China has been awarded concessions by the Sudanese government to explore for oil in three “promising” areas in the country, according to a state official.

Chinese-led companies already dominate exploration and production scene of Sudan’s oil sector, which currently produces 110,000 barrels a day after South Sudan seceded last month with the bulk of the country’s previous daily oil output of 500,000 barrels.

Sudan’s foreign minister Ali Karti on Tuesday said that the country’s President Omer Al-Bashir had granted China concessions to conduct oil exploration activities in three areas which the minister failed to identify but rather described as “promising” in addition to joining the state-owned Sudapet in the areas where it has concessions.

The minister’s announcement was made following a meeting on the same day between Al-Bashir and China’s foreign minister Yang Jiechi as he wrapped up a two-day visit to Khartoum where he held talks with his counterpart Karti as well as the ministers of finance, minerals, investment and oil. Jiechi also met with the economy’s secretary of the ruling National Congress Party.

Sudan announced in October last year that oil exploration activities are planned to be initiated in three areas in the country’s westernmost region of Darfur, the scene of a long-running armed conflict between the government and rebels accusing it of marginalizing the region.

Karti also announced that Al-Bashir had issued directives to facilitate the use of Sudan’s territories for transferring the equipments of Chinese companies operating in Chad, Central Africa Republic and South Sudan.

The country’s top diplomat also spoke of eight Chinese companies entering the country’s agriculture sector.

Sudan is trying to diversify its economy to compensate for the loss of oil revenues it was splitting evenly with South Sudan since 2005 after the two sides signed a peace deal ending nearly half a century of intermittent civil wars.

Henceforth, Sudan will only be receiving fees from the south for the use of its pipelines infrastructure and refineries which the grossly underdeveloped South lacks.

Sudan’s oil sector is subject to a number of uncertainties. The most productive oilfields left in Sudan after the south’s split lie in the country’s southern state of South Kordofan which descended into a state of war since early June between Sudan army and fighters from the indigenous Nuba population and who were previously aligned with South Sudan army.

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