

Sudan goes for historical vote today

AFP, Juba, Sudan

Western envoys, Hollywood stars and elder statesmen all gathered in Sudan as the war-ravaged south was finally poised to have its say on independence after a 50-year wait today.

The beat of African drums reverberated around the south's regional capital Juba as hordes of youthful campaigners, who have held monthly rallies to ensure the promised referendum goes ahead, staged an exuberant "final march to freedom" from the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum.



A handout picture from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) shows a southern Sudanese woman holding a separation ballot paper ahead of Southern Sudan independence referendum in Juba today.

PHOTO: AFP

South Sudan not ready for split

Says Omar al-Bashir

BBC ONLINE

Sudan President Omar al-Bashir has warned that Southern Sudan will face instability if it votes to secede from the north in the upcoming referendum.

He told al-Jazeera TV the south did not have the ability to create a stable state or provide for its citizens.

Correspondents say the comments will infuriate the SPLM - former rebels who have ruled the south since the two-decades-long civil war ended in 2005.

Correspondents expect an overwhelming "yes" vote in the referendum, which would see the world's newest country come into being.

The poll, which begins today, was part of the terms of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the civil war.

In an interview with the Arabic news

channel al-Jazeera, Mr Bashir said he understood why many southerners wanted independence, but he expressed concern at how the new nation would cope.

"The south suffers from many problems," he said.

"It's been at war since 1959. The south does not have the ability to provide for its citizens or create a state or authority."

Mr Bashir said southerners living in the north would not be allowed dual citizenship, and floated the idea of the two nations joining in an EU-style bloc.

He also raised the issue of Abyei, an oil-rich region with disputed borders.

He warned that if southerners seized the region for themselves, it could lead to war.

Analysts say Mr Bashir is under intense pressure from northern politicians, who fear that secession of the south may lead to a further splintering of the country.

South Sudan's Muslims welcome secession

AFP, Juba, Sudan

Muslims living in Sudan's largely Christian south, which holds a referendum on independence today, say they will vote for secession, even though some new arrivals are nervous about their future.

"I am a citizen of the south 100 percent, and I have all the rights enjoyed by southern Sudanese," said 55-year-old merchant Abu Obeida Mustapha Kurak, who is a member of the Islamic council of south Sudan.

Dressed in his white "jalabiya," Kurak strolls through Juba's main market greeting his friends.

"I will never leave Juba. Our great-grandfather came to Juba 110 years ago, from Nile state, north of Khartoum, and now we are an integral part of this town."

The last census to mention the religion of southerners dates back to 1956. It classified the majority of the population as Christian, or following traditional beliefs, and put the number of Muslims at 18 percent.

Intense US push led up to Sudan referendum

AFP, Washington

An intense US diplomatic push, personally led by President Barack Obama and motivated by fears of cataclysmic bloodshed, helped underwrite a landmark independence referendum in Sudan today.

Months after Obama warned millions of lives were at risk and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton feared a "ticking time bomb," worst-case scenarios look likely to be averted with southern Sudan expected to choose divorce from the north.

Multiple potential flashpoints remain between what could effectively be two new states -- not least over oil resources and borders -- but expectations are that the vote will take place on time and without large-scale violence.

Though the ultimate success of the effort will be written in the future lives of

Sudanese, Washington may be able to claim a rare diplomatic success in a world bristling with challenges to US power.

A top target of US diplomacy was China, a supporter of Bashir who was indicted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes in Darfur.

Issues of secession and popular democracy are troublesome for Beijing's communist rulers who have national interests in Sudan, including in oil and minerals.

Yet Beijing has called for a "free, fair, transparent and peaceful" referendum and sent vote observers.

"We share an interest with China in a stable Sudan," said a US official. "It is absolutely not in their economic or political interest to see Sudan implode or return to massive widespread civil conflict between north and south."

Iran claims nuclear breakthrough

AFP, Tehran

Atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi declared in a report yesterday that Iran is capable of making its own nuclear fuel plates and rods, technology the West says the Islamic republic does not possess.

