and SPLM members, that the meeting was postponed for next Saturday.

Observers described the postponement of the meeting as "procrastination" on the part of the NCP.

Eight killed, injured in tribal clashes between Miseriya and Dajo in Lagawa

(AlKhartoum)Three persons were killed and five others injured in armed clashes between some Dajo and Meseriya tribal sons in Lagawa, South Kordofan State.

Two persons killed from the Meseriya while one killed on the part of the Dajo in attacked launched by the Dajo on the Meseriya. The Meseriya were attacked while providing water to their animals from boreholes in Lagawa. Five injured persons were hospitalized in Lagawa, four from the Meseriya and one from the Dajo.

Emir Masri of the Enainat said the situation was under the control of the police and the problem is solved. He said the reasons for the problem were not clear but sources of Al-khartoum learned that a Dajo man fired in the air and the Dajo tribe thought they were fired at by the Arabs and consequently attacked the Meseriya even before investigation.

Human Rights Council seeks clarification on retrial of child traffickers (Sudan Vision)

The consultative council of human rights in Sudan has sought information from the French ambassador in Khartoum about retrial of those accused of trafficking children in Darfur.

The ambassador has denied repeating the trial which took place in Chad. Human rights council rapporteur, Dr. Abdelmoniem Osman Taha stated that Sudan has requested the European group to support procedures of trying offenders of children trafficking.

In the press conference he held yesterday, Dr. Taha disclosed the result of meeting between Sudan and EU with regard to human rights in Sudan which was held last week. He affirmed the importance of continuity of Sudanese European dialogue.

The Human rights council rapporteur said that the meeting tackled many issues such as human rights during this year and the support that can be offered by the European group.

He praised the support of the Swiss government and mentioned that the Swiss project would be implemented within this year.

Taha also disclosed that the meeting that took place between Sudan and the European group was to form a joint mechanism to monitor human rights violations such as tortures of political prisoners. He denied the existence of political detainees in Sudan's prisons.

He added that the council discussed a number of issues with EU such as violence against women, the role that can be played by UNMIS in North Sudan and UNAMID in Darfur. The meeting also discussed the difficulties faced by human rights observers.

Darfur IDPs organize public demonstrations against Darfur-Darfur Dialogue (AlKhartoum)

IDPs in Al-Seraif, Attash and Kalma camps in Nyala (South Darfur) and Abu Shoak camp in El Fasher (North Darfur) staged demonstrations yesterday against the start of Darfur-Darfur Dialogue Consultation (DDDC). They delivered memos of protest to UNAMID.

Some demonstrators said DDDC should be held after a peace agreement is reached with non-DPA signatories and demanded its postponement until such deal is signed.

IDPs representatives have called upon the International Community not to fund convening of such dialogue, which they described as 'failure'.

DDR coordination council starts meetings (Khartoum Monitor)

a meeting of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Coordination Council kicked off yesterday at the Republican Palace in the presence of the United Nations (UN) representative, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Representative, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Country Representative and Ambassadors of Britain, Japan and the European Union (EU).

Minister of the Presidency, Maj. Gen. Bakri Hassan Salih said his government appreciates the DDR Programme and supports it politically and financially along with the role to be played by the UN and donor nations. He urged the International Community to provide financial and technical support to the programme.

Representative of the UN Secretary General thanked the government for the invitation to the meeting and reiterated commitment along with donors to provide all that it takes to the programme which will contribute to the sustainability of peace. The UN supported the programme from the onset because it is part of the peace agreement, and by extension, part of the programme implementation he added.

Deputy of the UN Representative said the UN supports the programme and it will carry on with dialogue over thorny issues. The role of the UN in the DDR programme focuses on support to demobilization and reintegration. "We know that is the most difficult part of the job as it needs tremendous efforts", he added.

Federal, South Sudan transports ministers discuss roads construction (ST)

February 17, 2008 (KHARTOUM) — The Federal Ministry of Transport, Roads and Bridges agreed with the Ministry of Transport and Roads of southern Sudan government to expedite the implementation of development projects in the south in particular the completion of the Road of Peace, which links the southern states with the North.

