

In Focus

Sudan Cuts Ties With Chad



Sudan has cut ties with neighboring Chad, following accusations that it supported rebels who attacked Khartoum. Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir "announces the severing of relations with Chad", the official news agency Suna said.

The announcement came after hundreds of Darfur rebels from the Justice and Equality movement clashed with Sudanese security forces outside the capital Khartoum, thousands of miles from their usual area of operation in the far west of the country. Sudan accused Chad of being behind the rebel attack - an accusation Chad has denied.

> Clashes With Darfur Rebels

Hundreds of rebels from war-ravaged Darfur clashed with Sudanese security forces on the doorstep of the capital Saturday in a dramatic widening of the five-year-old conflict.

It was the first foray into the seat of the Sudanese government by a rebel group once confined to the western region, which is deeply scarred by the struggle between the ethnic African rebels and the Arab-dominated central government, AP reported.

The country's interior minister said government forces successfully "chased" away the rebels by nightfall, about three hours after the first outbreak of violence, and killed a rebel leader and his aide. State television showed footage of the fighters in handcuffs and soldiers driving confiscated jeeps through empty streets, saluting colleagues standing at attention.

But a rebel leader denied his fighters suffered heavy casualties and said some took up positions inside Khartoum, while others remained in its twin city, Omdurman.

> US Condemns Attacks

The United States on Saturday condemned the rebel attacks in Sudan and called for an immediate end to the fighting, Xinhua reported.

The United States condemns the recent attack by Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) forces in the area of Omdurman, near Khartoum," the State Department said in a statement.

"We call for an immediate end to fighting. These actions undermine the ongoing efforts of the international community to support resolution of the conflicts in Sudan," the statement said. The United States "implores both JEM and the Government of Sudan to guard against attacks on civilians in Omdurman and Darfur, and warns both sides against taking any retaliatory action based on ethnicity or tribe," the statement added.

The Sudanese government confirmed earlier fighting took place Saturday in the capital Khartoum between army troops and rebels coming from the restive western Sudanese region of Darfur. The infiltration attempt by the JEM rebels had been crushed by the Sudanese government troops.

The JEM, led by Khalil Ibrahim, is believed to have the most powerful rebel forces among some two dozens of rebel groups in Darfur, which has been plagued by an armed conflict for five years.

Turkish Warplanes Strike Rebel Targets

Warplanes and artillery units hit Kurdish rebel positions in northern Iraq in response to a rebel raid on a military outpost inside Turkey, the Turkish military said Sunday.

According to AP, targets in Saturday's raids included an area just across the border where rebels had allegedly gathered after attacking the military station in Hakkari province, near the Iraq border, the military said in a statement posted on its website.

Six soldiers and 19 rebels were killed in the rebel attack and military airstrikes that followed, according to the military. The rebels denied suffering any losses.

The military said in the statement that artillery units and attack aircraft "intensely and effectively" struck rebel targets in the Avasin-Basyan area in northern Iraq.

"All targets have been hit with accuracy and terrorists in the targeted facilities have been rendered ineffective," the military statement said. "Studies and evaluations are underway to determine final results."

The military said its forces were careful to avoid affecting civilians or local Iraqi Kurdish forces in the attack.

"The Turkish Armed Forces will continue its struggle against terrorism with increasing power and determination," the military said. "Any heinous act against the Turkish Republic will be responded to immediately and heavily."

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has been fighting for self-rule in Turkey's southeast since 1984. Tens of thousands of people have died since then.

The PKK maintains bases in the north of neighboring Iraq that serve as a launch pad for attacks on targets inside Turkey.

Power Blackouts Hit Gaza

The Gaza Strip faced new power blackouts on Sunday after its only electricity plant shut down after receiving no fuel from Israel in four days, senior Palestinian officials said.

"There is a very serious crisis with respect to electricity," Jamal Al-Dardasawi, spokesman for the Gaza electrical distribution company, told AFP.

