

Shooting reported in Sudan flashpoint state's capital

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- * South Kordofan seen as flashpoint area
- * Northern army says southern-allied groups behind shooting
- * At least 96,000 have fled Abyei violence - U.N.

By Alex Dziadosz

KHARTOUM, June 6 (Reuters) - Shooting broke out in the capital of Sudan's Southern Kordofan state on Monday, the latest eruption of violence in the tense border region as the country's south prepares to secede.

South Sudan is scheduled to become a separate country in less than five weeks, but the split has been complicated by disputes over the exact position of the common border and over oil revenue-sharing.

Tensions have been high since Khartoum occupied the disputed Abyei region on May 21, setting off an international outcry and raising fears of further violence.

Southern Kordofan state, which lies in northern territory, is seen as another potential flashpoint because it is home to many who fought against the north during the country's last civil war.

It also holds the most productive oil fields that will be left in the north after the split, which could see Khartoum lose up to 75 percent of Sudan's 500,000 barrels per day of oil output.

One northern soldier was killed and seven were wounded during fighting on Sunday in the village of Umm Dorain, some 50 kilometres east of the state capital Kadugli, the military said in a statement carried by the Sudanese Media Center.

It blamed the attack on southern-allied forces.

"The armed forces reserves its full right to respond at the appropriate time and place," the report quoted the military statement as saying.

A spokesman for the U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) said there had been shooting in Kadugli late on Monday afternoon, but no details were available.

A northern military spokesman said Khartoum's army was not involved in the shooting, saying it came from southern-allied forces firing randomly from nearby mountains.

"No clashes occurred between the Sudanese army and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army today," Al-Sawarmi Khaled said, referring to the southern military. Southern officials were not immediately available to comment on the reports.

Khartoum has threatened to disarm or clear out southern-allied militias in Southern Kordofan, which borders both Abyei and the western region of Darfur, where separate rebel groups are fighting government forces.

Juba has played down its links to the armed groups in Southern Kordofan, saying it cannot ask them to withdraw south because they are northerners.

BORDER REGION

Southern Kordofan has been tense since Sudan declared the northern ruling party's Ahmed Haroun winner of a gubernatorial election last month. The south said the vote was rigged, a charge the north denied.

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The northern army sent tanks into Kadugli after fighting broke out at the weekend, southern party officials said on Sunday. A police station was attacked and looted in Kadugli and fighting was reported in the village of Umm Dorain, they said.

It was unclear if there had been any casualties.

UNMIS said in a statement it was "deeply concerned" about the security situation in Southern Kordofan and Abyei and urged all parties to prevent any escalation of violence.

The statement added that looting was continuing in Abyei and called on the northern military to stop firing artillery from the vicinity of the UNMIS compound.

The northern army says fighting has ceased in Abyei and that life has returned to normal in the region. In London, Sudan's foreign minister said the army would stay in Abyei until it was stable enough to leave.
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At least 96,000 people have fled Abyei and the surrounding areas, the top U.N. humanitarian official said on Monday.

Southerners voted to secede in a January referendum, the culmination of a 2005 peace deal that ended decades of civil war. (Additional reporting by Jeremy Clarke in Juba and Khalid Abdelaziz in Khartoum; Editing by Jon Hemming)

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