Philip Thon Leek, the Minister of Transport, Roads and Bridges, said following his return from Juba that he had discussed with GoSS Minister of Transport and Roads, David Deng Athorbei, during his visit, how to implement joint projects between the two ministries.

The federal minister was accompanied by directors of departments in the Ministry of Transport and Roads.

Thon said he agreed with Athorbei to set up a coordination committee between the two ministries to enforce all projects in the war affected areas. Also they tackled the urgency of development and the completion of railway line Babanusa - Wau and Road of Peace project linking Renk - Malakal besides the revitalization of the river traffic.

The minister said that his visit was an opportunity to follow up what is happening in the road sector in the South as well as revitalization of cooperation and coordination between the two ministries in order to serve the national interests.

(ST)

Japan mulls peacekeeping mission in southern Sudan (ST)

February 17, 2008 (TOKYO) — Japan's government is considering sending peacekeeping troops to southern Sudan to help implement a 2005 peace deal that ended more than two decades of war, a report said Saturday.

But the possible mission would not join the UN-African Union force operating separately to stop the bloodshed in Darfur in the west, the mass-circulation Yomiuri Shimbun said without naming sources.

Japanese troops would be part of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), which is coordinating UN activities in the country, for the implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended a 21-year civil war, it said.

Their tasks would include humanitarian assistance, protection of human rights and could also involve tasks such as removing landmines, the report said. It did not mention the size of the possible Japanese mission.

The United Nations says the war killed more than two million people, uprooted four million and made 600,000 flee the country.

The Yomiuri said Tokyo was looking to raise its profile in international security as it prepares to host a summit of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised nations in July.

Japan is the only G8 country that does not contribute troops to the UNMIS.

The government was unavailable for comment on the report Saturday.

The Yomiuri said the government has judged it could send troops to Sudan under the nation's peacekeeping law, given that an accord has already been signed there.

In 2003 then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi took the landmark step of sending troops to Iraq under a special law, the first time since World War II that Japan has deployed troops to a country where fighting was under way.

Koizumi withdrew the 600-strong troops before leaving office in 2006 but maintained the Kuwait-based air mission, which flies goods and supplies into the war-torn country.

(AFP)

Director of Central Bureau of Statistics announces beginning of actual preparations for 5th population census (SUNA)

Khartoum, Feb. 17 (SUNA) - General Director of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Dr. Yasin Al-Haj Abedin, announced start of actual preparations for the 5th national population census following completion of preliminary surveys in Northern and Southern Sudan and issuance of the republican decree No. 44 for the year 2008 setting 15 -30 April for conducting the census in the country. Dr. Abedin said in an interview with SUNA that all the technical equipment, forms, scanners, vehicles, etc are available and will be distributed to the states in the coming days. He explained that the counters will be provided with maps including the targeted houses and dwellings which range between 120 -150 house for each one of the 60,000 counters in the north and 12,000 counters in the south. Dr. Abedin revealed existence of special system for the nomads that can cope with their movements in the North and South. He pointed out that the Ministry of Finance and National Economy is ready to finance the coming stage by 22 million dollars, 60% for the north and 40% for the south. MF/BT

Newly-appointed Federal Ministers Take Oath of Office before President of the Republic (SUNA)

