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Darfur accord at Doha talks

By Faisal Baatout

SUDAN and Darfur's most active rebel group the Justice and Equality Movement have agreed to sign a declaration of good intentions today, mediator Qatar said yesterday.

The announcement by HE the Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani came after the Khartoum government and the JEM group agreed on an exchange of prisoners.

"There has been great progress... and we now have an agreement that may be signed," Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim told reporters.

Qatar has been mediating peace talks between the Sudanese government and the JEM since last Tuesday.

"The content of the agreement, which will be signed tomorrow (Tuesday), has the agreement of all parties," the premier

exchange of prisoners, to be freed in successive groups between now and the launch of talks on a framework agreement on peace in Darfur," JEM delegation member Tahar el-Fakih said, according to Qatar's QNA news agency.

Amin Hassan Omar, a member of the Khartoum delegation, was quoted by QNA as confirming that "on the principle... there is a commitment to release prisoners and detainees for events linked to the Darfur conflict".

The two delegations have been meeting in Doha with a view to paving the way for substantive peace negotiations between Khartoum and the JEM.



LETTER FROM LEBANESE SPEAKER: HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani with Ali Bzi, member of Lebanese House of Deputies, at the Al Wajbah Palace yesterday. The Lebanese deputy handed over a letter from Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Lebanese parliament, to the Emir. The letter dealt with relations between Qatar and Lebanon and issues of mutual concern. The meeting was attended by HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Director of HH the Emir's office, and Lebanese Ambassador Hassan Yusuf Saad.

Meningitis epidemic fears called baseless

By Anwar Elshamy

Watani Al Habib radio programme via phone.

"There is no outbreak," said Shazia Nadeem, the acting head of the pre-

A TOP official at Qatar's Ministry of

The number of infected cases in

production unit at the plant, to

Hamas awaits Israel response on Gaza truce

CAIRO: A Hamas delegation met Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman in Cairo last night as Egypt continued bids to broker an extended truce with Israel over Gaza, the state Mena news agency reported.

It said the Islamist delegation was preparing to return to the Gaza Strip and Syria to await Israel's final say on a long-term truce.

A Hamas official told the news agency the delegation had been informed Israel would respond to an Egyptian truce proposal on Wednesday.

Mena reported that the delegation of senior Hamas leaders from Gaza and Syria will leave today ahead of the meeting of Israel's security cabinet to vote on the truce.

Hamas has accused Israel of backtracking on a deal after Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Saturday ruled out lifting the blockade of Gaza, a key Hamas demand, until the Islamists release captured soldier Gilad Shalit.

Hamas has insisted that Shalit, seized in a cross-border raid from Gaza more than two years ago, will be freed in a separate prisoner exchange deal with Israel. - AFP

Israeli aircraft strike Gaza - Page 8

Chavez victory sparks warning by opposition

CARACAS: Opponents of Venezuela's leftist President Hugo Chavez yesterday warned of greater authoritarian rule after he triumphed in a referendum which could allow him to stay in office for life.

Chavez, who has already been president for a decade in this Latin American nation, said he now intended to stand for a third term in 2012, after winning 54.36% of preliminary results in Sunday's referendum.

"The doors of the future are wide open," Chavez boomed from the balcony of his Miraflores palace after winning the referendum which scraps the previous rules requiring the president to stand

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