

Sudan accused of concealing famine omens

Report tells of devastation by locusts and drought

SUDAN is suppressing harvest survey figures which show that the west of the country is facing a serious food shortage this year, according to sources close to the United Nations.

The figures, in a report by a UN Food Supply Assessment Mission and other aid agencies, show that drought and locusts in the Northern Kordofan region have caused a grain shortfall of more than 73,000 tons this year. The provincial government would not endorse the figures, and the central government has insisted the report be kept secret, so no formal request for food aid has been made.

The shortage may not lead to mass starvation this year but if no food aid is brought in and there is another bad harvest next year, people will be too impoverished to survive. The region, on the edge of the Sahara, is vulnerable to erratic rains and drought. Much of its food comes from the Nuba mountains, but government military campaigns in the Nuba region have cut food production drastically, and it will produce no surplus this year.

Khartoum is reluctant to admit to another potential famine: it feels they have given Sudan a bad name and drawn attention to its inability to provide for its own people. Since the droughts of 1983 and 1984, which led to a serious famine, early warning systems have ensured that food

RICHARD DOWDEN
Africa Editor

aid arrives at the right time at the right price, and starvation has been averted.

Crop assessments, movements of grain and livestock can all indicate potential shortages. Recent surveys in Northern Kordofan indicate that in several areas there will be virtually no harvest this year. The report says: "Unless additional food is allocated to Northern Kordofan immediately, internal displacement appears to be inevitable."

This means that people will start leaving their homes in search of food. Once that happens, they are weakened by walking and end up in camps, unable to cultivate their fields for next year's harvest. "There

is now evidence to conclude that there will be little to no harvest in most of Northern Kordofan in 1993," the report continues "and significant amounts of food aid will be required in 1994."

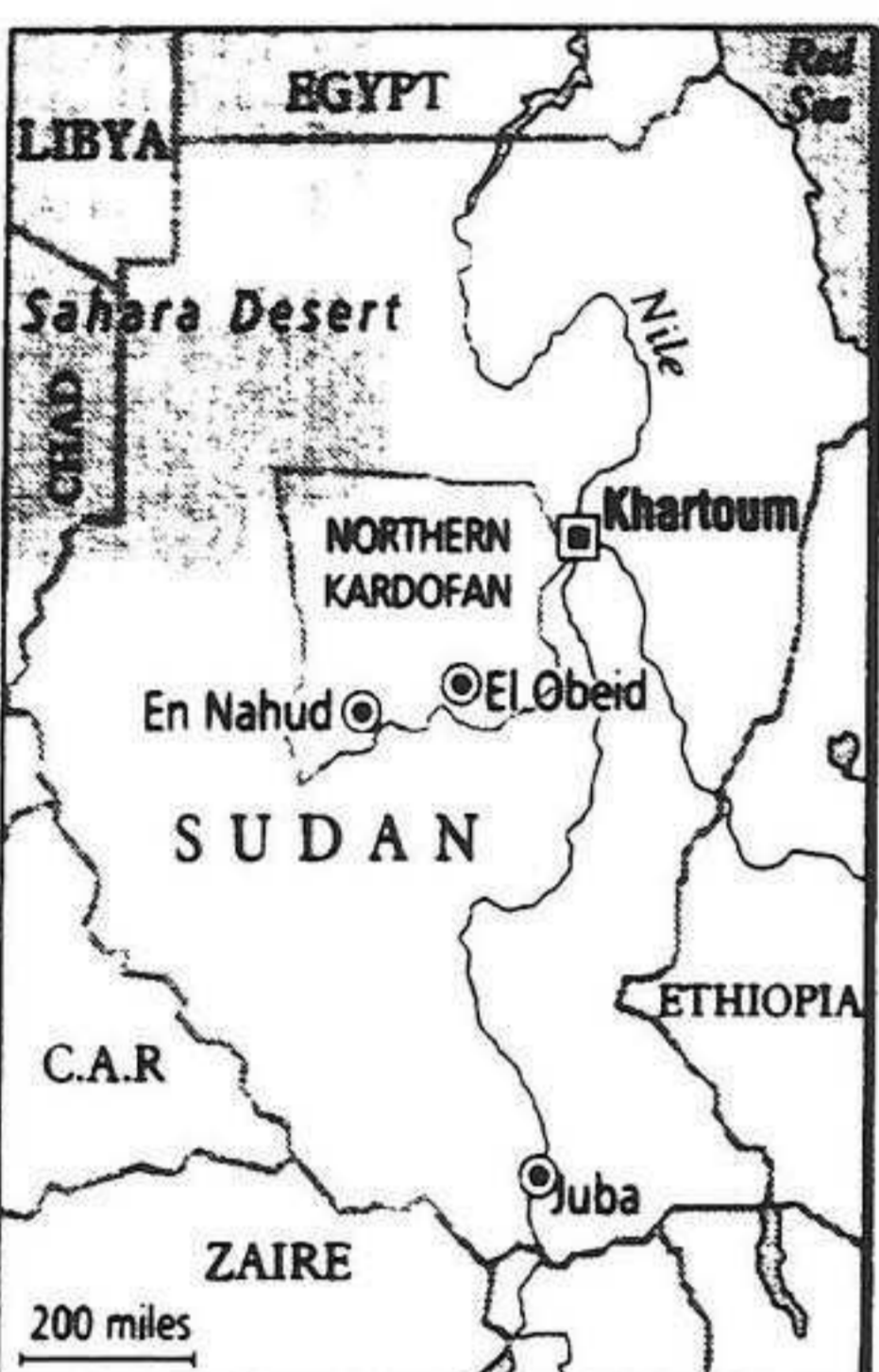
Conditions are worst in the Sodari province of Northern Kordofan, where it barely rained this year. Even if rain does come "there will be no food crop production in Sodari province this year" says the report.

