

6 January 2005

# Taking peace process forward

By DR BIPIN ADHIKARI

Although path breaking, the recent political development in Sudan is something that the Nepali media overlooked as if it had no interesting stuff for the local intelligentsia or the commoners. This only proves what many conscious professionals in Nepal do not doubt – i.e. the allegation that our media has made little contribution to the efforts towards resolution of the Maoist conflict, which is the principal item on the agenda of the ailing country.

Many critical analysts around the world never believed that peace is possible in Sudan. They thought that it is never possible to reconcile Islamic authorities in the northern Sudan who were fighting with the Christian and animist rebels in the south – those who took up arms in 1983 to protest against control of their territory by the Muslim government of Sudan. But the deep mistrust that prevailed due to one of the most protracted conflict in Africa has finally been overcome paving the way for a permanent cease-fire and an accord acceptable to all.

This development in Sudan must be illuminating to His Majesty, his government and the parliamentary political parties which have not yet been able to develop a workable approach to the political demands of the Maoists despite many sublime possibilities on board. Their worst enemies – the Maoists – have not harmed them as much as their own unregulated thoughts.

Sudan has been a humanitarian disaster since the last two decades. Some serious efforts in the last couple of years helped the government of Sudan and rebel representatives of the People's Liberation Movement/Army signing a permanent cease-fire and an accord that maps out the implementation of several peace protocols already concluded between them. This paves the way for a final agreement to end 21 years of civil war in southern Sudan - Africa's longest-running conflict.

Although the final peace accord is expected to be signed on January 9, which will also open the procedures for its implementation, the principles behind the resolution of the conflict as are agreed by this time are clear. The accord tries to move away from the pride and prejudices of the parties to the conflict, focusing more on alternatives to activities that almost disfigured Sudan and frustrated its economic and political development. During these painful years

Complicated by the presence of oil reserves in the south, which the parties to the conflict wanted to monopolize for themselves, the fighting - along with resultant disease and famine - had left over two million people dead and about four million others displaced. It is only after the loss of this magnitude that Sudan started looking for the best in rebels and in itself, and in fact found it.

Sudan is an example of the fact that peace may demand what may be described as painful compromise on the part of parties to the conflict. Indeed, the Sudanese government has made significant concessions to the rebels, which our own government need not be troubled with even in the present trying situation. For example, South Sudan is to become autonomous and, at the end of six years, a referendum will decide on

The peace process in Sudan will not complete unless problem of Darfur - a region of western Sudan - is solved. Again the challenges of implementation of the peace plan as noted above are enormous and call for integrity and seriousness from all quarters. But what is important is that a process, which was long due has started, and there is an image of the country so tangible that everybody can reach out and touch it. This is what is not happening in Nepal.

secession of South from the mainland. If the decision is to stay part of Sudan, both sides will unify their armies into a single military force. The country's oil wealth is to be shared equally and central and official jobs will be apportioned on fixed ratios. This will ensure that both sides have a proper say in the administration of both the central government and three southern state governments, which have been fought over for half-a-century.

Similarly, the Sudanese government as a part of the peace deal must withdraw at least 91,000 troops from South Sudan under a permanent cease-fire arrangement that has been signed with militants. The troops have to pull out within two and a half years after the adversaries sign a comprehensive peace deal on January 9. The rebels also have eight months to withdraw their forces from Northern Sudan. They too had to give ground, winding back its

*de facto* independence to a limited autonomy, the future of which will be decided by plebiscite in 2011. By then, if the peace has held and each side has learned to trust each other and work together, the Sudanese of the south may prefer to remain part of a newly prospering Sudan than risk the uncertainties and dangers of independence.

The peace deal holds the promise of elections after more than a decade of autocratic rule by a government accused of human rights abuses and of sponsoring terrorists including Osama bin Laden.

These agreements were possible because the countries in Sudan's neighborhood also committed themselves to the peace process with such honesty and sincerity, which were necessary to guarantee the sanctity of the process. Negotiations between

the government and the southern rebels, which got underway in 2002, are being mediated by the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) - a regional body comprising Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. These countries with others in Africa are walking together with the people of Sudan to make sure that Sudan comes up again as a prosperous and vibrant nation.

The peace process in Sudan will not complete unless problem of Darfur - a region of western Sudan - is solved. Again the challenges of implementation of the peace plan as noted above are enormous and call for integrity and seriousness from all quarters. But what is important is that a process, which was long due has started, and there is an image of the country so tangible that everybody can reach out and touch it. This is what is not happening in Nepal.

(The writer is a lawyer)