

# Port row will affect investment in the US: UAE Central Bank

REUTERS

ABU DHABI, MARCH 12

The Dubai Ports furore will colour foreign investors' perceptions of the US and affect future investment decisions, the United Arab Emirates' central bank governor said on Sunday.

The governor's comments were the first from a senior UAE official since state-owned Dubai Ports announced on Thursday that it would transfer six US ports to a US entity, to allay concerns that the deal posed a threat to American security.

Governor Sultan Nasser al-Suweidi said the row kicked up by US lawmakers over the ports deal betrayed a double standard. "It is against the principles of international trade...which the US was in-

strumental in making. They are contravening their own principles in this respect," Suweidi said.

"Investors are going to take this into consideration. They will look at investment opportunities (in the US) through new binoculars".

While Suweidi made no specific reference to Arab investment, his remarks underscored growing concern of a backlash among Gulf Arab investors.

Governments in the world's biggest oil exporting region are diversifying away from US assets, as record oil prices drive up cash available for foreign



Sultan Nasser al-Suweidi

investment by about \$180 billion a year — about 16 per cent of the external funding needed to cover the US current account deficit.

Without making a link to the ports affair, Suweidi said the central bank was looking to con-

vert up to 10 per cent of its foreign exchange reserves from dollars into euros — double the target the bank had previously set.

UAE central bank foreign reserves — estimated at \$23 billion in December — are held virtually entirely in dollars. The bank said in July it was looking to convert 5 per cent of that into euros.

"Yes it's an increase. The euro will become more attractive definitely and once it becomes more attractive the decision will be to shift but in a reasonable way," Suweidi said.

He said bank executives would consider the shift at a meeting in April.

The central bank controls only part of the official foreign exchange reserves of the UAE, an oil-exporting federation of seven emirates. Other major holders include the investment arms of the emirates' governments.

Speculation that major central banks were looking to trim their dollar holdings reached fever pitch during the dollar's slide against the euro in the three years to 2004, but eased as the US currency regained ground last year.

# Saudis foil suicide attack on oil giant

**ASSOCIATED Press**  
CAIRO, February 24

**SUICIDE BOMBERS** in explosives-laden cars attacked the world's largest oil processing facility on Friday, but were prevented from breaking through the gates when guards opened fire on them, causing the vehicles to explode, officials said.

The Saudi oil minister said the blast "did not affect operations" at the Abqaiq facility, denying an earlier report on Al-Arabiya TV that the flow of oil was halted briefly after a pipeline was damaged. The facility "con-

tinued to operate normally. Export operations continue in full," the minister, Ali Naimi, said.

The price of oil jumped by more than \$1.20 on world markets as they heard of the attack.

It was the first attack on an oil facility in Saudi Arabia - and it targeted one of the kingdom's most important. The huge Abqaiq processing facility near the Gulf coast handles around two-thirds of the country's oil output, according to the US Department of Energy's Energy Intelligence Agency.

Saudi Arabia has been waging a fierce three-year crackdown on

al-Qaida militants, who launched a campaign in 2003 aimed at overthrowing the royal family with a string of attacks.

There was no immediate word on who was behind the attack, which took place in a region where Saudi Arabia's Shiite minority is centred. But there were varying reports on the details. A Saudi journalist who arrived at the scene soon after the explosion said only one car exploded and that the guards killed two people in a second car before it blew up. Guards then battled for two hours with two other militants outside the facility, the re-

porter told AP. He said he saw workers repairing a pipeline.

Al-Naimi said "security forces and Aramco security officials managed to thwart the attack", and that it had only caused "a small fire".

The attack came in a largely Shiite area amid an uproar over the bombing earlier this week against a Shiite shrine in Iraq.

Friday's attack at the oil site raised fears that the al-Qaida in Saudi Arabia was trying to emulate the Iraqi insurgents, who succeeded in hobbling that country's oil industry with sabotage and attacks.