Khartoum, Feb. 17 (SUNA) - The newly-appointed eight federal ministers took oath of office before President of the Republic Field Marshal Omer Al- Bashir at the Republican Palace Sunday in the presence of Chief Justice Jalal-Eddin Mohamed Osman. Addressing the swearing-in ceremony, President Al-Bashir affirmed importance of the current stage and the challenges the country is now facing in support of peace, stability and development. Meanwhile, Minister of Animal and Fish Resources, Mohamed Ahmed Al-Tahir Abu Kalabeesh expressed in press statement his appreciation and that of his colleagues to the confidence given to them by the President of the Republic and the political leadership to assume the responsibility. President Al-Bashir issued a republican decree last Thursday appointing ministers at the Government of National Unity as follows: Lt. Gen. (engineer) Abdul-Rahman Saeed as Minister of Federal Government, Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid as Minister of Interior, Abdul-Basit Salih Sabdarat as Minister of Justice, Dr. Awad Ahmed Al-Jaz as Minister of Finance, Al-Zubair Ahmed Al-Hassan as Minister of Energy, Prof. Al-Zubair Bashir Taha as Minister of Agriculture, Mohamed Ahmed Al-Tahir Abu-Kalabish as Minister of Animal and Fish Resources and Prof. Ibrahim Ahmed Omer as the Minister of Science and Technology. BH/BT

GoSS

Japan contribute to South Sudan development (ST)

February 17, 2008 (JUBA) — Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is preparing to assist development in southern Sudan after upgrading its assessment of security in the region, the organisation's president said on Sunday.

The JICA President who is visiting Sudan nowadays met with the Sudanese president Omer Al-Bashir today in Khartoum to brief him on the projects being implemented by JICA in Sudan as well as its prospective plan to consolidate peace and development in Sudan.

"We are very happy to see JICA involved in the reconstruction of southern Sudan," Sadako Ogata, head of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, said in the southern capital Juba.

Last month, the aid agency's security team analysed the situation in the south at the invitation of ex-rebels now incorporated into a national unity government in Sudan.

"They wanted to be sure that local security was good for our staff to work here, and they found it satisfactory," said Ogata, who flew to the south after talks in Khartoum with government and UN officials.

Her visit comes one day after a Japanese newspaper reported that Tokyo is mulling sending peacekeeping troops to southern Sudan under a UN umbrella to help implement a 2005 peace deal that ended more than two decades of war.

Southern Sudan officials have welcomed the possibility.

"Japan, being an influential member of the United Nations, can play a role," said southern Sudan Regional Cooperation Minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin.

The JICA has said it is considering projects in health and education.

Japan, the world's second-largest economy, has pledged 150 million dollars through the UN or other relief bodies, for Darfur or southern Sudan. The security clearance would put Tokyo on course to implement its own projects.

Ogata has committed the JICA to expanding its assistance to Africa and the organisation's project budget for the continent has increased from 15.5 to 22 percent, or 25.4 billion yen (200 million dollars).

Asian countries are major players in Sudan, with China the country's biggest foreign investor, arms supplier and oil customer. Malaysia is another key trading partner.

The Federal Minister of International Cooperation, Al-Tigani Salih Fedail, commended the effective contribution of Japan in the implementation of development projects in

Sudan, referring to Japan's contribution in Oslo Conference for donors besides its contributions in the bilateral cooperation programmes in domains of development, health, education and infrastructures.

He also enumerated the projects being implemented by JICA in Kassala and Juba besides rehabilitation of Ibn Sina Hospital besides vocational training and development of human resources.

(ST)

Darfur

"Hybrids" take back night in dangerous Darfur camps

February 17, 2008 (KRINDING CAMP) — The soothing tones of West Indian reggae stopped abruptly and the U.N.-African Union peacekeepers left their vehicles to face a machine gun pointed at them by a Sudanese soldier crouched in a trench.

But as more white peacekeeping vehicles emerged from the darkness at the army checkpoint outside West Darfur's capital el-Geneina the Sudanese soldiers, heads wrapped in cloth to shield them from the harsh sandy wind, broke into smiles and friendly greetings.

The "hybrids", as the new United Nations-AU force of 9,000 is called in Darfur, were on night patrol — an initiative by the peacekeepers' newly energized leadership which some count as their first success.

The patrols began after U.N.-AU troops, known as UNAMID, took over peacekeeping in Darfur from AU forces on December 31. They were designed to tackle one of the most entrenched problems in Sudan's violent west.

