

ROW OVER DISPUTED OIL FIELD

South Sudan withdraws troops easing war fears

AFP, Juba

Sudanese troops recaptured the Heglig oil field yesterday after battling forces from South Sudan, whose President Salva Kiir ordered an immediate withdrawal, inching the foes back from wider war.

Heavy casualties were reported by both sides as Khartoum's forces retook Heglig ten days after Southern troops seized it, in a move that had raised concern the former civil war foes were returning to fully-fledged conflict.

"Our troops were able to liberate Heglig town by force," Sudanese Defence Minister Abdelrahim Mohammed Hussein announced on state television. "Our enemy suffered heavy losses in people and equipment."

Sudanese troops launched a renewed counter-attack late Thursday with air strikes hitting Southern troops entrenched along the frontline, with Juba announcing a withdrawal as

Khartoum celebrated victory.

"An orderly withdrawal will commence immediately and shall be completed within three days," South's Information Minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin said earlier, reading out a presidential statement to reporters.

International powers have called on Juba to pull back its forces, but it had resisted those calls, insisting it would do so only after Khartoum withdrew its troops from the neighbouring contested Abyei region.

On Thursday, United Nations Chief Ban Ki-moon condemned the South's taking of Heglig as an "illegal act," but Juba still maintained Friday that Heglig -- which it calls Panthou in the local Dinka language -- was its territory.

Fighting between Sudan and South Sudan escalated earlier this month, following the South's April 10 seizure of Heglig, which makes up around half of Sudan's oil production for its faltering

economy.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir this week called for the destruction of the "insect" Juba government, and has launched waves of air strikes against the former civil war foe.

Tensions have gradually mounted since, with the two governments unable to agree on their border -- which cuts through rich oil reserves -- sovereignty over the disputed territory of Abyei, and oil transit fees.

Meanwhile, fighters in Sudan's Blue Nile -- civil war allies of the former rebels who now rule South Sudan -- said Friday they had killed 79 government troops and militiamen in two ambushes in the ethnically divided state.

The clashes sparked widespread fears that fighting would spread. The violence was already the worst since South Sudan won independence in July after a 1983-2005 civil war in which some two million people died.



A Pakistani airline official stands next to the wreckage of a Bhoja Air Boeing 737 plane which crashed in the outskirts of Islamabad yesterday. The Pakistani airliner with 127 people on board crashed in bad weather leaving no sign of survivors.

PHOTO: AFP

China accused of aiding in N Korea's missile project

REUTERS, Washington

China has provided some assistance to North Korea's missile programme, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said on Thursday, a week after the hermit state's failed rocket launch triggered international condemnation.

Under United Nations Security Council resolutions from 2006 and 2009, states, including China, are banned from helping North Korea with its ballistic missile programme, its nuclear activities as well as supplying heavy weapons.

Beijing has denied it has broken any rules, although a modern missile transporter seen in Sunday's military parade to celebrate the founder of North Korea was said by some western military experts to be of Chinese design and possibly origin.

"I'm sure there's been some help coming from China. I don't know, you know, the exact extent of that," Panetta told members of the House Armed Services Committee when asked whether China had been supporting North Korea's missile programme through "trade



Leon Panetta

and technology exchanges".

North Korea's powerful Asian neighbour is Pyongyang's only major ally, with military and economic ties that date back to the communist origins of the two nations.

Pyongyang has said it was ready to retaliate in the face of widespread condemnation of the failed launch, increasing the likelihood the isolated state will go ahead with a third nuclear test. Late on Thursday it said it had "never recognised the UN Security Council resolution".

After last week's launch, which the United States said was a disguised long-range missile test but which Pyongyang insists was meant to put a satellite into orbit, the Obama administration said it had suspended a food aid deal.

Pyongyang retorted the food aid was "worth a petty amount of money". China has called for "dialogue and communication" as tensions with North Korea mount and reiterated its long-standing call for a return to regional denuclearisation talks that have been stalled for years.

G20-IMF MEET, 2012

Emerging countries flex muscles

AFP, Washington

China and other emerging economies were set to test their new-found political clout Friday, as the world's leading economies turned to them for the final pieces of a \$400 billion IMF crisis fund.

Underscoring the tectonic shift of power from developed to developing nations, the likes of Brazil, Russia, India and China are being asked to stump up cash to help the International Monetary Fund ease debt crises, particularly in Europe.

With economic weakness in Italy and Spain sparking fears that the eurozone crisis will again get worse, the IMF was still tens of billions of dollars short raising the \$400 billion it says is needed to fight the crisis as its annual Spring meetings began.

Europe has pledged \$200 billion, Japan \$60 billion, and Nordic countries, Switzerland, Poland and others have offered another \$60 billion.

The debt-ridden United States, the IMF's largest shareholder, has refused to contribute to the crisis fund, which leaves the BRICS -- Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa -- the best source for cash.

But that also put the rising nations in a position to ask for more say in the G20 and the IMF, which have long been dominated by the United States, Europe and Japan.