## When the crown slips away

**I**t is perhaps the only country in the world where legislators can oust the executive on grounds of ill health. What makes the process all the more interesting is that the Kuwaiti executive is not an elected leader but a monarch. When Kuwait's National Assembly voted to remove Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah as Emir, they were using a provision in the Constitution that allows the parliament to declare the ruler unfit to govern. Following the death of Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Abdullah al-Sabah on January 14, Crown Prince Sheikh Saad, thought to be in his late 70s, automatically succeeded him. But it was common knowledge that he was ailing — he had hardly been seen in public for many years. The Crown Prince is also customarily the Prime Minister, but Sheikh Saad's illness had necessitated the separation of the two offices in 2003, when Sheikh Jaber appointed another member of his family, Sheikh Sabah, to head the government under him. With both ruler and Crown Prince on the sick bed, the Prime Minister was virtually running the oil-rich Gulf country. Confronted with Sheikh Saad's ascension, and the possibility that he was too ill even to take the oath of office, the Cabinet decided to invoke an article of the succession law that enables it to recommend to the National Assembly the replacement of the Emir if he fails to meet the conditions for ruling or is incapable of discharging his duties for health reasons. The Assembly voted to remove Sheikh Saad moments before he announced his abdication. The Cabinet nomination of Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah as the new Emir appears to have the approval of the royal family.

The succession drama in Kuwait is a study in how monarchical rule and democracy have sought to come to terms with each other in a region that is otherwise known for its tightly controlled sheikhdoms. Kuwait is the only country with a fully elected parliament since 1962, and a Constitution that has tried to fit the country's monarchy into a mix of presidential and parliamentary systems. The 50-member National Assembly has sworn in Sheikh Sabah as the new Emir, but it is no rubber stamp of the ruling family, from which most of the government and cabinet ministers are drawn. Political parties are banned in Kuwait but elected representatives group themselves around other affiliations such as Islamist, Bedouin or liberal, and have often clashed with government. From 2003 to 2005, members tabled three no-confidence motions against Cabinet Ministers, forcing their resignation just before voting. The Islamist and tribal representatives, who make up the majority in the Assembly, also succeeded in blocking, until 2005, a 1998 decree by Sheikh Jabar giving women equal political rights and allowing them to vote in and contest elections. It was finally passed in March last year and is to take effect in the 2007 Assembly elections. Kuwait, which has one-tenth of the world's known oil reserves, is certainly not a model democracy but in some ways it is for sure a trendsetter in the region.

# House ousts ailing ruler in Kuwait



Sheikh Saad: New era

Kuwait, Jan. 24 (Reuters): Kuwait's parliament deposed the Arab Gulf country's ailing new ruler on health grounds today and the cabinet nominated the Prime Minister as the new emir.

Parliament voted unanimously to remove Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah shortly before receiving his abdication letter, parliamentarians said. Sheikh Saad only became emir on January 15 and had not yet taken his oath of office.

"After listening to the medical report, the Assembly with its 65 members agreed to remove him from the post of emir," parliament speaker Jassem al-Kharafi said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, who is Sheikh Saad's cousin, had already been de facto ruler for four years.

The vote was a rare assertion of parliamentary muscle against a hereditary ruler in the Arab world, even though Kuwait's ruling family had agreed Sheikh Saad should step down.

House Speaker Jassem al-Kharafi said there were no conditions attached to the emir's abdication letter, which he said had arrived after the vote had taken place.

"Even though his Highness the emir has decided to step down he is still in the hearts of all of Kuwait's people and we have a lot of love, appreciation and respect for him," Kharafi said.

"This is God's will and there's nothing to do except to wish him to get well and to have complete rest," he added.

Sheikh Sabah has strong support within the ruling family, but his accession has interrupted a tradition of alternating power between the two rival branches of the al Sabah dynasty.

Sheikh Sabah is expected to maintain Kuwait's oil policy and the pro-Western stance of the country which holds about 10 per cent of the world's crude reserves.

