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The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the sentencing of Ethiopian journalist Temesgen Desalegn on Oct. 27, 2014 to three years' imprisonment on charges of defamation and incitement that date back to 2012. A court in Addis Ababa convicted Temesgen on Oct. 13 in connection with opinion pieces published in the now-defunct Feteah news magazine, according to news reports. He was arrested the same day. Authorities have routinely targeted Temesgen for his writing. Temesgen's lawyer said he plans to appeal the ruling, according to local journalists (*Statement, Oct. 27*).

Ethiopia's government illegally detained at least 5,000 members of the country's most populous ethnic group, the Oromo, over the past four years as it seeks to crush political dissent, Amnesty International said. Victims include politicians, students, singers and civil servants, sometimes only for wearing Oromo traditional dress, or for holding influential positions within the community, the London-based advocacy group said in a report on Oct. 27. Most people were detained without charge, some for years, with many tortured and dozens killed, it said. "The Ethiopian government's relentless crackdown on real or imagined dissent among the Oromo is sweeping in its scale and often shocking in its brutality," Claire Beston, the group's Ethiopia researcher, said in a statement. "This is apparently intended to warn, control or silence all signs of 'political disobedience' in the region" (*Bloomberg News, Oct. 27*).

Britain has suspended most of a £27m aid programme to support Ethiopia's police force, amid mounting allegations of torture, rape and murder by the regime. Ministers pulled the plug on a scheme intended to improve criminal investigations, help Ethiopian police "interact with communities on local safety" and help women access the justice system (*The Telegraph, Oct. 31*).

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has publicized the electoral timetable for the upcoming 5th general elections scheduled to be held in May 2015. According to the timetable, 24 May 2015 will be the voting date and the result will be announced on 22 June 2015. Political parties must submit their candidature symbols between 24 Nov. and 9 Dec. 2014. The registration of candidates will take place 10 Dec. 2014 to 6 Jan. 2015, while voters' registration will take place 9 to 20 Jan. 2015. Prof. Merga said agreement has been reached with the political parties who, during previous the consultations, had asked for lengthy time for candidates and voters registration. NEBE has almost finalized the preparation of basic election materials (*ENA, Oct. 31*).

Dr. Tedros Adhanom held talks with Dr. Joachim Schimdt, Ambassador of Germany to Ethiopia. Discussions covered issues related to bilateral and multilateral relations. Welcoming Ambassador Joachim Schimdt, Dr. Tedros referred to the excellent relations existing between the two friendly countries. He noted the strong business and economic ties between Ethiopia and Germany and emphasized that economic diplomacy was at the center of their relations. This relationship could indeed be considered as a stellar example of Africa-Europe economic partnership based on mutual benefit and win-win cooperation (*WIC, Oct. 30*).

Over 200 Eritrean refugees are crossing the heavily fortified and dangerous border into arch-foe Ethiopia daily, the UN said in a report noting a "spike" in those fleeing. Tens of thousands have now run away from the autocratic Horn of Africa country, escaping open-ended conscription and the iron-grip rule of President Issaias Afewerki, with many continuing northwards to brave the often harrowing journey towards Europe. According the October report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) over 3,500 Eritreans have fled into northern Ethiopia in the past two months, taking the total to over 104,000 Eritrean refugees in the country (*AFP, Oct. 28*).

Available resources for South Sudan refugees in Ethiopia are under pressure as the warring parties continue to be deadlocked in flailing peace talks. More refugees are expected in the coming months as the conflict in the world's youngest country turns almost a year old. Since the conflict in South Sudan erupted in Dec., some 245,000 South Sudanese have fled to Gambella, a southwestern province of Ethiopia. Pagak is one of the three main entry points used by refugees - who cross a bridge that functions as the border (*VOA, Oct. 27*).

