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An Egyptian official has emphatically denied the veracity of allegations that his country had reached an agreement with neighboring Sudan to use its territories as a launchpad for potential attacks on Ethiopian damming facilities over the dispute of Nile water-sharing. The allegations last month citing a 2010 internal e-mail leaked by the whistle-blowing website Wikileaks, which suggested that Sudan president Omer Al-Bashir had agreed to build an Egyptian airbase in his country's western region of Darfur to be used for assaults on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) should diplomatic efforts fail to resolve the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over Nile water-sharing (Sudan Tribune ,Sep. 24).

The IMF has denied a news report that it had urged the Ethiopian government to slow the Grand Renaissance Dam project to protect its economy. In a letter sent by the IMF to the National Bank of Ethiopia and which was, the IMF's country director, Jan Mikkelsen, said that the comments he gave at a press briefing were misrepresented by the author of the report (Bloomberg, Sep. 22).

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has endorsed a new Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for Ethiopia to build on the country's development progress over the last five years of its previous country strategy and to help its government and communities go further in their efforts to create more growth, more jobs, better health and education, and significantly less poverty. Consistent with the new CPS, the Board approved two International Development Association (IDA) interest-free credits totaling US\$ 1.15bio to support Ethiopia's commitment towards expanding the reach of key services to poor people across the country, and further develop its road networks to help promote better regional trade and internal travel. As a result of today's decisions, the World Bank Group will mobilize US\$600m in development financing for the third phase of the Promoting Basic Services (PBS III) program, which serves approximately 84 million people across Ethiopia, and is co-financed by the Government of Ethiopia, and other development partners such as the European Union, the UK Department for International Development, the African Development Bank, Italy, Austria and others (press release, Sep. 25).

Ethiopia expects to earn more than 233m USD through the export of leather and leather products this financial year. The estimated revenue is almost double the amount earned last year according to the projected figures by the Leather and Leather Products Development Institute. It is to be remembered that Ethiopia earned about 112.1m USD from the sector in the last financial year (Capital, Sep. 25).

The Ministry of Agriculture said it had transferred 70,000 ha of land to both domestic and foreign investors last fiscal year. Esayas Kebede, Director of Agriculture Investment Support in the ministry, said the large swathes of leased farmlands would be predominantly utilized to cultivate products like cotton, sugar cane and palm oil, which have higher demand in the global market. Some 79 MT of cotton was cultivated on previously leased 118,000 ha, he noted. The ministry plans to transfer more than 100,000 ha to investors during this fiscal year. It has prepared large fertile tracts of land in Gambella, Benshangul-Gumuz, Oromia and Amhara states to be offered to investors, Esayas added. Until 2011, land deals are already in place for 520,000 ha, of which according to the Ministry, 307,000 ha has already been transferred to both foreign and domestic investors. The government says it plans to build infrastructure by investing in roads, telecom line and electricity in designated areas to add value (The Ethiopian Herald, Sep. 25),

Ethiopia Sugar Corp. said it's signed agreements with state-owned China Development Bank Corp. for \$500m in loans to build two refineries, part of a plan to boost output of the sweetener almost tenfold by 2025. Ethiopia's Finance Ministry and the state-run sugar company have signed memorandums of understanding with the Chinese lender for loans to build the plants in Ethiopia's South Omo Zone, Sugar Corp. spokesman Yilma Tibebu said. China Development Bank has advanced \$123 million for a factory in the northeastern Afar region, he said. The factories will be built by the Ethiopian state-owned Metals and Engineering Corporation, an amalgam of former military companies. China Complant Group Inc. is also working on the Afar project, Yilma said (Bloomberg, Sep. 26).

Ethiopia inaugurated a wire and cable production factory and a truck assembling factory executed in cooperation with a Chinese company Poly Technologies in Modjo town about 80 km south west of Addis Ababa. The Chinese company has also collaborated with the Metals Engineering Cooperation of Ethiopia for the execution of heavy truck assembly plant in Bishoftu town about 45 km south west of Addis Ababa (Xinhua, Sep. 27).

The child mortality rate in Ethiopia has decreased by more than 60%, the Ministry of Health said. The mortality rate, which was 124 per 1,000 new born babies in 1990 decreased to 52 per 1,000 new born babies in 2011, he noted. According to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), this number has to decline to 31 by 2015 (ENA, Sep. 26).