## Kuwait to debate Emir issue

KUWAIT CITY: Parliament has decided to debate whether the emir should be deposed on grounds of ill health on Tuesday morning, said Speaker of the Assembly Jassem al-Kharafi on Monday.

The move is an unprecedented attempt to settle the constitutional crisis that has engulfed this oil-rich state and Western ally since the late emir, Sheik Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah, died on January 15 and was succeeded automatically by his cousin, Sheik Saad Al Abdullah.

Sheik Saad has so far been too ill to take the oath of office, a ceremony that is scheduled to take place in Parliament on Tuesday evening. There are serious doubts about whether his health would permit him to recite the full oath.

Mr. Al-Kharafi spoke to reporters at the end of a meeting with senior legislators over a Cabinet request to discuss deposing the emir, as well as a letter from the emir himself asking for his swearing-in to be brought forward to Monday. — AP

# Kuwait's new Emir to take over amid bitter struggle

**Kuwait City:** Kuwait's new ailing Emir will take the oath of office this week, the official news agency reported on Sunday, despite fears that he might not be able to recite it in full and regardless of the cabinet's moves to replace him with the prime minister.

All signs point to a deepening leadership crisis within the ruling family of this major US ally in the Gulf.

A special session of parliament will be held on Tuesday to administer the oath to Sheik Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah, KUNA reported. The Emir asked for the date in a meeting with the parliament speaker, KUNA said. The meeting was also attended by the head of the national guards, Sheik Salem Al Ali Al Sabah, a senior member of the ruling family and a strong backer of the new Emir.

But succession is still not certain. On Friday, the prime minister, Sheik Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah, who has led the country for years because of the poor health of the previous Emir and Sheik Saad, who was crown prince, accepted a request by much of the royal family to continue as de facto leader.

On Saturday, the cabinet—headed by Sheik Sabah—said it had decided to invoke constitutional procedures to strip the Emir of his power and install the prime minister in his place.

The dispute within the ruling family has left Kuwaitis anxiously hoping for a speedy solution before the succession struggle can affect the stability of the oil-rich country.

"It is not about that person or the other any more," said Abdul-Rahman Al Anjari, a

member of the liberal National Democratic Alliance. "It has become a matter of (the fate) of a country." He said the crisis must be resolved before it affects the stock exchange and causes the loss of investor confidence. Al An-



Sheik Saad and Sheik Sabah

jari, himself an investor, said as long as the government continued to sell some 2.5 million barrels of oil a day, state finances would not be harmed.


The dispute within the ruling family has left Kuwaitis anxiously hoping for a speedy solution before the succession struggle can affect the stability of the oil-rich country

The country's Islamist and liberal political movements issued a joint statement on Sunday calling on the Al Sabah family to "come together ... and put the interest of the country and its people over personal ones".

Sheik Saad automatically took over as Emir on Jan 15 upon the death of his predecessor, Sheik Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah.

But he has been in deteriorating physical health since 1997 and some question his ability to rule. According to the 1964 succession law, parliament can transfer power to the crown prince with a two-thirds vote if it is proven the Emir can no longer rule. A crown prince has not been appointed yet but Sheik Sabah was seen as the top candidate. AP

**The New York Times**

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January 28, 2006

## **Plan to End Darfur Violence Is Failing, Officials Say**

By JOEL BRINKLEY

WASHINGTON, Jan. 27 — The broad strategy for ending the carnage in Darfur, Sudan, devised over the last two years by the United States, the United Nations and the European Union, is collapsing as the violence and chaos in the region seem to grow with every passing week, United Nations and Bush administration officials say.

After three years of bloodshed that has already claimed more than 200,000 lives, officials say they are struggling to devise an effective new strategy.

"We're working very closely with our partners to see if we can turn this around," said a senior administration official who was not authorized to speak publicly.

But the obstacles and complications are multiplying.

