

## Libya's chemical arms plant Mubarak for probe by Egyptian-European team

CAIRO, Apr 8: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called Sunday for an Egyptian-European mission to visit Libya to investigate a reported chemical weapons plant under construction, reports AFP.

"To avoid the use of violence, we will talk with the Libyans," Mubarak told a joint press conference with his French counterpart Jacques Chirac.

"Perhaps we can agree that an European party go with us to see the place which is said to be producing chemical weapons," he said.

The United States says Libya is building the world's largest chemical weapons plant at Tarhuna, 65 kilometres (40 miles) southeast of Tripoli, while Libya insists the site is only a factory for irrigation pipes.

Mubarak said he asked US Defense Secretary William

Perry during his visit to Cairo last week "to provide information and photos which prove the truth of what has been reported."

"No decision can be made in this matter without there being certain information," he said.

Chirac, in turn, said he did not discuss the Libyan plant in talks with Mubarak, adding, "I don't have enough information on this subject to comment."

Perry did not rule out the use of force by Washington to prevent completion of the underground plant at Tarhuna saying the US had several options "the first being diplomacy and the second deterrence."

Arab League head Esmat Abdel Meguid expressed his "sorrow" on Sunday at Perry's hints at military actions against Libya.

## Heavy combat operations to flush out Chechen rebels

GROZNY, Apr 8: Russian troops conducted intensive combat operations today in southeastern Chechnya in an effort to drive rebels forces out of two of their mountain strongholds, reports AP.

The ITAR-Tass news agency, quoting the federal command, said the Russians were attacking the villages of Vedeno and Dargo, two important bases for fighters loyal to separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev.

There was no immediate word on casualties.

In another development, Gen. Stanislav Kondratyev, deputy commander of the federal forces in Chechnya, denied reports that Russian forces had moved in on the village of Shali.

Kondratyev said a column of Russian forces had driven past Shali, a village located about 25 kilometres southeast

of the Chechen capital Grozny, on its way to southern Chechnya.

In Shali on Monday, Russian Martagov, a spokesman for the Russian-backed Chechen government, told ITAR-Tass residents of the village held a rally to demand the rebels leave the village.

Shali, like many Chechen villages recently, faced the choice of telling the rebels to leave or facing a possible brutal attack by Russian troops.

Martagov said the situation around Shali was quiet Monday, with no shelling or bombing of the settlement. The Echo Moskvy radio station said the town had come under fire from Russian troops Sunday night.

Russian troops claimed to have cleared rebel forces from the settlement of Beni-Vedeno, a village to the east of Vedeno, ITAR-Tass said.

Since Sunday, Russian troops claimed they came under rebel fire 11 times, and five Interior Ministry troops were wounded.

The latest fighting came one week after President Boris Yeltsin announced his peace plan for Chechnya and said Russian troops would fire only if attacked. The unilateral cease-fire, however, has not been observed and the Kremlin still seems far from an end to the war.

About 100 Russian servicemen already have been killed in the past week of fighting, the Russian NTV network said Sunday.

Russian leaders say "special operations" such as bombardments and localised clashes will continue despite Yeltsin's peace initiative.

Yeltsin is under pressure to end the unpopular war, which began nearly 16 months ago as

an effort to end Chechnya's separatist drive and since has killed more than 30,000, before the June 16 presidential elections in which he is seeking a second term.

The Russian president has proposed indirect talks with Dudayev and other Chechen leaders.

Dudayev has responded positively to the possibility of Minsmir Shamiyev, the president of the mainly Muslim republic of Tatarstan, in central Russia, being named to mediate the conflict, ITAR-Tass reported.

However, Vyacheslav Mikhailov, Russia's Minister of Nationalities, said Dudayev's attitude towards talks was negative although some field commanders had expressed their readiness for talks, ITAR-Tass reported.

It was unclear when talks might begin.

## Ship with arms intercepted Iranian plan to attack Jewish targets uncovered'

JERUSALEM, Apr 8: An Iranian ship loaded with sophisticated arms and explosives and intended to attack Jewish and Israeli targets has been intercepted, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said.

Belgian authorities discovered the ship in the port of Antwerp in the past two weeks, Peres aide Aliza Goren told The Associated Press.