Armed men had roamed the camps at night with near impunity while thousands of displaced Darfuris cowered in the dark, too afraid to talk for fear they would be discovered by the gangs who have raped, murdered and pillaged their way through the civilian population for five years.

"We are always hearing shooting and men come in and attack us," said Youssef Abdel Rahman, a leader at the Krinding Camp outside el-Geneina town.

But in the few weeks since the hybrid forces began regular night patrols around the camp, there has not been a single live fire incident and U.N.-AU troops do not generally encounter armed men, who locals call Janjaweed, along the way.

"If you're a criminal you don't stick around to talk," said Nigerian A.A. Adeyemo, a UNAMID patrol leader.

Abdel Rahman said the sound of gunfire left with them.

"Now it's not there anymore. That improvement has been since the UNAMID has come. ... Now we can sleep better," he added.

HUGE EXPECTATIONS

The 2.5 million Darfuris driven from their homes since mostly non-Arab rebels took up arms in early 2003 have huge expectations that the joint U.N.-AU force will protect them from attacks in a way 7,000 AU forces were not able to alone.

The AU had lacked the manpower and equipment to protect civilians caught in the crossfire of the conflict pitting the rebels against the government and feared Janjaweed militias, and which has grown worse over the years as splinter groups turned into opportunistic bandits.

It has not been an easy road for the U.N.-AU mission so far. Pledges for equipment and troops have been slow in coming — at the moment only about 9,000 of an expected force of 26,000 is on the ground in Darfur.

The government in Khartoum has been accused of imposing difficult restrictions on UNAMID.

It had been reluctant to allow the night patrols and more than once, nervous Sudanese at army check points have almost opened fire on the peacekeepers mistaking them for rebels in the most militarily active part of Darfur, officers said.

Adeyemo said the first time UNAMID went out they took two Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) for high security and also because they made so much noise the Sudanese army would know who was coming and not open fire.

But while the patrols have their tense moments, there is also time for relaxation. Soldiers in one vehicle played reggae and brought bread and other food to Darfuris in the camps surviving on U.N. rations like wheat, sugar and oil.

"OUR BROTHERS"

Driving through the deep sandy tracks two vehicles got stuck in a dry river bed and an APC had to drag them out. Meanwhile men on horseback and a jeep full of heavily armed men in mufti raced past.

"We love you so much for having come — you are our brothers," said Mohamed Abakr, a Darfuri who came to talk to the soldiers as they pushed their vehicle out of the sand.

The drivers know their way well, picking along through the shrub-covered terrain in the pitch black, stopping at army checkpoints and surprising men hanging around in the streets.

They even know which tiny clay hut down which narrow alley houses the local leaders who wake up to greet the soldiers.

"The hybrid coming to see us at night is very good," said Ismail Ali, a senior tribal leader of Ardadata Camp outside el-Geneina.

"There are not many problems as there were before. It's going well now."

But he said with concern, the 9,000 troops were not enough to protect Darfuris so they could go back to the villages and farms they left during the years of fighting.

"Nine-thousand is too little," he said. "Here we have 9,000 Janjaweed and until now the government is still arming them. ... These Janjaweed are roaming around outside like grains of sand - there are so many."

(Reuters)

Rebels say inter Darfur dialogue only valid after peace (ST)

February 17, 2008 (LONDON) – A Darfur rebel group has denounced the launch of Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultations (DDDC) in the South Darfur State saying such process should be conducted following the conclusion of a lasting peace deal.

The governor of South Darfur on February 17 attended a ceremony organized by the State Radio and TV Corporation to mark the launch of the DDDC process in the State, Radio Nyala reported.

Ahmed Hussein Adam, the spokesperson of the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) said that according to the Declaration of Principles agreed with the rebel movements in Abuja, the DDDC has to be organised by Darfur political and civil forces without any interference from the central government.

"Such manipulation aims at the destruction of the social fabric of Darfur. What is happening now is a kind of hijacking" Ahmed said.

The rebel spokesperson further asserted that JEM was the instigator of the idea of DDDC, adding that this process has to be conducted after the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between the government and the rebel movements in Darfur.