Peace talks have nearly halted after government and Darfur-rebel negotiators, in the latest round, showed an unwillingness to seriously discuss anything except sharing Sudan's oil wealth. A growing military conflict on the Sudan-Chad border in Darfur is further endangering hundreds of thousands of refugees living in camps there. One of the Sudanese president's latest positions, articulated in a published interview this month, is that the government-backed militias known to be behind most of the violence are actually a fictitious creation of the media and the United States Congress.

"The looming threat of complete lawlessness and anarchy draws nearer," Kofi Annan, the United Nations secretary general, lamented earlier this month as he urged Western nations to do more.

The international response has been so ineffectual that "people on the ground are just laughing," said Jan Pronk, the chief United Nations envoy in Sudan.

The primary element of the present approach to end the bloodshed has been the deployment of 7,000 African Union peacekeeping troops in Darfur, where they have tried without success to dampen the widespread brutality and banditry. In fact, these troops have become targets themselves. In recent months, five have been shot and killed, including one on Jan. 6.

The United States and Europe have both declined to provide further financial support for the effort, and African Union leaders say money to conduct the operation will run out in March. The Bush administration continues to push Congress to provide more money, but Congress has twice rejected the request in recent months during budget debates.

"The funds are almost exhausted," Alpha Omar Konaré, chairman of the African Union commission, said in a report last week.

28 JAN 2006

The United Nations is considering deploying a larger force of its own peacekeeping troops to replace those of the African Union, but the discussions are at an early, preliminary stage. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed support for the idea this month. But the Sudanese government insists it will not accept United Nations forces on its territory, leaving Darfur and its surviving residents in limbo.

What is more, Mr. Pronk said this week, the United Nations "is not so eager" to take on troop commitments. "The U.N. has already reached its ceiling of commitments."

Neither he nor other officials were willing to predict how this predicament might be resolved. Meanwhile, "Darfur is in a free fall," said John Prendergast, who was director of African affairs for the National Security Council during the Clinton administration. Now he is a senior adviser for the International Crisis Group, a nonprofit organization.

In recent months, American officials said they were placing most of their faith in the on-again, off-again peace talks that began 18 months ago. Salim Ahmed Salim, an African Union official mediating the talks, observed after the latest negotiating session collapsed without result last month that both sides had shown little more than "deep distrust" of each other. American and United Nations officials said the only topic that the sides showed any eagerness to discuss was "wealth sharing."

Relief agencies administering the enormous task of feeding and caring for more than three million homeless Darfurians — half the state's population — have for many months tried to work in an environment rife with thugs, bandits, kidnappers and killers. Now, however, Sudan and Chad are building up forces and fighting skirmishes along their border in Darfur.

As a result, Mr. Pronk said he had ordered "a significant reduction in the presence of U.N. staff, and restricted U.N. access in the affected areas." Camps holding hundreds of thousands of refugees lie on or near the border with Chad. But Mr. Pronk said relief agencies there were still providing essential services.

The conflict in Darfur began in February 2003, when rebel groups attacked government positions, accusing the leaders in Khartoum of ignoring their region. The government struck back with a fury, enlisting local militias to massacre civilians and destroy entire villages.

The world was slow to acknowledge the problem, but in September 2004, the Bush administration stated that the carnage constituted genocide. The African Union troops began slowly arriving in Darfur last year.

So far, Mr. Prendergast added, Western nations "have used an ostrich strategy, hoping with a wing and a prayer that the African Union forces would actually succeed. But they are finally acknowledging that it is not going to work."

Western leaders have all but given up on a key part of their strategy, trying to persuade Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, to disarm the militias that are responsible for a large part of the violence. The United States says his government continues to finance the militias, even though Sudanese officials claim to be working hard to bring peace to Darfur. A special United Nations committee said this month that the Sudanese government had "abjectly failed to fulfill its commitment to identify, neutralize and disarm militia groups."

Mr. Bashir generally deflects questions on the Darfur violence when meeting with visiting American officials, and instead asks them to lift the economic embargo on Sudan, senior officials said. He also



urges them to continue providing aid under the peace agreement that ended a 21-year civil war with the south — the one bright spot in Sudan.