Peres said the arms were discovered only by chance, and said the Iranian plan could easily have succeeded. Authorities offered no other details.

Speaking Sunday to the central committee of his Labour Party, Peres alleged that Iran's support for Islamic militant groups was aimed at helping the opposition Likud Party win upcoming Israeli elections. He said Iran's greater goal is to sabotage the peace process between Israel

and its Arab neighbours. Peres bitterly attacked "four European countries" that he said have extended billions of dollars in credits to Iran in the last few months. He did not name the countries.

"They forgot just one thing that Iran is financing the Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad," Peres said, referring to Islamic militant groups that have been fighting Israel.

Also Sunday, the army announced the Israelis have arrested a Palestinian student who allegedly had undergone training in Iran to carry out attacks against Israeli targets.

Khalil Zuhada Suleiman Abu Issa, 24, was arrested last month when he returned from Turkey, where he had been studying medicine.

The army issued a statement saying Abu Issa was a representative of the Islamic Jihad.

## BRIEFLY

### Prison revolt ends in Argentina:

Rebellious inmates freed 17 hostages on Sunday, ending an 8-day mutiny that had spread through the country's prisons, AP reports from Buenos Aires.

"I have the great pleasure to announce that, almost as an Easter gift, the situation in the prisons has been normalised," said Roman Catholic Bishop Emilio Bianchi di Carcano, a member of a negotiating team.

The hostages, including Criminal Court Judge Maria Malere, her secretary and at least 12 guards, fled out of Sierra Chica Prison, 400 kilometres (250 miles) south of Buenos Aires, to the applause of bystanders.

### Fire bombs hurt 6 in West Bank:

Six Israelis were injured Sunday when two fire bombs were thrown at their bus near the Palestinian village of Beit Omar, emergency workers said. AP reports from Beit Omar.

One person suffered moderate burns, and the others were slightly burned, the Magen David Adom ambulance service said. They were taken to hospitals in Jerusalem.

The army sealed off Beit Omar, and soldiers and police searched the area. Palestinian and Israeli settler sources said.

### SA violence claims 5 more:

Five people were killed and four wounded when gunmen opened fire on a memorial service at a house in South Africa's Zulu heartland, police said on Sunday, Reuters reports from Durban.

Five or six attackers burst into a home near Greytown in KwaZulu-Natal province on Saturday night where the Ngidi family were holding a memorial service for a dead relative, spokesman Henry Budhrum said.

### 4 drug dealers killed in Brazil:

Four drug dealers were killed in a shootout with police in a Rio de Janeiro slum, Brazilian newspapers reported on Sunday, Reuters reports from Rio de Janeiro.

The Correio Braziliense daily said in the Vila de Joao slum, 4 died after about 20 bandits attacked a police patrol in the early hours of Saturday.

One police officer was slightly injured, Correio added.

### Bus mishap kills 11 in C Java:

At least 11 people died and 45 others were injured in a four bus pile-up in Wonosobo, Central Java, an official said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

"The bus brakes weren't working," said Syamsyul Ma'rif, a spokesman in Wonosobo regency.

Ma'rif said the accident happened Sunday morning when the inter-city Java Indah bus lost control after its brakes broke down and initiated a pile-up accident when it ran into a parked bus which was letting off passengers.

### 5 miners die, 4 missing in China:

Five miners died and four others remain missing after three coal shafts flooded 12 days ago and trapped 57 people underground, a mining official said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

Rescuers are continuing to search for the four miners, but hopes are slim of finding them alive, said a spokesman, surnamed Xue from the Mining Bureau of southwestern China's Guizhou province.

### Avalanche kills 8 in Ecuador:

Three mountain climbers missing after an avalanche that killed eight people and injured nine were feared dead, the Red Cross said Sunday, AP reports from Quito.

The 20 climbers were caught in the avalanche Saturday, about 130 feet (40 meters) from a wooden shelter on Cotopaxi Volcano, 55 miles (90 kms) south of Quito, according to Red Cross and radio reports.

## Fewer women to contest Indian polls

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: A small percentage of women who constitute half of Indian population were nominated by different political parties to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, reports BSS.

The pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had fielded women candidates for 22 seats out of 464 it contemplates to fight while the ruling Congress has given party tickets to 47 out of 533 Congress candidates contesting for the 11th Lok Sabha polls.

Communist Party of India (M) is contesting 77 seats for which five are women while Communist Party of India (CPI) has nominated three women from 44 candidates.

The times of India, quoting Vineta Farooqui of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) said, "In the recent times, all political parties have been talking a lot about empowerment of women but when it comes to giving tickets, very few give a chance

to women." She said all the political parties are equally guilty of ignoring women.

The NFIW chief said, "In the name of women, wives and daughters of influential people and even former dacotis are being fielded while women working in the field are being ignored."

Pleading strongly for rightful share of women, she said, "all political parties should start enrolling more women and placing them in positions of power in the party structures first before sending them to parliament."

### Number of aliens up in HK

HONG KONG, Apr 8: The number of foreigners living in Hong Kong continues to rise despite the British colony's impending return to Chinese rule, according to immigration department figures published here today, reports AFP.



A Palestinian shouts slogans against the Israeli closure as hundreds of Palestinian Christians and Muslims hold a joint march through Gaza City on Easter Sunday to protest the six-week-old Israeli closure of the Palestinian territories. At the march, headed by leaders of local Christian churches and Islamic clerics, demonstrators carried banners demanding an end to the "punishment of the Palestinian nation". — AFP/UNB photo

## Pyongyang blames Seoul for heightening tensions ROK won't tolerate DPRK's 'reckless provocations': Kim

SEOUL, Apr 8: South Korean President Kim Young-sam told top military leaders today that "reckless provocations" from North Korea would not be tolerated, a presidential spokesman said, reports Reuters.

Seoul has been shaken by North Korean incursions into a sensitive border area in the past three days in a dramatic signal of Pyongyang's intention to completely ignore a truce agreement that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

President Kim instructed that the military must be fully prepared to immediately repel any provocation," the spokesman said, adding that President Kim met Defence Minister Lee Yang-ho and military chiefs this morning to discuss countermeasures following

recent incursions at Panmunjom.

He did not give any details of possible countermeasures.

North Korea on Sunday sent about 180 soldiers into the joint security area at Panmunjom, the only crossing point in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) dividing the Korean Peninsula. It was the third incursion in as many days.

A Defence Ministry spokesman said South Korea and the United States were discussing a possible deployment of US Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to improve surveillance of North Korean troop movements.

The US-led United Nations Command has called North Korean incursions in Pan-

munjom a "significant violation" of the 1953 armistice.

But a command spokesman said there was no cause for alarm as the situation elsewhere along the border remained normal.

Another report from Tokyo says, North Korea today broke a nearly two-day silence over heightened tension in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) with South Korea, again blaming the crisis on Seoul and adding "bellicose quarters of the United States" to its list of trouble-makers.

A commentary in the Communist Party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said South Korea faced an "irrevocable disaster" if it ignored Pyongyang's warning against making war preparations to invade North



Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma (l) and his Vietnamese counterpart Le Duc Anh are greeted with flower petals as they walk into Hanoi's presidential palace during a welcoming ceremony yesterday. Kuchma arrived Sunday for a 24-hour official visit aimed at boosting economical ties between Vietnam and the CIS republic. — AFP/UNB photo

## 'HR situation in India-held Kashmir deteriorating'

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Apr 8: US Senator Hank Brown Sunday said he was concerned about the "deteriorating" human rights situation in Indian-held Kashmir and tension between India and Pakistan over the dispute, officials said, reports AFP.

Brown, who held a 90-minute meeting with Sardar Abdul Gaiyyum, the prime minister of the Islamabad-administered part of Kashmir, said the United States believed in a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir issue.

Officials said the Republican senator from Colorado expressed "deep concern" over alleged human rights violations in the Indian zone, adding it was not only a major source of tension between India and Pakistan but also an "economic burden" for New Delhi.

India has repeatedly accused Pakistan of arming and training Muslim separatists in its part of the province, a charge Islamabad has denied saying it only provides diplomatic support to the Kashmiris' right to self-determination.

Pakistan controls the northern third of Kashmir while India administers the southern part of the state. The two countries have fought two wars over the province.

