

South Sudan plans mediation between Ethiopia and Eritrea

Aaron Maasho

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ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) - Newly independent South Sudan plans to help resolve the long-running border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, a senior official said on Wednesday.

South Sudan's minister for cabinet affairs, Deng Alor, said Addis Ababa and Asmara had given the green light for mediation talks on the border, which could start as early as November.

"We have close ties with both countries so we are planning to mediate and solve the problems that they have between them," Deng Alor, South Sudan's minister for cabinet affairs, told Reuters.

Ethiopian and Eritrean officials were not available to comment. Ethiopia has said its conflict with Asmara over the demarcation of their shared border following a 1998-2000 war would be solved only through a negotiated settlement.

South Sudan is still embroiled in its own frontier argument with its northern neighbor, Sudan. The two countries broke apart last year under a 2005 peace deal that ended decades of civil war.

Alor said South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and other senior officials were set to name a delegation "very soon" that would travel to both capitals.

"We will embark on rounds of shuttle diplomacy between the two countries. We are hoping to start in November," Alor said.

A Hague-based boundary commission awarded the flashpoint frontier village of Badme to Eritrea in 2002. But Ethiopia has yet to conform with the ruling, insisting on further negotiations on its implementation.

Asmara wants Ethiopia to pull its troops out before normalizing relations.

The two countries nearly returned to war in March when Addis Ababa launched cross-border attacks in Eritrea on what it said were rebel targets.

Both countries routinely accuse each other of backing dissidents to destabilize and topple the other's government. Ethiopian strongman Meles Zenawi died in August.

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