In a speech two weeks ago, Mr. Bashir called on the anti-government Darfur rebels to "repent." Then, in an interview with a German newspaper two days later, he denied that the government-financed janjaweed militias existed.

On Jan. 12, Sudan's government news agency issued a statement about the interview, saying "Field Marshall Bashir" had offered the view that "the U.S. Congress groups, which represent the Christian right and Zionist lobby, have a primarily hostile stance against Sudan and always try to incite this issue."

The New York Times

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January 19, 2006

## Growing Violence in Ivory Coast Pushes Leaders Toward Crisis Talks

By LYDIA POLGREEN

MONROVIA, Liberia, Jan. 18 - Clashes between protesters and United Nations peacekeepers left four people dead in western Ivory Coast on Wednesday as tensions mounted and youth leaders called for mass protests to push the United Nations and French peacekeepers from the country.

The escalating violence threatened to plunge Ivory Coast, once West Africa's most peaceful and prosperous nation, back into civil war. It also threatened to destroy a transitional government charged with unifying the country, which has been split in two since rebels attacked the north in 2002.

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria flew in for crisis talks with the government, Reuters reported, a clear sign of the seriousness of the situation.

There have been violent protests in several Ivorian cities since an international group of mediators trying to forge a plan to reunify the country and hold elections announced Sunday that it recommended dissolving Parliament, a bastion of power for the embattled president, Laurent Gbagbo.

Confusion reigned in Abidjan on Wednesday, as the country waited for Mr. Gbagbo to make a statement at a scheduled news conference, but he failed to appear as he huddled in meetings with leaders of his party, the Ivorian Popular Front.

Party leaders said Tuesday that they planned to withdraw from the transitional unity government, but it was unclear whether Mr. Gbagbo agreed. That raised the possibility that the party is not unified, and that Mr. Gbagbo may be losing his grip on the large numbers of militant youths he once controlled.

"It is clear that within the party there are other people who fear the president's party is losing the battle," said Gilles Yabi, an expert based in Dakar, Senegal, who studies Ivory Coast for the International Crisis Group, a research institution. "They fear that the president's party will be absolutely nullified by this process of transition, and it is clear they are interested in raising the stakes and showing their strength."

Youth leaders loyal to the president's party on Wednesday took over the state television station. Serge Koffi, the leader of the Ivorian students' union, went on the air to call for youths across the country to take to the streets to demand that United Nations and French military installations withdraw.

Early Wednesday morning, a group of protesters attacked a United Nations base staffed by peacekeepers from Bangladesh in Guiglo, an important government-controlled city in the cocoa-rich western part of the country. They were repelled, but four were killed, Margherita Amodeo, a United Nations spokeswoman, told Reuters.

In Abidjan, the commercial capital, militant youths armed with rocks and gasoline-filled bottles who are loyal to Mr. Gbagbo's party erected barricades, paralyzing the city and shutting most businesses and schools.

Mr. Gbagbo has drawn support from legions of Ivorian youths angry at the decline in their country's economic fortunes, for which they blame migrants from other parts of West Africa who own large plots of choice cocoa-growing land and have for decades worked in the fertile agricultural fields of the nation's vast cocoa belt.

The youth groups have aimed much of their wrath at migrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and other nations, as well as at France, which colonized Ivory Coast and remains a powerful economic force. But the recent violence marks an expansion of hostility by these volatile groups against the United Nations.

Ivory Coast has been divided between the rebel-controlled, largely Muslim north and the government controlled south since 2002, when rebels angry at the exclusion of their candidate from the presidential election tried to push Mr. Gbagbo from power.

Their putsch failed, and a brief civil war followed. A cease-fire agreement was signed in 2003. But three years of attempted peacemaking failed to reunite the country, which is deeply divided over ethnicity and religion. The country's once-mighty economy has foundered and its citizens have become impoverished. The prospect that yet another plan to end the stalemate will collapse prompted dismay across the region.