Gaiyyum called on the US Congress to send a fact finding mission to Kashmir.

## Weather a key concern, says Li

BEIJING, Apr 8: Concerned with the challenge of feeding China's 1.2 billion people, Premier Li Peng says he often is preoccupied with watching weather forecasts, reports AP.

Interviewed by the French television network Antenne 2, Li said his main motivation was to work "on behalf of the people."

Since China has only 7 per cent of all the world's arable land to nourish one-fifth of its population, the grain harvest has a major influence on our politics," Li said.

"So, when it is dry, I watch the evening news to see if it will rain the next day. That is my primary preoccupation."

## CPI (M) may join future coalition govt : Jyoti Basu

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: Indian Communists could for the first time join a possible coalition government after general elections in April-May, a veteran Marxist said today, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India quoted Jyoti Basu, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), as saying his party may join a coalition if "the Third Front" made of centrists and leftists won the polls.

"A situation may arise when the CPI (M) might have to join" the new government, Basu told reporters in Agartala, capital of the north-eastern state of Tripura.

Basu, the most prominent Indian Communist, is the Chief Minister of the eastern state of West Bengal. He has held that office since June 1977.

It is the first time Indian communists have said they will join a government in New Delhi in the event of a split verdict.

## Off the Record

### Shall we call it a bapple or appelana?

JERUSALEM: It looks like a banana. It smells like a banana. But it tastes like an apple, reports AP.

It is the apple-banana, a hybrid banana variety that growers at Kibbutz Kosh Hanikra have cultivated in their laboratory and fields in the north of Israel.

The hybrid fruit is smaller than the average banana, a little more sour, crispier, "with an aroma like an apple," researcher Dubon Duvdevani said Sunday.

The kibbutz exports the apple-banana to countries in South and Central America, central and western Africa, and some Mediterranean countries, but the main market remains local. The fruit's thin skin and small crop yield make it difficult to export overseas.

Kibbutz researchers are presently conducting experiments to raise the yield of the exotic fruit. Due to its small yield, the price of the apple-banana is nearly double that of its more common cousin.

"We make good money, but not much money," Duvdevani said.

### It's lovely news for Margaret

LONDON: Princess Margaret, the queen's sister, is due to become a grandmother this summer, reports AP.

