

Topix Ethiopia, July (2)2014

The Ethiopian authorities must halt their continuing onslaught on dissent, Amnesty International said, after the arrest of four more opposition party members this week, who are believed to be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. All four were arrested on 8 July in Addis Ababa and the northern city of Mekele on "terror" accusations. Those arrested are: Abraha Desta of the Arena Tigray party, who is also a lecturer at Mekele University; Habtamu Ayalew and Daniel Shebeshi, both members of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party and Yeshevas Asefa of the Blue Party. Those arrested on 8 July are: Abraha Desta of the Arena Tigray party, who is also a lecturer at Mekele University; Habtamu Ayalew and Daniel Shebeshi, both members of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party and Yeshevas Asefa of the Blue Party. Blue Party and UDJ members say they tried to visit the men in Maikelawi on 9 July but were not permitted access and were told they could not have contact until the police investigation was concluded. It is commonplace for detainees in Maikelawi to be denied access to legal representatives and family members in the initial stages of detention. This incommunicado detention significantly increases the risk of detainees being subjected to torture. Political detainees in Maikelawi are frequently subjected to torture during interrogation (Amnesty international USA, July 10).

The French beverage giant Castel, which bottled its first batch of Ethiopian wine this year, is boosting government hopes of attracting foreign investment, key to its plans to reach middle income status by 2025. For Castel, the ambition is merely to produce good wine, and Ethiopia is an ideal – if surprising – place to do that. "We don't find it difficult because the climate is good, it's not too hot," said Castel's Ethiopia site manager Olivier Spillebout, at its vineyards in Ziway, 160 km south of the capital. The sandy soil, short rainy season, cheap land and abundant labour were what drew the company's billionaire president Pierre Castel. The company has been working in Africa for half a century, and in Ethiopia since 1998 when it purchased a state-owned brewery, St George. But the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi thought a vineyard would boost Ethiopia's image abroad, and asked Castel if it would be interested. So in 2008 the firm spent US\$27m setting up Ethiopia's first foreign-owned vineyard. Castel aims to sell half of this year's production of 1.2 million bottles on the domestic market, and half to Ethiopian diaspora communities in North America, Europe and elsewhere in eastern Africa. But Spillebout has been startled by some surprise customers, including a Chinese buyer who snapped up 24,000 bottles. China is home to the largest number of wine drinkers in the world, and in recent years Chinese investors have bought scores of French vineyards as they have become significant players in the wine world. In Ethiopia, a bottle of Castel wine sells for US\$10, and is of better quality than comparably priced imported wines from South Africa or Italy (The China Post, AFP, July 21).

A French company, ADPI, won the bid that the Ethiopian Airports Enterprise floated to hire a consultant for the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport passenger terminal expansion project. Early this year, the Ethiopian Airports Enterprise had put up an international tender inviting companies that would supervise the construction of the state-of-the-art passenger terminal. Wondim Teklu, head of communication affairs office with the Enterprise, told that an agreement would soon be signed with the company. The incumbent will also undertake a study on the new mega airport project planned to be built outside of Addis Ababa. The enterprise is contemplating building a giant international airport in a low land area out of Addis Ababa. The French company will be tasked with undertaking a study on the site selection for the new airport and how to integrate it with the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. ADPI

is a French architecture and engineering company operating worldwide on complex development and construction projects. - The Chinese construction firm, China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), has already commenced work on the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport passenger terminal expansion project at a cost of 250m \$. The loan is secured from the EXIM Bank of China. The project is aimed at transforming the passenger terminal into a state of the art terminal and boosting its capacity substantially. The expansion project includes the construction of a new passenger terminal as an extension of the existing Terminal 1 (domestic and regional terminal) and Terminal 2 (international terminal) with all related equipment and the construction of a new VIP passengers' terminal (The Reporter, July 19).

The Ethiopian government said it had proposed the third week of August for holding tripartite talks with Sudan and Egypt to discuss Ethiopia's multibillion-dollar hydroelectric Nile dam project, suggesting that the meeting be held in Sudan. Earlier this month, Cairo said it had offered to host tripartite talks in mid-July. The invitation came after Egypt and Ethiopia agreed - on the sidelines of last month's African summit in Equatorial Guinea - to resume talks on the Ethiopian mega-dam. Ethiopia, however, rebuffed the invitation. "Ethiopia cannot agree to Cairo's proposal because the issue needs preparation," Fekahmed Negash, director-general of boundary and trans-boundary rivers at Ethiopia's Water Ministry, told Anadolu Agency said. - Set up in 2011, a tripartite technical committee was tasked with studying the impact of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the two downstream states. The committee's activities, however, were suspended in January. According to Fekahmed, the committee will "pick up where it left off at the time of its disruption, which is the formation of a committee for conducting two proposed studies." The two proposed studies, he said, involved a hydrology simulation model and a trans-boundary social, economic and environmental impact assessment. "The committee will comprise members drawn from all the three countries... who will select contractors to conduct the two studies," he explained ((WIC, July 16).