January 17, 2006

## Liberia's Harvard-Trained 'Queen' Is Sworn in as Leader

By LYDIA POLGREEN

MONROVIA, Liberia, Jan. 16 - Greeted by shouts of "Queen of Africa!" and standing before the bullet-scarred capitol of this war-torn nation, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained banker and stalwart survivor of Liberia's brutal politics, took the presidential oath of office on Monday, becoming Africa's first woman to be elected a head of state.

As her words were interrupted again and again with joyful shouts of "Yes!" and "Amen!" Ms. Johnson Sirleaf, 67, told the crowd that she would bring "a fundamental break with the past, thereby requiring we take bold and decisive steps to address the problems that for decades have stunted our progress, undermined national unity and kept old and new cleavages in ferment."

It was a jubilant moment suffused with history, observed with smiles by members of the old boy's club Ms. Johnson Sirleaf now joins, the formerly all-male fraternity of African leaders. Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's president and chairman of the African Union, looked on beaming as Ms. Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in.

A United States delegation led by Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sat beneath simple woven canopies. Their presence was an indication of the long and often troubled relationship between the United States and Liberia, which was founded by freed slaves from the United States in 1847.

In the front row sat George Weah, the soccer star who lost to Ms. Johnson Sirleaf and initially refused to concede the election, raising the grim possibility that long-suffering Liberia's opportunity for lasting peace might slip away. But Mr. Weah conceded last month, paving the way for the historic ceremony.

Despite the euphoria, Ms. Johnson Sirleaf faces a mountain of troubles in a nation afflicted by civil war for 14 years. Liberia's public works are in shambles; there is no piped water, no electricity grid. Its roads, schools and health centers, where they still exist, barely function.

An interim government that has ruled since Charles Taylor fled in 2003 was supposed to kick-start development, but corruption forced many donors to halt their programs.

The European Union had been supporting an effort to bring electricity to all of the capital, but withdrew because of corruption concerns. With the new president taking office, the Europeans will begin the program again, committing \$70 million. The United States is committed to rebuilding the armed forces. The United Nations mission in Liberia, which includes 15,000 peacekeepers, costs about \$700 million a year.

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There also remains the difficult question of what to do about Mr. Taylor, the warlord-turned-president who, with the backing of Libya and other regional powers, rampaged through his own country and much of West Africa, unleashing a cycle of war that still reverberates today. He fled to exile in Nigeria in 2003 as a condition of ending the war, but is under indictment by a court for war crimes in Sierra Leone. Nigeria has said it will hand him over only if Liberia asks.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf said Liberia was bound by the United Nations resolution calling for Mr. Taylor to appear in Sierra Leone, and must weigh calls for justice against the need for peace. "Our peace is fragile; we still have lots of Taylor operatives in the country," she said in an interview. "We don't want to see us return to a state of war."

Liberians, even Mr. Weah's partisans, who had taken to the streets to protest what they said was a rigged election, exulted in the moment, relieved that war seemed to have ceased and proud that their nation had produced the continent's first woman to be elected head of state.

"I voted for George Weah, but I accept Ellen because she is our Ma and is going to take care of us," said Benedict Newon, 19, a former child soldier. He first hoisted a weapon for the warlord Charles Taylor when he was 10, though he later switched allegiance to another rebel group.

"I never carry a gun again," Mr. Newon said, gesturing at his 8-month-old son and his pregnant wife, Fatou. "I have a future now. I got to protect it. I got to be patient with Ma Ellen."

That notion of president as *mater familias* may seem new, but in Liberia politics has always been paternalistic - fighters for Mr. Taylor called him their "Papay."

In an interview before the inauguration, Ms. Johnson Sirleaf said that unlike some Western women in politics, she embraced the stereotypical feminine roles as part of her appeal, though she is also known as Liberia's iron lady from her years in opposition politics, which included two stints in prison.