Salehi, the driving force behind Iran's contentious atomic programme, said the country has built a facility in the central city of Esfahan to produce the technology which is required to power nuclear reactors.

"We have built an advanced manufacturing unit in the Esfahan site for the fuel plates," Salehi, who is also acting foreign minister, told Fars news agency in what was said to be an exclusive interview.

NEWS IN brief

Israeli soldier killed in 'friendly fire' at Gaza border

BBC ONLINE

An Israeli soldier has been killed and four others injured by so-called friendly fire near to the Gaza border, the Israeli military says.

The incident happened while the soldiers were involved in a clash with Palestinian militants in Gaza.

The army said the group had been trying to plant explosives underneath the security fence along the border.

The clash follows a month of increased tension along the Gazan border with frequent exchanges

Two dead, 400 hurt in Algerian riots

AFP, Algiers

Two people were killed and 400 injured, 300 of them police, in riots in Algeria linked to rising food costs and unemployment, Interior Minister Dahou Oul Kablia said yesterday as the government scrambled to defuse the crisis.

One was shot dead on Friday in Ain Lahdjel in the M'Sila region, 300 kilometres (180 miles) southeast of Algiers, the minister said on national radio.

A second demonstrator was killed on Friday in Bou Smail, a small town 50 kilometres west of Algiers, he said.

"More than 300 police and gendarmes have been wounded, while on the other side there are

S Africa may restrict foreign land ownership

AFP, Johannesburg

South African President Jacob Zuma yesterday said foreign land ownership may be restricted in a bid to revive lagging reforms to transfer land to the black majority.

Zuma was speaking at the 99th anniversary of his ruling African National Congress (ANC) in an address that also stressed economic transformation and more jobs ahead of local elections later this year.

"Restoration of the land to the people has always been an integral part of the struggle for freedom," Zuma told the celebrations in the northern town of Polokwane.

"Land reform will now be based on the decolonisation of the rural economy."

Zuma, whose party faces pressures over rampant joblessness and service delivery, said economic transformation was key for the benefits of

15 beheaded bodies found in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

The decapitated bodies of 15 men were found yesterday near a shopping centre in the Mexican beach resort of Acapulco, the state of Guerrero's public security office said.

Police responding to a report of a fire shortly after midnight instead found five abandoned vehicles and the bodies of 15 young men who had been beheaded, it said. Messages were left with the bodies.

"On the sidewalk of the Plaza Senderos shopping centre were the decapitated bodies of 15 males, between 25 and 30 years of age," a police report said.

"The heads were found in one single place, with the exception of one that was half severed from the body and with an impact of a projectile from a firearm," it said.

US wants Twitter details of Wikileaks activists

BBC ONLINE

The US government has subpoenaed the social networking site Twitter for personal details of people connected to Wikileaks, court documents show.

The US District Court in Virginia said it wanted information including user names, addresses, connection records, telephone numbers and payment details. Those named include Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and an Icelandic MP.

The US is examining possible charges against Mr Assange over the leaking of 250,000 classified diplomatic cables.

Reports indicate the Department of



Justice may seek to indict him on charges of conspiring to steal documents with Private First Class Bradley Manning, a US Army intelligence analyst.

Mr Manning is facing a court martial and up to 52 years in prison for allegedly sending Wikileaks the diplomatic cables, as well military logs about incidents in Afghanistan and Iraq and a classified military video.

According to the court order issued on 14 December by the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, the US Attorney's Office has provided evidence to show that the information held by Twitter is "relevant and material to an ongoing criminal investigation".

North Korea renews South overture

Seoul reviewing offer

BBC ONLINE

North Korea says it wants to reopen talks with the South - the latest in a series of conciliatory gestures.

The North's reunification committee issued a statement calling for "unconditional and early" talks.

Seoul officials said they would review the latest proposals from Pyongyang. The South dismissed a similar offer earlier this week as "propaganda".

