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Media Monitoring Report

United Nations Mission in Sudan/ Public Information Office

Referendum Watch

- Presidency to meet today to discuss a range of issues including release of referendum result (*Al-Sahafa*)
- Delay of popular consultation in the Blue Nile sparks public outcry (*Al-Sahafa*)
- South Sudan signs ceasefire with rebel George Athor (*AFP*)
- Sudan “needs clearer oil-sharing deal” (BBC)
- UN Security Council to focus on Sudan, Haiti in January (*Xinhua*)
- US confident Sudan vote to go off peacefully (AFP)
- Parliament endorses price increase of many commodities including fuel (*Sudan Radio*)

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Highlights

Presidency to meet today

Al-Sahafa 6/1/11 – the Presidency is to hold a meeting today chaired by President Al-Bashir and attended by his deputies FVP Salva Kiir and VP Taha.

Presidency state minister Amin Hassan Omer said the meeting would focus on preparations for the referendum and to discuss pending issues particularly Abyei Area.

According to *Al-Akhbar* 6/1/11, the meeting will discuss a range of issues including border demarcation, post-referendum arrangements, Abyei and release of referendum results.

President Al-Bashir will meet with AUHIP Chair Thabo Mbeki before the meeting is convened.

Delay of popular consultation in the Blue Nile provokes outcry

Al-Sahafa 6/1/11 – The Blue Nile Legislative Assembly has decided to hold an extraordinary session today to discuss repercussions of the postponement of popular consultation in the area.

The delay angered many civilians in the area who blocked the path of MPs on their way to explain to a rally the reasons for the postponement.

Rapporteur of the parliamentary commission for popular consultation Sella Musa said it was likely that the MPs would respond positively to the public outcry by directing the start of the process.

Meanwhile, Blue Nile AEC Chair Abdul Rahim Osman said preparations have been completed for the start of the process but indicated some challenges including the presence of the SPLA in the state which might impact the conduct of the process.

Also, the postponement triggered an altercation between the NCP and SPLM representatives in the popular consultation commission, according to *Al-Ayyam* 6/1/11. Blue Nile state government official Yousuf Al-Hadi said one of the NCP members brandished a knife in the face of an SPLA representative, adding that the NCP members are hampering the conduct of the process at the behest of the centre.

South Sudan signs ceasefire with rebels

AFP 5/1/11 - South Sudan's army signed a "permanent ceasefire" with rebel forces it has been fighting since an election last April, just four days ahead of an historic independence referendum.

The deal with renegade senior officer George Athor, who began a rebellion after he claimed he was cheated in gubernatorial elections in the state of Jonglei, was welcomed as a step to easing tensions in the south ahead of the key vote.

"This is a great agreement," said Brigadier General Michael Majur, who signed the agreement

for the south's Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA).

"I want to thank comrade Athor for his tireless effort to make this agreement a success." Athor did not appear himself at the ceremony but sent a delegation instead.

"This is an important step towards establishing peace in south Sudan," said Major General Abraham Thon, who signed the ceasefire on behalf of Athor. "This will help our people allow the benefits of good security."

"There is no longer a place for tribalism and nepotism from this day forth," Thon said.

The agreement was overseen by the south's vice president Riek Machar, and the Episcopal Archbishop of Sudan, Daniel Deng Bol. The southern army had accused Athor and his men of acting on behalf of Khartoum in a bid to destabilise southern Sudan, a charge denied by the central government.

David Gressly, head of the United Nations mission in Southern Sudan, said the agreement is "one more reflection of the many steps that have been taken since 2005," when the north-south peace deal was signed, ending more than two decades of war that killed an estimated 2 million people.

Gressly said "everything looks very positive" ahead of the south's weeklong referendum. Polls open Sunday and close the following Saturday...

Sudan "needs clearer oil-sharing deal"

BBC 6/1/11 - Sudan needs to have greater transparency over its oil revenues to help preserve peace in the region, according to a new report.

Campaign organisation Global Witness says suspicions over how revenues have been shared have added greatly to mistrust between north and south.

The report comes ahead of Sunday's referendum on southern independence. Most of Sudan's oil comes from wells in the south but the infrastructure remains in the north. The current oil-sharing accord between the two shares the revenues roughly 50:50.

In its report, Global Witness says the two sides need to agree a more transparent deal to replace the existing one, which is due to expire at the end of the month.

"There has been much mistrust over whether the current revenue distribution system has been implemented fairly," the report says.

"Mistrust over revenue sharing was one of the primary reasons for the south's temporary pullout from the power-sharing arrangement in 2007. Evidence suggests that such concerns are not unfounded."

The report also says the Sudanese government and the region's main oil company - China National Petroleum Corporation - have not adequately accounted for discrepancies in published production figures.

It adds: "Under the current circumstances Sudanese citizens cannot be sure how much oil their country produces and therefore cannot be sure that the oil wealth-sharing agreement is being implemented fairly.

"It is critical that these issues are addressed. A new oil deal between north and south is essential to prevent a return to full-scale war."

The week-long referendum that begins on Sunday is part of the 2005 deal that ended a two-decades-long war.

More than 95% of registered voters are in Southern Sudan while the rest are Southern Sudanese living in the north or in one of eight foreign countries.

UN Security Council to focus on Sudan, Haiti in January

Xinhua 5/1/11 - The UN Security Council will focus on the pressing issues of Sudan and Haiti in January, the council president announced here Wednesday.