"The iron lady, of course that comes from the toughness of many years of being a professional in a male-dominated world," she said. "But also the many young people we have here, and the suffering I have seen, and the despair and lack of hope, brought out the motherliness in me, and that is where the Ma Ellen comes from."

It is a combination - tough and tender - that has won women new respect in the increasingly democratic political scene in Africa. Once dominated by male autocrats, many African countries now have women in high positions, and a handful are poised to join Ms. Johnson Sirleaf at the pinnacle of power.


Women from across the continent flocked to Monrovia to celebrate her victory. Abena P. A. Busia, an English professor from Ghana, said she would have swum to the inauguration.

Euphoria was palpable in the streets, where squads of workers frantically readied this battered city for its long-awaited close-up. Lacking heavy equipment, crews painted lines in the roads using huge stencils and hand brushes.

Pandora Matati, 20, a former fighter, was among the crews who worked furiously to prepare for the big event.

"I love Ellen because she is going to do so much for us," she said as she took a brief break from her job laying concrete at the capitol. "With Ellen, anything is possible."

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## **African Union Divided by a Sudanese Bid to Lead It**

By **MARC LACEY**

KHARTOUM, Sudan, Tuesday, Jan. 24 - African leaders rebuffed an attempt Monday by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan to become chairman of the African Union, sidestepping what they called the embarrassing prospect of having a leader accused of fomenting war in his own country take the helm of a continent-wide organization that advocates peace.

Mr. Bashir, eager to rehabilitate his own image and that of his beleaguered country, had lobbied hard for the prestigious post. But after considerable behind-the-scenes jockeying over his proposal in advance of a two-day summit meeting that opened here on Monday, Africa's leaders opted instead to set up a committee that will recommend who should replace President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria as the African Union's chairman.

Given the controversy, Sudan suggested that it would abandon Mr. Bashir's bid if it continued to divide the union's members.

The top candidate to emerge for the post was President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of Congo Republic, officials said early Tuesday.

Selecting Mr. Bashir, a general who seized power in a 1989 coup, would put the organization in the difficult position of attempting to mediate peace talks and quell the violence in the home of its chairman. Worse still, Mr. Bashir's own government has been accused of carrying out attacks on civilians in the western Darfur region and arming militia fighters who continue to terrorize the population there. An international criminal court is investigating an array of officials in Mr. Bashir's government for human rights violations related to the Darfur crisis, but has not indicated how high up the ladder the inquiry goes.

Human rights groups across the continent and beyond warned that choosing Mr. Bashir would damage Africa's credibility in the eyes of the world and hamper the African Union's efforts to negotiate an end to the Darfur crisis and to other conflicts around the continent.

"Making Bashir the chairman would be an insult to the victims of Darfur," said Salih Osman, a Sudanese human rights lawyer and opposition member of Parliament. "The highest level officials in this government are involved in the atrocities in Darfur."

Sudan, celebrating the 50th anniversary of its independence, argues that it is working hard to bring peace to Darfur and that it has made enough progress on a number of other fronts that it deserves the chairmanship. A year ago, for instance, the government signed a power-sharing agreement with southern rebels that ended a two-decade-long conflict. Since then, the government has admitted former rebels into its ranks and opened up political space to opposition parties.

"Which country in Africa does not have internal problems?" asked Lam Akol, Sudan's foreign minister, defending Mr. Bashir's bid. Still, there are ample signs that Sudan has a long way to go. The government initially denied credentials to cover the summit meeting to a Sudanese newspaper that had editorialized against Mr. Bashir's chairmanship bid. Authorities later backed down but said they would discuss the matter with the paper's editor after the meeting ended.

On Sunday night, security officials broke up a meeting of several dozen human rights activists in which Mr. Bashir's chairmanship was to be discussed. Participants were held for several hours and then released after various European ambassadors protested. "I'm surprised and disappointed," said Kent Degerfelt, the European Union's ambassador to Sudan, who had several staff members at the meeting. "This is a step in the wrong direction."