"According to us this DDDC can only be held in a healthy environment following the end of hostilities and violence because it means to give the ownership of the peace agreement to all the people of Darfur including the different, political, tribal and social forces but not in this acrobatic way." He underlined.

Ahmed described the current process as "a distortion of the DDDC and an abortion to the rational behind the idea". He further accused the National Congress Party of hijacking the inter Darfuris dialogue process.

"The DDDC at this stage is a superficial operation far from the people and used by Khartoum as instrument to hit the social fabric because the government does not want the unity of Darfur people." He said.

Ahmed urged the African officials in charge with the DDDC to assign the money allocated to this operation to something else useful for Darfur people because at this stage it would be a useless expenditure.

(ST)

Miscellaneous

Chad rebels say divergence over leadership behind assault failure (ST)

February 17, 2008 (NDJAMENA) — Chad's rebel groups have acknowledged that the failure of their assault on the capital is largely due to their divergence over the who would be the head of state vowing to learn the lessons of their defeat and select a common leader in their fight against President Idriss Deby Itno.

The principle reason for the failure of rebel attack against the presidential palace was the last minute divergence among them on who will be proclaimed president of the state. Mahamat Nouri, Goran ethnic group, and Tom Erdimi, a Zagawah were the two contenders for the presidency.

"We have decided not to return to Ndjamenah without having a single leadership," Abderaman Koulamallah, a spokesperson for the rebel alliance, said on Friday. He further said a commission had now been set up comprising the leading members of the groups to "decide on a consensus leader as quickly as possible."

Assessing the causes of their rout in Ndjamenah two weeks ago, the groups say they now recognise the need for a single leadership — despite the expected difficulties of uniting their fractious movements behind one.

Under pressure from Sudan, which allegedly arms them, the groups had previously agreed to form a military alliance under a joint command, but without a common leader.

"We need to agree to a political union," said General Mahamat Nouri, leader of one of the rebel groups, the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD), who is believed to be eyeing the leadership post.

The rebel alliance seized large chunks of Ndjamenah and surrounded Deby in the presidential palace on February 2-3, but government troops — given logistical and intelligence support by the French military — repulsed the fighters, who have since withdrawn to the southeast of the country.

FAILURE IS DUE TO STRUGGLE OVER PRESIDENCY

Although they claim officially that their forces were well coordinated during the assault on Ndjamenah, which began on January 28, some of those involved indicate that the three-headed leadership was one of the reasons for failure.

"One of the columns didn't really get involved," said one senior member of the Assembly of Forces for Change (RFC) group pointing to a UFDD-led operation that was supposed to bring supplies and reinforcements from the east of the country.

"They took far too much time. We had to abandon our positions in the city because we didn't have a single round of ammunition."

According to him, the mix of soldiers from the three groups in battle columns also contributed to the failure of the offensive. "Some people responded to the head of their movements but not the head of their column," he said.

During their retreat toward Chad's south-eastern border with Sudan, the rebels formed back into columns composed entirely of their own rebel groups, he said.

The search for a single leader to unify the rebel movement is likely to be a struggle however, as illustrated by an incident in Ndjamená.

"In Ndjamená we wanted to send out a radio message," said Nouri, "but we were unable to agree on which leader was going to read it out."

He added that "after the fall of the regime our objectives are different."

Hailing from the same Goran ethnic group as former Chadian president Hissene Habre, who was overthrown by Deby in 1990, Nouri is clear about his suspicion of the RFC. The group is led by Timan and Tom Erdimi, the nephews and former chief of staffs of Deby.

"Chad cannot continue to be governed by one family or tribe," Nouri said.

He is suspected of wanting to reassert the power of fellow Gorans and is also seen by critics as Sudan's puppet.

The third rebel group is the United Front for Change (FUC), led by Abdelwahid Aboud Makaye.

"I am not the candidate of Sudan, which supplies all the rebel groups," said Nouri.

A member of the RFC also said that support from Khartoum was now reaching all rebel groups.

