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The sit-in strikes of teachers of some schools in Addis Ababa have continued and classes are still discontinued. According to sources, some teachers have been fired from their work for refusing to heed the government's order to go back to work. The Ethiopian Teachers' Association has called on teachers to continue protesting while teaching. The Ministry of Education said it is deeply concerned about the teachers' strikes (*Sendek, March 27*). -The government has demanded a formal apology from teachers of Addis Ababa who recently staged a sit-in strike in protest against the recent salary increases, which they described as being below their professional dignity. For their part, the striking teachers said it is the government who should apologize to the teachers for making a token 73 birr increase at this time when the cost of living has become unaffordable. They threatened to continue their strikes if the government refuses to reverse its decision and announce an increase that matches the teachers' needs (*Reporter (March 28)*)

A dissident Ethiopian journalist on trial for terrorism has categorically denied the charges and warned the court that history would judge its verdict. A three-judge panel listened as journalist Eskinder Nega described himself as a prisoner of conscience and rejected accusations that he had conspired to overthrow the government through violence. Eskinder is one of 24 defendants, including opposition politicians and several exiled journalists, charged with supporting Ginbot Seven, a political party the government has labeled a terrorist group. Lawyers say they could face the death penalty if convicted (*VOA, March 28*).

Ethiopian forces and Somali pro-government troops have captured a major base from al-Shabaab militants, residents say. The central town of El Bur was one of the main bases still controlled by the al-Qaeda-linked group, analysts say. But residents say al-Shabaab fighters had withdrawn before the pro-government forces arrived. Al-Shabaab still controls many southern areas but is also under pressure from Kenyan and African Union forces. Despite pressure on the militants, al-Shabaab continue to carry out attacks, especially in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab said it carried out an attack on Monday at a camp for the displaced that killed two civilians and left eight injured. Militants targeted the site, near the presidential compound, with mortar bombs. The attack was the third this month against the heavily guarded compound in Mogadishu (*BBC, March 26*).

Despite good harvest, Ethiopian coffee exports have continued to fall alarmingly, where shipment of the beans dropped by 38% during the first eight months of the current Ethiopian fiscal year. The Ethiopia Commodity Exchange (ECX) eliminated the +/- 5 percent coffee price range, which was set to regulate against price fluctuation. The 5% range was instituted to protect coffee suppliers and exporters from fierce international coffee price volatility. Eleni Z. Gebremedhin (Ph.D.), CEO of the commodity exchange, told that until the international coffee market stabilizes the range will not be applicable on the trading floor (*The Reporter, March 24*).

The Saudi agriculture company, owned by Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi, is getting ready to export over 60,000 tons of bananas this year. The Horticulture Development Agency said the company will obtain the bananas from banana producers in the Arba Minch area. Besides buying the bananas, Sheikh Al-Amoudi's company has also started hiring experts in the area to help train the farmers in production techniques (*Sendek, March 27*).

Ethiopia has accepted bids worth 2.1 billion birr for seven state-owned firms, part of a plan to privatize dozens of corporations in the next three years. The Horn of Africa nation, whose state-dominated economy ranks among the fastest growing in the world, aims to sell around 40 enterprises, including several large farms, a winery and a big hotel. The Privatization and Public Enterprise Supervising Agency accepted an 860m birr bid from MIDROC Ethiopia for one of the country's biggest farms, Upper Awash Agro-Industry Enterprise, said agency spokesman Wondafrash Asefa. - Al Amoudi's other companies Horizon Plantation PLC, National Mining Corporation and Saudi Star Agricultural Development won bids for four other firms for a combined 463m birr, Wondafrash said (*Reuters, March 29*).

Ethiopia and Germany signed bilateral agreement to improve existing air transport services, the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority said. Regulation. The new accord enables Ethiopian fly to four German cities seven times a week. Ethiopia and Germany had signed bilateral air transport service agreement on 19 Feb. 2003. According to the agreement, Ethiopian was flying to two German cities three times a week only (*ENA, March 29*).

Magnetic Emission Control AS (MEC AS), a leading Norwegian company that develops groundbreaking emissions reduction and fuel efficiency technology, inked a dealer agreement with QOPH Engineering Enterprise (QOPH) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Under the terms of the agreement, QOPH will target long haul trucking businesses, earth-moving and construction equipment, bus and taxi fleets.

Late and erratic mid-February to May ('Belg') rains could significantly reduce crop yields in central and southern Ethiopia and adversely affect food security, warn officials. Judith Schuler, Ethiopia's spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP), said there has been limited land preparation for, and planting of, sweet potatoes in northeastern parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR). Sweet potatoes are the major transitional crops consumed mainly among poorer households until the 'Belg' harvest begins in June. In the Amhara (central highlands) region, for example, only 3% of planned cropland had been planted as of 16 March, according to an update by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 'Belg' production accounts for 5-30% of annual food production in the northern 'Belg' cropping areas, and 30-60% or more, of production in southern 'Belg' cropping areas (*IRIN, March 30*).

In a press release on March 29, the World Bank said Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), which has a seven-year track record of improving food security for poor people and increasing their resilience in the face of economic and climate-related crises, is to receive additional funding from the World Bank. The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has approved an additional credit of US\$ 370m for the program, which now reaches about 7.6 million chronically food-insecure people or 8% of Ethiopia's population, and is set to cover 8.3 million people by 2015. This funding includes US\$70 million in crisis response resources intended to help address the consequences of drought in the Horn of Africa (*World Bank Press Release, March 30*).

A partial fossil of a pre-human foot has been found in Ethiopia, which researchers said proves there were two species of

hominins existing around 3.4 million years ago. It was previously thought that *Australopithecus afarensis*, a slender-built hominid known as Lucy, was the only ancestor of humans living at that time, research team leader Yohannes Haile Selassie told reporters. The new find, which has a big toe that is splayed out to the side demonstrating an ability to climb trees, shows similarities with an ancestor that lived 4.4 million years ago, said Yohannes. The fossil differs from Lucy's toes, which are aligned with each other. The findings from the discovery of the so-called Burtele Partial Foot will be published in science journal *Nature* tomorrow, Yohannes said. The „eight elements of a right foot“ were found by the Woranso-Mille Paleontological Project in February 2009 in Burtele, 50 km north of Hadar town, in the Afar region. Lucy was also discovered in Afar. Cranial or dental specimens are needed to decide what species of pre-human it belongs to, Yohannes said. Other findings from the area show that the creature lived in the same area as hippopotamuses, fish, crocodiles and turtles near a „large body of water and abundant forest cover,“ said Yohannes (*Bloomberg, March 28*).