The hesitancy to select Mr. Bashir was seen as clear evidence that the African Union, set up in 2002, is seeking to distinguish itself from its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, which was criticized as a dictators' club unwilling to hold its members accountable. Already, the African Union has sanctioned two member states, Togo and Mauritania, for failing to hold democratic elections, and has conducted peacekeeping operations in Burundi and Darfur.

Some African leaders said they feared that the debate over Mr. Bashir's chairmanship would create a distraction as they attempt to end Africa's conflicts and help the continent grapple with a variety of woes.

The Bush administration also suggested that Mr. Bashir's selection might interfere in the African Union's efforts to seek a peace settlement in Darfur. "It is a concern to us, and it should be a concern to the A.U. nations," President Bush said during a trip to Kansas on Monday.

Mr. Bashir, who has complained of outside interference in his chairmanship bid, offered to allow someone else handle Darfur matters for the African Union should he be selected by his colleagues to lead it.

The African Union's first three chairmen, Thabo Mbeki from South Africa, Joaquin Chissano of Mozambique and Mr. Obasanjo of Nigeria, were chosen with little controversy. The 53-member bloc, loosely modeled after the European Union, rotates the presidency to give each of five regions access to the top post. East Africa says it is now its turn.

But Mr. Bashir's bid drew discomfort from the start, even after fellow leaders in East Africa had lined up solidly behind him. With support for its bid lagging, Sudan said late Monday that it was ready to bow out of the race if no consensus emerged.

"We don't want to make any crack in the union," said Mustafa Osman Ismael, a top foreign policy adviser to Mr. Bashir. "We don't want there to be division in order to obtain the objective. If that means Sudan should withdraw, we'll withdraw."

# Crown Prince of Dubai assumes power on brother's death

Sheikh Maktoum was known for his generosity for the Indian community, says envoy

Atul Aneja

**DUBAI:** Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who is the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as well as the ruler of Dubai, has died.

A statement issued by the Presidential Affairs Ministry, and carried by the UAE's official news agency, WAM announced his death.

The statement did not clarify the cause of death.

However, the Dubai ruler's office said that Sheikh Maktoum, who had ruled that emirate since 1990, died early on Wednesday in Australia. In Australia, offi-

cials said that Sheikh Maktoum died at the exclusive Palazzo Versace hotel on the Gold Coast, a resort in Queensland State.

## Architect of development

Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who has been the architect of the Dubai's rapid development, immediately succeeded him as ruler of the emirate, one of the seven emirates that comprise the UAE federation.

Sheikh Mohammad, who is the brother of Sheikh Maktoum, has been the intellectual driving force behind building up Dubai as a financial, business, industri-

al and sporting centre.

Educated in the Bell School of Languages, in Cambridge, he is credited with playing a key role in construction projects such as The Palms — a \$4-billion development reclaimed from the sea, the futuristic Burj Al Arab Hotel, the world's tallest, as well as promoting the Dubai World Cup, the richest horse race in the world.

Authorities in Dubai said Sheikh Maktoum's funeral would be on Thursday, and he will be buried at Umm Hurair cemetery in Bur Dubai.

UAE's Deputy Information Minister, Ibrahim Al Abed said

the country's Supreme Council, which comprises the rulers of the seven constituent emirates, would choose a Vice-President to succeed Sheikh Maktoum.

The President then will nominate a new Prime Minister, who, after being approved by the Council, would form a new Cabinet.

## Condolence messages

Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa on Wednesday mourned Sheikh Maktoum's death.

Condolence messages have been pouring in from Saudi Arabia as well as the other neighbouring countries of the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC).

In a condolence message, the Indian Business and Professional Council praised Sheikh Maktoum for his "exceptional calibre and vision", which has led to the emergence of the emirate as the "undisputed business hub for the Gulf and the Indian subcontinent."

Indian Consul General Yash Sinha expressed shock and sadness at the "sudden and tragic demise of Sheikh Maktoum."

He added that Sheikh Maktoum was known for his "kindness, generosity and affection for the large Indian community" in the emirate.