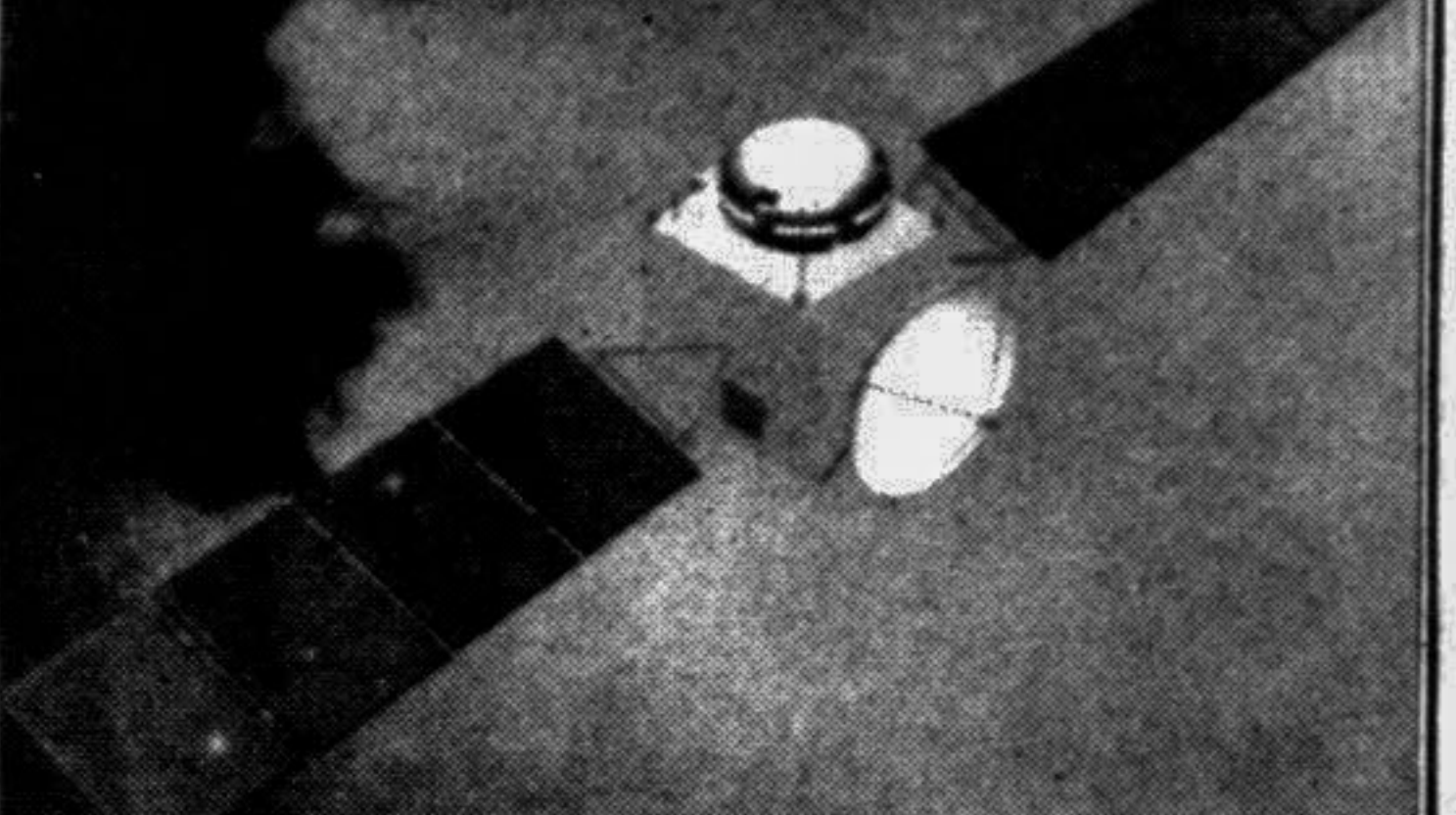
Her daughter, Lady Sarah Chatto, announced Sunday that she is expecting her first child in July.

Lady Sarah, 31, married Daniel Chatto, 39, on July 14, 1994.

"Princess Margaret and I are absolutely thrilled. It's lovely news," said Lord Snowden, Lady Sarah's father. He and Margaret divorced in 1978.

Close members of the family have known for some time, but we thought it would be nice to make an announcement at Easter," Snowden said.

The child will be 14th in line to the throne, behind Lady Sarah and her brother, Viscount Linley.



Artist's impression on Sunday of the European Space Agency's Rosetta spacecraft which will be launched to towards the comet Wirtanen in the next century in an ambitious 530 million mission to land a pair of unmanned space probes on the comet. After an eight-year journey the craft will rendezvous with the comet near Jupiter's orbit 700 million kilometres from Earth. It will then deploy two small probes containing scientific instruments on to the comet's head. — AFP/UNB photo

## Because he won't be able to make love

BRASILIA, Brazil: A Roman Catholic bishop has prohibited the marriage of a paraplegic man because he would not be able to have sex with his future wife and father children, reports AP.

Bishop Joao Bosco de Faria rejected a request to marry Elzimar de Lourdes Serafim and Edir Antonio de Brito, a paraplegic who lives in Patrocinio in southeastern Minas Gerais state.

In a March 21 letter, the bishop said a religious wedding was impossible because the couple would not be able to have their own children.

Archbishop Lucas Moreira Neves, head of the powerful National Bishops Council, said Friday he supported Faria's decision.

"There can be no marriage without the sexual union of the partners," said Neves. "If a partner is incapacitated after the marriage, then there is no problem."

He said the sacrament of marriage "implies that one spouse gives the other his... sexuality. There is no discrimination because, in this case, there is no way to sanctify matrimony in its fullness."

Brito, paralysed from the waist down for 29 years, said he was "disappointed and hurt."

"I have paraplegic friends who live very well," he said. "A couple I know adopted a son because they couldn't have children naturally."

## 1.2m prisoners being held in 31 European states

STRASBOURG, Apr 8: More than 1.2 million prisoners were being held in 31 European countries, more than half of them in Russia, according to statistics compiled for the Council of Europe in 1994, and made public Sunday, reports AFP.