The announcement came as Ivan Barbalic, ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the UN...

The situation in Sudan, which is facing a referendum that could create separate countries in the south and the north, will be an important focus of the Council this month, Barbalic said, adding that on Thursday the Council will hear a briefing from the special representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), Haile Menkerios, as well as former president of Tanzania Benjamin Mkapa, who is currently head of the UN's panel on the Sudan referendum.

"Tomorrow we'll have consultations on Sudan, we will be briefed by SRSG Menkerios and President Mkapa via video link," Barbalic said. "The goal of this consultation is to discuss the process that is ahead of us, the process of referendum in Sudan that starts on the 9th and lasts for seven days."

He added that the council will continue to monitor happenings in Sudan closely and will meet again later in the month to review them.

"After the process is over, the referendum, we will have another meeting on Sudan that is scheduled now on the 18th (of January)," he said. "It's going to be a briefing by the same briefers but it is also going to give the opportunity for member states to express support to the process and hopefully by that time we will be able to come out with a strong outcome document that will support the process. We expect to have at that point probably a presidential statement" ...

US confident Sudan vote to go off peacefully

AFP 5/1/11 - The United States believes this weekend's referendum on independence for southern Sudan will go off successfully and "peacefully," senior US diplomat Johnnie Carson said Wednesday.

The US government believes that the vote "will in fact go off successfully," Carson, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, told reporters.

"We think that it will reflect the will of the people, that it will occur on time, peacefully, and in a well-organized manner," Carson said.

He said Washington was "extraordinarily pleased" with the comments Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir made during a visit to the southern capital Juba on Tuesday when he said the North was prepared to accept the referendum outcome.

"We hope that the North and the NCP (ruling National Congress Party) will live up to the very promising statements that have been made by the leadership of the North," Carson said.

He said the United States has spent considerable time preparing for the referendum with the European Union and the broader international community, adding the number of US diplomats deployed to the region has quadrupled.

"The United States has invested a great deal of diplomacy to ensure the outcome of this referendum is successful and peaceful," he said.

If the South secedes, he said the United States will help the new nation succeed economically and politically.

Parliament endorses to price increase

Sudan Radio 6/1/11 – the National Assembly yesterday endorsed the increase of prices of some commodities including and sugar.

Al-Ahram 6/1/11 reports that the opposition political parties have reacted by threatening to stage demonstrations to mount pressure on the government.

Sudan Tribune.com 5/1/11 the Sudanese national assembly hastily approved an austerity package sent to it by the cabinet that contained cuts in subsidies for crucial products that is expected to trigger a domino effect on prices of a wide variety of goods and services.

President Omer Hassan Al-Bashir presided over a meeting of the council of ministers late on Tuesday that was described by state media as "exceptional" and lasted until the early morning hours of Wednesday.

At the meeting, finance and national economy minister Ali Mahmood presented his plan that aims to curtail government spending, inhibit imports, shore up foreign currency reserves and contain the budget deficit particularly as uncertainty looms over the economic future in the likely event that the South will choose to secede in the referendum that starts Sunday.

Among the measures introduced was an increase to the price of petroleum products which is subsidized by the government.

These included gasoline (from 6.5 Sudanese pounds per gallon to 8.5); diesel (from 4.5 Sudanese pounds per gallon to 6.5); cooking gas (from 12 Sudanese pounds to 13); jet fuel (from 4.5 Sudanese pounds per gallon to 6.5).

"The price of petroleum has been subsidized for a long time and this creates a gap in the state's

financial resources, so we decided to introduce some measures to change that," the finance minister said after the vote.

The direct impact of the increase in the price of petroleum products will likely be felt in public transportation which is a strategic service in the country and is heavily utilized by the poor and middle-class population of the country.

The governor of Khartoum state Abdel-Rahman Al-Khidir was quoted as saying that no increases in the bus fares will take place and that students will be able to ride for half the price.

However, the independent *Al-Sudani* newspaper reported on Thursday that fares of public transportation will go up by 25%.

Al-Khidir also pledged that there will be no increases in the price of bread or chicken and that efforts are being made to contain the increases in cooking oil.

The government also announced today that the price of sugar will be raised by 20 Sudanese pounds per 50 kilogram (110 pounds) bag. Sugar is considered a crucial product in Sudan and people are extremely sensitive to any changes in its pricing.

Other policies to be enforced include prohibiting purchases of furniture and vehicles for most ministries unless for extreme necessity, stopping issuance of building permits for government agencies, reviewing government structure on state and federal levels and reducing budget of diplomatic missions abroad by 10%.

The minister announced lower-level state workers would get an extra 100 Sudanese pounds a month but little else targeting the poor majority of Sudan's 40 million people. Gross national product per capita in Sudan was just \$1,220 in 2009.

Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir, speaker of the Sudanese parliament, said that the current phase is similar to the years of 1990-1992 and called on citizens to curb their consumption of electricity and food.

Representative Ismail Hussein from the opposition Popular Congress Party (PCP) was the lone vote against the bill saying that "it make no sense" for the finance minister to ask for these increases five days after the 2011 budget went into effect. He said that Bashir should dissolve the cabinet for what he described as its failure.

Mahmood acknowledged there was a budget deficit for 2011 but declined to say how much. Sudan, which operates an opaque economic policy, has kept its 2011 budget under wraps and has not declared any financial details. He revealed that the measures were crafted after consultation with trade unions, chamber of commerce, agricultural workers union and states....

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