"With the power station having shut down we are only receiving 120 megawatts from Israel and we need around 250 megawatts.

There is a shortfall of around 50 percent," he said.

The Gaza plant provides 30 percent of the impoverished and densely populated territory's electricity, with most of the rest directly supplied by Israel and a small amount coming from Egypt. Israel cut off fuel shipments to the Hamas-ruled territory after Palestinian militants attacked Gaza's main Nahal Oz fuel terminal on April 9, killing two Israeli civilian employees.

It later resumed the supply of industrial-grade fuel for the power plant, which provides most of the electricity for Gaza City and surrounding areas, despite several subsequent attacks on Nahal Oz and other crossings.

An Israeli army spokesman on Saturday said the last shipment of fuel for the plant entered the territory on Wednesday and that another was due to arrive on Sunday, but the terminal remain closed.

Anti-US Protests in Afghanistan

Thousands of demonstrators clashed with police in eastern Afghanistan in protest at the US killing of three civilians in an overnight raid.

At least two people were killed and seven others wounded in the protest.

The protestors had blocked a highway through Nangarhar province on Saturday linking the capital Kabul with Pakistan.

"Police tried to stop them as they threw stones at the police. Police then fired at the crowd. One person was killed and three

ist Taliban movement.

"The coalition conducted independent operations in Shinwar and martyred three people. They were civilians," he told AFP.

Before the demonstration was dispersed, protestors chanted slogans against foreign troops, Bush and Afghan leader Hamid Karzai.

"The Americans killed three civilians," said demonstrator Pizwan Khan. "They were my neighbors and I knew they were not Taliban," he told AFP above shouts of

they work on verified information and have the right to self-protection if attacked.

The issue of civilian casualties is deeply sensitive with many Afghans already wary of the presence of foreign troops seven years after they helped to drive out the extremist Taliban government.

The Al-Qaeda-linked Taliban are fighting to topple the US-supported government in Kabul and have demanded the removal of the international troops, most of them westerners, on which the country relies.



Angry demonstrators protest against civilian deaths caused by US-led forces in Afghanistan.

others were injured," said a local physician, Darya Khan.

An AFP reporter was shown the body of a man whom protestors said was killed in the police action. Other demonstrators alleged three people were killed but this could not be confirmed.

A doctor in the nearby city of Jalalabad said six people were admitted to hospitals. "They were all wounded by gunshots but their wounds were not deep. They were treated and released," Baz Mohammad Sherzad said.

Provincial police chief Sayed Abdul Ghafar denied his men had caused any casualties, saying they had only fired into the air after being shot at from the crowd.

Ghafar, however, said that--contrary to US-led coalition claims--the men killed in an operation overnight in the Shinwar district were not militants or from the extrem-

"Death to America, death to Bush, death to Karzai."

Others said the dead were an elderly man shot in a mosque and two other men, employed as drivers, shot in their homes.

But the US-led military coalition said it had only killed militants who had attacked troops searching for a "foreign fighter network."

"During the operation, several militants were killed when they attacked coalition forces. Nine militants suspected of foreign fighter facilitation were detained," it said.

It is often difficult to verify events in Afghanistan, where thousands of Afghan and international soldiers are working against several rebel networks, some with Al-Qaeda backing.

International troops are often accused of mistaking civilians for rebels or being heavy-handed in their operations; the soldiers say

> Unfulfilled Promises

Meanwhile, former Afghan interior minister said nothing has been improved in Afghanistan because other countries, including the United States, have failed to abide by their promises.

"We know what happened to the pledges of billions of dollars for Afghanistan. We see a rise in extremism in Afghanistan because the world did not honor their pledges," Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao said on Saturday, the "Daily Star" reported.

Sherpao said "the US has pledged billions for Afghanistan but nothing has happened."

He added that peace will not sustain if Afghanistan continues to look for military solutions to militancy.

"Military solutions will not sustain until Afghanistan finds a peaceful solution," he told reporters at his house.