The sinking of a Southern warship last March sparked a dramatic rise in tension on the peninsula.

The Cheonan was apparently sunk by a Northern torpedo, with the loss of 46 lives. The North denies the attack.

Since then, the South has irked the

North by holding large-scale military exercises close to the maritime border.

On 23 November, the North infuriated the South by shelling one of its islands and killing four people.

But in the past week, the North has shifted away from statements threatening war and retaliation, to issuing offers of talks and peace overtures.

The committee suggested that the talks should take place later in January or early February.

In response, Unification Ministry spokesman Chun Hae-sung told the Associated Press news agency that the statement would be considered, but noted that no formal request had been received.

FLOOD IN AUSTRALIA PM pledges financial help

REUTERS, Sydney

Prime Minister Julia Gillard pledged financial support for Australia's flood-hit northeast yesterday during a tour of the most heavily inundated parts of Queensland state, but warned the recovery would be slow.

In a series of visits by military helicopter, Gillard went to towns whose streets have been turned into waterways by a Christmas deluge that left an area the size of France and Germany combined under water.

The floods have swamped coal mines and hit agriculture hard, washed away roads and railways, killed four, and brought the country's \$50 billion coal export industry to a near standstill.

Some river levels have hit records and some are still rising with further rain forecast for this weekend. Months more wet weather is predicted, brought by the La Nina weather phenomenon.

Asked how much it would cost Australia's federal government, she said: "I've been very clear that we are talking about hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars."

Addict kills boy

FROM PAGE 20

When a panicked Bibhuti let Sagar in, he attacked the trader and tied his hands and legs. Sagar then took away Shuvo from the room, sub-inspector Qaiyum Ali of Gendaria Police Station quoted Bibhuti as saying.

With Bibhuti crying for help, Sagar brought a knife from the kitchen and stabbed him in the neck.

Bibhuti's relative Swapan Kumar Roy said residents of an adjacent building noticed the incident and informed police and locals.

Sensing the presence of people near the front door, Sagar climbed down a sewer pipe at the back of the building and fled the place.

Swapan said locals later entered the apartment and found Bibhuti groaning in pain.

"But we could not trace Shuvo. We looked for him in the bedroom and kitchen. Then we noticed that the bathroom was locked from outside," he said.

"We found a water drum in the bathroom. When we removed its lid, we found Shuvo inside the drum with his hands and legs tied," Swapan said.

The two were whisked off to the DMCH, where doctors declared Shuvo dead.

Bibhuti's wife Sheuli Rani Das, a high school teacher, had left for school at Sirajdikhan in Munshiganj shortly after 6:00am, he said.

TRADER KILLED Criminals killed a trader and hung his body from the ceiling of his shop early yesterday at Pakapool Bazar in the city's Kamrangirchar area.

The deceased was identified as Abul Kashem, 42, proprietor of a cement store called Usha Traders.

Police recovered the body, which was hanging from the ceiling of the shop at about 10:00am said Abdul Karim, sub inspector of Kamrangirchar Police Station.

The victim's body bore several marks of injury on his chest and his mouth was gagged while both his hands were tied with a wire, he added.

The victim's wife Momtaz Begum Shanu told The Daily Star that Kashem returned home at 8:00pm on Friday and received a call on his cell phone an hour later.

Quoting the deceased, she said the unidentified caller claimed he had been paid Tk 2 lakh to kill Kashem.

However, the caller said he would spare Kashem if he paid him Tk 5 lakh, she added.

He went to his shop again that night and was seen there till 11:00pm, according to sources.

"I called him after midnight but no one answered the phone," said Shanu.

Yesterday, at around 6:30am one Hanif brought the news of Kashem's death by hanging himself, after which his mother, Marjina Begum along with some locals broke open the shop's shutters and found his lifeless body, she said.

Family feud over property may have been the cause of his death, alleged the victim's wife.

Police sent the body to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for an autopsy.