Russia offered \$10 billion where China's foreign ministry indicated Thursday it was still thinking about its contribution.

India's missile woman

BBC ONLINE

The media loves calling her Missile Woman - and with good reason.

Tessy Thomas, a scientist from India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), is a rare woman who has played a key role in the making of its most potent long-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile, the Agni-V, which was successfully tested on Thursday.

She is thought to be one of the very few women working on strategic nuclear ballistic missiles in the world.

In the male-dominated world of the country's highly secretive missile development programme, Thomas, 49, has stood out ever since she joined the DRDO in 1988.

In January, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told the Indian Science Congress that Thomas is an example of a "woman making her mark in a traditionally male bastion and decisively breaking the glass ceiling".

Thomas, a Roman Catholic, grew up near a rocket launching station in Alleppey in southern Kerala state. Her admiration for rockets and missiles began from there.

So how does she feel about working on



Tessy Thomas

some of the most powerful weapons of mass destruction?

Tessy Thomas, who was named after Mother Teresa, says she is developing "what are really weapons of peace".

Now, the accolades are again coming fast for Thomas - the media also love to call her Agniputri, or one born of fire, after the missiles she has helped develop.

Indian newspapers yesterday trumpeted the launch as a sign of New Delhi's emerging power, while others warned about misplaced triumphalism.

"India goes ballistic," headlined the English-language tabloid Mail Today over a full-page photo of the Agni V missile lifting off on Thursday from its launch site in eastern India.

"Missile Muscle" said the front-page headline on The Indian Express broadsheet, while the Times of India declared that the "Agni V roars into elite ICBM club."

ICBMs are the most advanced and long-range missile systems, but the Agni V will need to increase its range to 5,500 km from its current 5,000 kilometres and be further tested to be classified in this category.

NEWS IN brief

Australia pressing US on Assange

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday said it was making representations to the United States about the potential prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and his treatment there.

"The only channels that Australia currently has available are diplomatic channels and those channels are being used," Roxon told Assange's lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, during an open session at a legal conference in Sydney.

Attorney-General Nicola Roxon said Canberra was asking "plenty of questions" about Assange, an Australian citizen, though it could not interfere in European proceedings involving the WikiLeaks chief.

Assange is under house arrest in Britain awaiting judgment from the Supreme Court in London on whether he can be extradited to Sweden for questioning over allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Qaeda claims deadly Iraq attacks

AFP, Baghdad

Al-Qaeda front group the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) yesterday said that it carried out a wave of attacks across the country that killed 38 people, in a statement on jihadist website Honein.

The attacks, it said, were "in response to the waves of arrests and the siege and confiscation of lands in Sunni areas," specifically in and around Baghdad.

Dozens of bombings and shootings in seven different provinces killed 38 people and wounded more than 170 on Thursday, the deadliest day in Iraq since March 20, when 50 people were killed and 255 wounded in attacks also claimed by al-Qaeda.

2 more self-immolations in China

AFP, Beijing

Two more Tibetans died after setting themselves on fire in a restive southwestern region of China, a rights group said yesterday, the latest in a wave of such protests against Beijing's rule.

A total of 34 Tibetans, many of them Buddhist monks and nuns, are now reported to have attempted to kill themselves in the same way since the start of 2011 over what they see as Chinese repression of their culture.

The self-immolations by a pair of young Tibetan men occurred Thursday in the prefecture of Aha, in a rugged area of Sichuan province, overseas Tibetan rights groups said.

China has imposed tight security to contain simmering discontent in Tibetan regions since 2008, when deadly rioting against Chinese rule broke out in Tibet's capital Lhasa and spread to neighbouring Tibetan-inhabited regions.

French poll campaign ends

Survey predicts Sarkozy defeat in Sunday's polls

AFP, Paris

Nicolas Sarkozy apologised for his mis-steps yesterday, the final day of campaigning in France's presidential election, while his main rival Francois Hollande was increasingly confident of victory.

The latest polls ahead of Sunday's first round point to a resounding win for the Socialist in the May 6 run-off against Sarkozy, dogged by criticism his flashy and overbearing style lowered the standing of France's head of state.

The vote is seen by many as a referendum on the unpopular Sarkozy, who feted tycoons and married supermodel Carla Bruni during his five-year term, rather than a

French presidential candidates

The four top candidates in 2012



chance to choose France's first socialist president since 1995.

The latest survey before campaigning and opinion polls were to be banned at midnight yesterday said Hollande would win 29 percent of votes to Sarkozy's 25.5 percent before the pair meet head-on in the second round.

Hollande is on course to win the final vote 56 percent to the right-winger's 44 percent, polling organisation Ipsos forecast.

Far-right candidate Marine Le Pen could take 16 percent in the first round, the far-left's Jean-Luc Melenchon 14 percent and centrist Francois Bayrou 10 percent, IPSOS said.