It says that in Bara province "the majority of the province has had little to no rain at all... unless sufficient quantities of food aid are delivered within the next two to three weeks, large internal displacement is expected."

In En Nahud province the price of livestock has halved, while the price of dura and millet, the locally grown grain, has risen by 50 per cent - a sure sign that people are selling their animals to buy grain. "Herders are selling off livestock at an alarming rate... crops planted in June have been devastated by the recent locust infestation."

These indicators have not been turned into requests for food aid by Sudan to the UN and other big food-aid donors.

The military government in Khartoum has said it will supply all food requirements throughout the country but the report says it is unlikely that the exceptional needs of Kordofan have been planned for or will be met.



Tansu Ciller, on her first foreign trip since becoming Turkey's Prime Minister, with Viktor Chernomyrdin before their talks Photograph: Boris Yurchenko/AP

Turkey and Russia united on Armenia

RUSSIA and Turkey stand together in condemning Armenia's invasion of Azerbaijan and may send a joint peace-keeping force to the region, the Turkish Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller, said yesterday.

Mrs Ciller was speaking to reporters after meeting the Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and President Boris Yeltsin in the Kremlin.

Turkey, a member of Nato, has given moral support to the Muslim Azeris in their five-year-old war with the Christian Armenians over the dis-

puted territory of Nagorny Karabakh while Moscow, officially neutral, has in practice leaned towards Armenia. But Russia changed its attitude this summer when Armenians from Nagorny Karabakh started pushing beyond the mountain enclave into southern Azerbaijan, taking some 20 per cent of their neighbour's territory and creating a refugee crisis.

Mrs Ciller expressed satisfaction that the Russians had shown "considerable understanding" for Ankara's po-

HELEN WOMACK
in Moscow

sition. "Both sides agreed that the Armenian aggression should be stopped, that the invasion must be reversed," she said. But Turkey and Russia had gone further and agreed to co-operate. "If a peace force is required, the two nations may take this up as required."

Before coming to Moscow, Mrs Ciller had issued a warning that if Armenia touched Nakhichevan, a tiny Azeri en-

clave sandwiched between Armenia and Turkey, then Turkey would become involved in the military conflict. But yesterday Mrs Ciller, whose country has reinforced its troops near the border with Armenia, was at pains to calm fears. "We see no immediate threat to Nakhichevan. We are watching what our neighbours do. It is reasonable that we should be concerned about our own region."