"The Sudanese have supported Nouri a lot but now, after the defeat in Ndjamená, they are supplying us in the same way," he said.

Sudan denies supplying the rebels.

Even though the idea of choosing a single political leader is supported by all sides, in practice it is likely to prove difficult and could be explosive if the rebel groups ever succeeded in overthrowing Deby.

"If we had seized power at the beginning of February, there would have been a period of hesitation," the RFC member acknowledged.

(ST)

Chinese disappointed by Spielberg's Olympic pullout over Darfur (ST)

February 18, 2008 (BEIJING) — The Chinese people have expressed their bafflement and disappointment these days over Hollywood director Steven Spielberg's quit from 2008 Beijing Olympics, but they still admire the Oscar winner's artistic achievements.

"Mr. Spielberg knows nothing about China's endeavor to solve the Darfur issue...He is unqualified to blame the Chinese government," according to a commentary published on Saturday's Guangming Daily, one of China's leading newspaper.

The world-renowned American movie director announced to quit the coming Olympics on Wednesday, citing concerns over the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, which he linked to the Chinese government.

Many Chinese said they were shocked by Spielberg's announcement and deemed it "unacceptable" when the news first came out. The criticism is continuing.

"The person is completely live in his Sci-Fi world and can not distinguish dream from reality," said a commentary on Saturday's China Youth Daily.

On China's major websites, such as Sina.com, Sohu.com, China.com, and Xinhuanet.com, the news was followed by thousands of comments. Internet users wrote in their blogs to express their discontentment.

They criticized Spielberg as a person who failed to keep his word and slashed the action of linking politics with the sports event

Jiang Bojing, from northern Hebei province, said in an online forum that Spielberg was used as a tool by some people in the West who want to take advantage of Beijing Olympics to attack China.

"Mr. Spielberg should not use Olympics as an opportunity to make indiscreet political remarks on China," Jiang said.

"We regret Spielberg's withdrawal, but there's no need to be angry," Zhuang Huayi, a citizen from Shamen said, "if we see it from the other aspect, his snub reflects the high expectation of the world on China."

A netizen nicknamed "It's Nothing" said he could not understand and was disappointed by the decision Spielberg had made, however, he still appreciated Spielberg's films.

The Chinese people are very familiar with Spielberg's movies, ranging from Close Encounters of the Third Kind, E.T. A.I to Jurassic Park, Save Private Ryan and Schindler's List. Many of hisblock busters have produced very desirable box office results on the Chinese market.

Xinghe, a writer, said that Spielberg have inspired a lot of Chinese youngster who love Science Fiction. "He has great talent. We are regretful over his decision, but we can still enjoy his movies," he said.

Xu Jinglei, a renowned actress and director, said that she loves Spielberg's films very much as he creates a style that combines arts and commerce together.

Spielberg was appointed artistic consultant by the Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2008 Olympics in April, 2006 and got involved with the opening and closing ceremonies of the event together with Chinese film director Zhang Yimou and Ric Rirch, Australian director who made the highly successful ceremonies at the Sydney Games in 2000.

Liu Jianchao, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman on Thursday said "regretful" over Spielberg's decision to quit.

"It is understandable if some people do not understand the Chinese government's policy on Darfur," he said, "But we can't accept that some people want to use this as an opportunity to link Darfur to China's Africa and Sudan policies, and even to the Beijing Olympic Games."

(Xinhua)

Government bans entry of Danish officials and commodities

Islamic Jurists Council has strongly denounced the aggressive and insulting campaign launched by the Danish press against Prophet Mohamed and Islamic religion.

In a statement it issued yesterday, the Council demanded the political leadership in the country to take decisions to silence and stop them from insulting the prophet. It called on officials and citizens to rally behind the Prophet.

The newspaper learned that a decision was taken by the government banning entry of Danish officials and commodities into the Sudan.

In a related development, the Mecca-based World Islamic league urged the Danish authorities to take action to halt the campaign against the prophet.