The census dated September 1, 1994, found that 664,700 of the inmates were being held in Russia.

According to the annual study, the number of prisoners in the 31 European countries studied remained virtually stable in 1994, compared with the previous year, after 10 years of growth in the prison population.

## Villagers caught in crossfire of Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir

NEELUM VALLEY ROAD, Pakistan, Apr 8: Face down in a muddy, roadside ditch, Ahmed Younis lies small to avoid a burst of gunfire, reports AP.

The first shots whizz across Pakistan's contested border with India as the sun's last light fades behind the towering mountains.

A 12-kilometre stretch (7 1/2-mile) stretch of the Neelum Valley Road is the only supply route for Younis and his fellow villagers, who are caught in the crossfire of Pakistan's 49-year-old dispute with India over ownership of the Himalayan state of Kashmir.

Their village is just inside the part of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan, within range of Indian soldiers across the nearby border.

Vehicles haven't been allowed on the road since September because of the sniping. Now only the most intrepid villagers make the journey on foot to bring in food and other goods for their communities.

Short of breath and sweating despite the cold mountain air, Younis crawls on his belly toward two companions.

"We must decide if we should move next time the fire stops," says Younis, a seasoned scout and former Pakistani soldier.

To move is to risk being spotted by Indian marksmen, but sit still too long and a stray bullet may find its mark.

The frontier has become especially dangerous because of a secessionist rebellion in the part of Muslim Kashmir controlled by Hindu-dominated India. Indian troops deny targeting civilians, saying they shoot only at people suspected of trying to smuggle arms to the rebels.

Indian authorities say Pakistani soldiers also fire across the border, sometimes hitting civilians. But many border villages on the Indian side have been cleared out because India believes the residents were helping militants cross the frontier.

In this stretch, known as "the shooting gallery," the road runs adjacent to the frontier, the flashpoint of two wars between Pakistan and India.

Bending with the turns of the Neelum River, the road skirts the water — a natural dividing line between India and

Pakistan.

Moments pass and another burst of machine-gun fire explodes for more than six months. A bullet shredded the muscles in his right thigh last year.

Since the start of this year, 28 Pakistanis have been killed trying to bring food and fuel into the isolated village of Authmuqam.

For Younis, there is a gnawing fear lying in the cold rain as bullets whiz past.

Slowly he inches ahead to peer around a bend. Returning to gather his 20-kilogram (50-pound) pack, he whispers: "We must go. It's too dangerous to stay for long."

He explains that his group of three men will separate and walk one at a time in intervals

"We have to get food into the village," says Haji Naush-erwan, who hasn't made the journey for more than six months. A bullet shredded the muscles in his right thigh last year.

Tracer bullets zing across the border trailing red and yellow streaks that seem to hang in the air.

Younis hunches deeper into the wet, shallow ditch, which offers the only cover from the shooting.

Last year, the bodies of more than 200 civilians were recovered from the river, according to both the Pakistan army and United Nations.

Countless others have been wounded, but for the villagers the choice is clear.

of about 50 yards (metres) to clear the most dangerous stretch ahead: A 200-metre (650-foot) expanse.

It's a hairpin turn that leaves all traffic completely exposed to Indian snipers.

Once past, hands shaking, one man lights a cigarette and slumps to the ground in relief. The remaining kilometre (half mile) can be done in relative safety as the road moves back from the disputed border.

In another 20 minutes, Younis reaches the village of Jura, where he hands over his pack to the driver of a small Jeep headed for Authmuqam.

Younis rests for a moment, bids farewell to his companions and heads back toward "the shooting gallery" to bring in more supplies.

## KSA, Qatar agree to outline their common border

RIYADH, Apr 8: Saudi Arabia and Qatar agreed Sunday to complete work on outlining their common border and end a dispute which has rumbled on for more than 30 years, reports AFP.

The official Qatari agency QNA published a joint statement after talks between Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal and his Qatari counterpart Hamad bin Jassam bin Jabr al-Khalifa saying a committee in charge of delineating the borders would meet "in the next two weeks."

The committee would appoint an international company to draw up the borders and decide where border posts should be erected.