The Turkish Foreign Minister, Hikmet Cetin, said he was not alarmed at the mo-

ment that Iranian forces had penetrated just inside southern Azerbaijan to help refugees who have fled from the Armenians. Neither has Moscow voiced undue concern.

Yesterday the acting Azeri leader, Haydar Aliyev, said he was ready for peace talks with Armenia. And Armenia's President Levon Ter Petrosian was reported to have told the Iranians that Karabakh forces would stop attacking Azerbaijan, and gradually withdraw from its territory.

US helicopters strafe Somalis

MOGADISHU - US helicopter gunships attacked crowds of Somalis, including women and children, in Mogadishu yesterday, inflicting heavy casualties after Pakistani and American troops came under attack. A UN spokesman said casualties among the Somalis were sizeable and may have included women and children.

The women and children were acting as a "human shield" for a large force of Somali gunmen moving among them to attack UN peace-keeping troops, whom they ambushed on Mogadishu's notorious October 21st Road.

Somali residents said that more than 100 Somalis were killed or wounded in the fighting, which lasted for three hours. This casualty-toll estimate could not be confirmed. Similar local reports in the past have been heavily exaggerated.

UN officials said a Pakistani soldier was killed and five Pakistanis and three US soldiers were wounded in the

MASSIMO ALBERIZZI
of Reuters

ambush, in which a force of 135 American and Pakistani troops was attacked by scores of gunmen. Two Cobra helicopters flew in to relieve them, firing 20mm cannons. The force was trying to remove barricades from October 21st Road, a hunting-ground for militiamen loyal to the fugitive warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed, when it was ambushed. An armoured vehicle in the UN column was hit by a cannon shell fired by militiamen and destroyed.

Major David Stockwell, the UN military spokesman, said women and children swarming around the soldiers' vehicles were regarded by the US helicopters "armed or not, as being combatants and posing an imminent threat against our soldiers". Armed youths attacking the column were moving among the civilians, a tactic they have been accused of employing in past attacks.

Pain is relative in the land of the rising yen, Terry McCarthy writes from Tokyo

JAPAN has got a problem. Only 97.5 per cent of the population have jobs. Inflation is raging at 1.3 per cent. Exports are struggling along, and this year the country will have a trade surplus of a mere £100bn.

Interest rates are painfully low: the official discount rate is at a post-war low of 2.5 per cent, but industry is begging the government to lop off another 1 per cent. At the same time, the yen has appreciated by 20 per cent against the dollar since the beginning of the year, slashing the country's import bills for oil and raw materials but making thankless exporters complain they can no longer sell competitively - hence the £100bn trade surplus.

Economic fundamentals like that would be cause for celebration in the US or West Europe. But in an indication of how far Japan has advanced - GNP per capita is now double that of Britain - and how high expectations have risen among consumers and businessmen, everyone is unanimous in decrying the "recession".

Japan takes recession in its stride

On Tuesday the Prime Minister, Morihiro Hosokawa, said there was a danger of the economy "going backwards". The Economic Planning Agency said the economy was at a "standstill".

Japanese factories still turn out world-beating goods, and salary-earners take home more money, on average, than any of their counterparts in the West, except Switzerland. But things used to be better. Industrial production has fallen continuously for the past 22 months, while sales in department stores have dropped for the past 17 months. Wages continue to rise, modestly. But overtime and the biannual bonuses which swell earnings during

good times have been cut to the bone.

Economic pain is relative. Japan does not have the structural unemployment of Europe. But as companies continue to cut costs in the latest adaptation to the rising yen, job opportunities are falling. For every 100 people seeking jobs, only 70 vacancies are being advertised: last year there were more vacancies than applicants. Nor have there been any of the huge lay-offs seen in IBM or other big Western companies struggling to restructure.