Countries must focus

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netts, to protect human capital in a volatile and uncertain world; gender, so that countries can gain growth opportunities from empowering all of their people; and financial inclusion.

He spoke to the press Thursday marking the beginning of 2012 World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings at the IMF Headquarters. Zoellick, who took office in 2007, elaborated the initiatives in making the WB more open and transparent which were the most important issues during his tenure as its chief.

This is the last Spring Meetings of Zoellick as the president of the World Bank Group, as his term expires in June. He will be replaced by Korea-born American health expert Jim Yong Kim.

Zoellick said his time at the WB has had three dis-

tinct phases: a turnaround from a time of trouble; faster, more flexible and large scale support for client countries in food, fuel and financial crises; and the start of the modernisation of the World Bank Group for the future.

"Our initiatives for open information, open data and open access to knowledge may turn out to be the most important legacy of the past five years," he said. "These steps are key to democratising development."

He added that the ongoing modernisation effort at the WB will be a large part of his presentation to the Development Committee, which meets today.

"Our modernisation agenda is driven by our focus on clients, listening to their priorities, as opposed to the old top-down approach," said Zoellick.

He also said developing

countries have provided two-thirds of the global growth over the past five years.

"These are no longer charity cases; they are vital to the world economy, but of course, they face huge challenges, too."

"So it is the World Bank Group's aim to keep focusing on the world's economic leaders on growth -- not just stability; on human safety nets -- not just financial safety nets; and on modernising multilateralism so that all the 188 of our shareholders can work together for their common interest."

The outgoing WB chief also said it needs to think ahead about how to mobilise resources for the poorest and for the changing needs of the middle-income countries, which are still home to three-quarters of those living on under \$2 a day.

Dry Africa sits on 'huge' water resource

BBC ONLINE

The notoriously dry continent of Africa is sitting on a vast reservoir of groundwater, say scientists.

They argue that the total volume of water in aquifers underground is 100 times the amount found on the surface.

The team have produced the most detailed map yet of the scale and potential of this hidden resource.

Due to changes in climate that have turned the Sahara into a desert over centuries many of the aquifers underneath were last filled with water over 5,000 years ago.

The scientists collated their information from existing hydro-geological maps from national governments as well as 283 aquifer studies.

The researchers say their new maps indicate that many countries currently designated as "water scarce" have substantial groundwater reserves.

Across Africa more than 300 million

people are said not to have access to safe drinking water.

Demand for water is set to grow markedly in coming decades due to population growth and the need for irrigation to grow crops.

Freshwater rivers and lakes are subject to seasonal floods and droughts that can limit their availability for people and for agriculture. At present only 5% of arable land is irrigated.

Now scientists have for the first time been able to carry out a continent-wide analysis of the water that is hidden under the surface in aquifers. Researchers from the British Geological Survey and University College London (UCL) have mapped in detail the amount and potential yield of this groundwater resource across the continent.

However, the scientists are cautious about the best way of accessing these hidden resources. They suggest that widespread drilling of large boreholes might not work.

Rab source held

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10:00am, said Inspector (Investigation) Sawndip Kumar Das of Kotwali Police Station.

However, Rab-7 claimed that they arrested Ebaidur first for feeding them false information and then handed him over to police.

Inspector Sawndip said Saleh had a conflict regarding the house with a Union Parishad chairman of Raozan upazila since 2010. Saleh's son Saiful Islam lodged a general dairy with Kotwali Police Station Thursday saying the chairman was trying to take over the house.

"Ebaidur might have been acting as an agent of the chairman and he probably went to the house to frame Saleh with the illegal amphetamines," he said.

Commanding Officer of the unit Maj Md Ziaul Ahsan

said, "On information, a Rab team went there to check the house. They seized a packet of Yaba tablets from Ebaidur's possession. Later, Rab personnel handed him over to police."

Meanwhile, in Shah Amanat Bridge area Rab-7 personnel arrested two youths with 1,480 Yaba tablets yesterday.

The detainees were identified as Md Abdullah, 23, and Shah Jalal, 25, hailing from Cox's Bazar.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team led by Lt Commander Nuruzzaman conducted a special drive in front of the toll booth at Shah Amanat Bridge under Karnaphuli Police Station around 3:30pm.

Both the arrestees and the seized illicit drugs, commonly smuggled from neighbouring Myanmar, were handed over to police.

Blasts kill 18 troops in Syria

AFP, Damascus

Thousands of Syrians took part in protests against President Bashar al-Assad's regime yesterday, testing a shaky UN ceasefire, as state media said 18 security personnel were killed in attacks.

The latest violence came as peace envoy Kofi Annan acknowledged the situation was "not good" and as rights monitors reported at least one opposition activist killed and intensification of protest hubs.

A deadly blast took place in the southern region of Quneitra, near the demarcation line with Israel on the Golan Heights, killing 10 members of the security forces, state television said, blaming an "armed terrorist group."

A similar bomb attack in Karak, in southern Daraa province, killed five soldiers, state media said.