

No.1, March 3, 2014(\*) Seven Days, Vol. 21

Egypt has begun a diplomatic offensive aimed at stopping Ethiopia from building a huge hydroelectric dam on the Nile River that Cairo says will be a disaster for the Arab world's most populous nation. The military backed administration began its effort to internationalize the thorny issue in hopes of gathering support for its case against Ethiopia, where the Blue Nile rises in the northwestern highlands, after bilateral negotiations deadlocked in January. Gamal Bayouni, secretary-general of the Egyptian-European partnership at the Ministry of International Cooperation in Cairo, said Egypt now seeks to "target all countries that provide technical assistance for designing and building the Renaissance Dam through private contractors and also the states likely to fund to construction of the dam." On Feb. 6, Egypt's minister of water resources and irrigation, Mohamed Abdul Muttalib, visited Italy, considered to be Ethiopia's main technical supporter in building the dam. Italy's Salini Construction Corp. is building the 6,000 MW facility on the Blue Nile, the main tributary of the Nile that flows northward through nine African states to the Mediterranean (UPI, Feb. 27).

Ethiopia has the right to utilize its water resource and no one can stop it from doing so, Alemayehu Tegen, Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy has said. The Minister said because of its geographical location, most of Ethiopia's rivers happen to be transboundary. Even so, the country has always been willing and ready to share those transboundary waters with neighboring countries, he said. That is why it took the initiative and signed the Nile River Basin Cooperation Framework Agreement, he added. Alemayehu said Ethiopia has also been working on the handling of possible future claims concerning the utilization of other transboundary waters (WIC, Feb. 25).

In the Garbahaareey district of Gedo region there was strong physical fighting going on between the Ethiopian troops and Al-Shabaab causing severe casualties in a nearby town, Barwaaqo. This battle came after the Ethiopian troops left Garbahaareey on their way to Baladxawo where the violent clash occurred. According to locals, the fighting lasted at least a few hours with both sides exchanging extreme gunfire. The casualty figures caused by the fighting between Al-Shabaab and Ethiopian forces in Gedo region are not known (Shebelle Media Network, Feb. 28).

Ethiopia and Sudan have agreed to form a joint force along the borders between the two countries at the conclusion of the military technical committee meetings in the presence of both sides' defense ministers. The Sudanese Defense Minister Abdul-Rahim Mohammed Hussein announced that the two countries will start forming the joint units that will patrol the borders. Hussein said that regular meetings between the leaderships in the two countries have created a great deal of mutual trust, pointing out that the cooperation moved to the stage of joint formation and training of border forces. The Ethiopian minister of defense Siraj. Fergessa arrived in Khartoum on Wednesday to participate in the work of the committee. Fergessa and Hussein both signed the minutes of the meetings which included the agreement on the exchange of information and control of outlawed elements, the establishment of joint forces, as well as peacekeeping issues (Sudan Tribune, Feb. 27).

The State Development Enterprises Supervising Agency has collected only 4bio birr out of the 18bio Birr it had planned to collect. The agency's General Manager, Ato Beyene Gebremeskel, told reporters last week that in the past 20 years, the agency sold to the private sector 365 state development enterprises. He said about 85% of the enterprises were sold to local investors. This has created favorable conditions for local investors to play their rightful role in the nation's development, he said. The agency has continued to announce bids for the sale of other enterprises but buyers have not yet come forth. The Director General said the agency has repeatedly announced bids for the Bahir Dar and Kombolchia Textile factories but no bidders have been found (Reporter, Feb. 23). Close to 40 million women give birth without health care services and the death rate of children is counted higher within 24 hours of their delivery period, according to a report by Save the Children. Country Director John Graham said that the first hours of a child's life is the most dangerous with more than one million new born babies dying annually. "Newborn deaths account for more than 42% of all fewer than five year deaths," he added (ENA, Feb. 25).