But there is a gradual fraying at the fringes, and almost every day companies announce plans to shed workers "by natural attrition" and by cutting recruitment. In the past

10 days Toshiba has said it will cut 5,000 jobs, Fujitsu will shed 6,000, Mazda 1,500 and Nippon Telegraph & Telephone 10,000.

To get the economy back on track, the cabinet is working on a package that will concentrate on deregulating the economy and passing on the benefits of a higher yen to the consumer.

At the same time, there is a battle behind the scenes over tax reform. The Shinsei (Renewal) Party, led by the Foreign Minister, Tsutomu Hata, wants to cut income tax to stimulate consumer demand. It would pay for this by increasing consumption tax on goods from 3 per cent to 10 per cent. But the Socialist Party, the largest single party in the governing coalition, opposes the move, because it would weigh more heavily on low-income families. And bureaucrats at the Finance Ministry are against cutting income tax because they fear it would deplete government coffers. That is another Japanese "problem": the government does not operate a budget deficit.

IN BRIEF

Shootings take SA toll to 25

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - Gunmen yesterday raked cars with automatic gunfire near Katsheung township, east of Johannesburg, killing two blacks and taking to at least 25 the overnight death-toll in political violence.

The Pretoria supreme court threw out a challenge by Mangosuthu Buthelezi's KwaZulu black homeland on the way decisions are taken at South Africa's democracy talks. KwaZulu, which with the Inkatha Freedom Party quit the talks on 2 July when a date was set for all-race elections, brought an action seeking to overturn the election decision.

Tourist murder: man held

MIAMI (Reuters) - A man has been arrested and police are searching for his girlfriend after the murder of a German tourist in an attempted robbery in Florida.

Police said they had arrested Ricardall Wiggins, 19, from Miami, and were hunting his girlfriend, Patsy Jones. A third person may have been involved. The tourist, Uwe-Wilhelm Rakebrand, had just arrived in Florida on holiday with his wife when their car was repeatedly hit by a van in what police called a "bump-and-rob" plot. Mr Rakebrand kept driving and was shot by someone in the van.

Star Wars test 'not rigged'

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The US Defense Secretary Les Aspin yesterday denied reports that a "Star Wars" test, in which a US missile hit a mock nuclear warhead in flight, was rigged to deceive Congress and the Soviet Union. But Mr Aspin conceded in a statement to reporters that the target of the 10 June 1984 test high over the Pacific Ocean was artificially heated to make it easier for the heat-seeking homing device on the US weapon to find the target. He said the target warhead also had a radar beacon on board, but that there was no receiver for beacon signals on the experimental US weapon.

Indian strike misses mark

NEW DELHI - A nationwide strike called by Indian left-wing parties and unions yesterday to protest at the government's economic reforms was only partially successful, writes Tim McGirk.

Strike organisers said 20 million workers disrupted trains and airline services and shut down some banks, coal mines and factories around India. But a government spokesman said that apart from four states controlled by the left-wing parties, few other states were hit by widespread industrial action.

Unita offers to talk again

LISBON (AFP) - Senior officials from Angola's Unita rebel movement arrived in Portugal yesterday and presented a peace proposal to President Mario Soares.

Unita's army chief of staff, General Arlindo Pena, said he had "a new proposal that could lead to resumed negotiations". He gave Mr Soares a message from Unita's leader, Jonas Savimbi, calling for an immediate ceasefire and talks, sources said. But Mr Soares said the Unita initiative was probably a "diversionary manoeuvre".

Abiola agrees homecoming

LAGOS (Reuters) - The thwarted presidential candidate Moshhood Abiola, widely believed to have won Nigeria's annulled June election, will return home on Sunday from abroad, where he has been lobbying for foreign support for his claim to the presidency, according to Baba Gana Kingibe, Mr Abiola's running-mate in the election.

Mr Abiola has been abroad since 3 August and has twice postponed returning to Nigeria for fear of his security.

"We advised him to come back on Sunday because we think it is safe for him to do so and he has agreed," Mr Kingibe said.

The former military ruler, General Ibrahim Babangida, handed power to an unelected interim government two weeks ago.

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