

Qatar mediating in Eritrea-Djibouti row

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DOHA: Qatar's diplomatic initiatives to broker peace in strife-stricken regions of the world got a further boost yesterday when it was picked to mediate in the long-running border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti.

Both Eritrea, which gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991, and Djibouti, a former French colony, have authorised Doha to mediate and find a lasting solution to the border row between them.

The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, yesterday announced that Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki and his Djibouti counterpart, Ismael Omar Guelleh, had inked a deal whereby they have authorised Qatar to mediate in the border dispute between their two countries.

"They (Eritrea and Djibouti) have authorised the mediator, the Emir, H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who signed as a mediator and witness, with the full authority to issue an executive working document to the agreement," the Premier said in a statement, according to Qatar News Agency (QNA).

Eritrean troops have withdrawn from an area they controlled in Djibouti as a result of Doha's mediation bid.

A Qatari observation force is tasked with monitoring the border between the two countries "until the conclusion of a final agreement on settling the conflict," QNA reported. The force, made up of about 20 soldiers, arrived in Djibouti on Friday, according to a news agency report.

The texts of the agreement will be exchanged between the foreign ministers of the two countries in Doha soon.

There are seven articles in the agreement, according to which a committee will be set up under the chairmanship of the Qatari Premier with a member each from Eritrea and Djibouti.

The job of this panel would be to resolve the boundary differences between the two countries within the framework of the authorisation given by the two sides.

The committee shall nominate and appoint with the consent of the two sides (Eritrea and Djibouti) an international company to carry out the demarcation of the border between the two countries in accordance with international principles and rules on border demarcation.

Qatar will monitor the demarcation of boundaries between the two countries.

Eritrea is a former Italian colony which was annexed to Ethiopia in 1962 and got free in 1991. The issue of its border row with Djibouti is with the UN as well as the Arab League, where Eritrea has only observer status. Djibouti, on the other hand, is an Arab League member.

Meanwhile, the GCC Secretary General H E Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah, in a statement to QNA yesterday welcomed the agreement signed by the Eritrean and Djibouti Presidents which was mediated by the Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who also signed the agreement in the capacity of the State of Qatar as mediator and witness.

In a press statement released here today, the GCC Secretary General said that mediation of Qatar in this regard involving exchange documents between the two foreign ministers in Doha soon, reaffirms Qatar's vital role in pursuing dialogue and resolving conflicts.

The agreement between Eritrea and Djibouti mediated by Qatar coincides with a new round of Doha negotiations after those initiated to resolve the Darfur crisis, driving home the point of Qatar's effectiveness in international politics and diplomacy for peace in Sudan, he noted.

The Peninsula