The National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) disclosed it has reserved over U.S. \$600m loan for the purpose of preventing inflation on cereals and other consumable goods in the economy. NBE's Governor Teklewold Atnafu explained the money was allocated for the procurement of wheat, edible oil, sugar and other consumer goods. Out of the total U.S. \$600m, as per the Governor, U.S. \$120m has been reserved for the purchase of sugar that will be used to prevent the shortage. Teklewold added preparations have been completed to release the loan now and import the commodities. The mega projects being carried out in the country have 45.5% birr and foreign currency is available as loan, he added. He also praised the nation's saving culture and stated the figure has jumped from 86% birr to 295% birr in the past five years. He indicated public saving, which was 9% five years ago, has now reached 22%. In addition, the number of banks' branches reached 2,208 from 680 during the same period (*ENA, Oct. 28*).

The Ethiopian government has closed an \$865m financing package that funds the development of some of the country's railway infrastructure. The proceeds of the financing will be used to build the Awash-Weldia/Hara Gebeya Railway Project, one of the key railway corridors that will form part of the National Railway Network of Ethiopia. The financing is split between a \$450m seven-year commercial loan, which includes a syndicate of lenders from Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the US, and pays 375 basis points over Libor (*Reuters, Oct. 27*).

A \$415m 13-year loan backed by the Swedish Export Credit Guarantee Board (EKN), Eksport Kredit Fonden (EKF) and Swiss Export Risk Insurance (SERV) export credit agencies is also included. Credit Suisse acted as coordinating commercial facility arranger and export credit agency facility lead arranger. Some of the loans have already been disbursed. In addition to Credit Suisse, the mandated lead arrangers for the EKF, EKN and SERV backed facilities are Deutsche Bank, ING Bank and KfW IPEX-Bank. Turk Eximbank provided a parallel financing of \$300m for the Turkish goods and services under the same project. - This project is being undertaken by the Ethiopian Railways Corporation. It will be built in the next three years and will run between the Ethiopian towns of Awash and Weldia. Yapi Merkezi Insaat ve Sanayi AS, a Turkish company, is the appointed contractor on the project and will design and construct 389km of the railway line. The financing has also been arranged under the OECD Common Approaches for Officially-Supported Export Credits and Environmental and Social Due Diligence which commit OECD countries to taking environmental and social impacts into account when granting officially supported export credits. Ethiopia is rated B by Standard and Poor's, B1 by Moody's

and B by Fitch (*Reuters, Oct. 27*).

Investment flow from Middle East countries has increased over the past four years, the Ethiopian Investment Commission said. Middle East FDI which was low before the beginning of the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) period, increased in the past four years, Getahun Negash, public relations director of the Commission told. In spite of the age-old relations and connections, Middle East investment has not reached the desired level, he added. As a result of intensive promotion of the country's investment opportunities and the fast economic growth and stability, Middle East investment increased during the GTP period. Some 254 investment projects by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman were licensed during the four years, out of which 35 projects with an aggregate capital of 5.9 billion Birr have become operational. Derba Cement, the country's largest cement plant, Saudi Star Agricultural Development Plc and Julphar Pharmaceuticals plant are among the operational projects. Middle East companies are largely engaged in agriculture, agro-processing and manufacturing sectors, Getahun said (*ENA, Oct. 27*).

The Ethiopian Electric Power (EEP) concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the US based Green Technology Africa Inc. (GTA) for the generation of 300 MW of electricity from solar energy. GTA's CEO, Dereje Mesfin, commented on the development saying the MoU dictates the American based firm will deliver the 300 MW of solar generated photovoltaic system as a turnkey project in areas such as Dire Dawa, Kombolcha and Desse. GTA finished the pre-feasibility study for the implementation of the project and the just concluded agreement will give GTA the ability to start a full and complete feasibility study on specific areas. The firm is also going to set up a shop in Ethiopia within six months. According to the MoU, the project is estimated to be worth U.S. \$600m. Dereje Mesfin noted, "We are planning to find and facilitate the finance from various sources mainly from President Barack Obama's Power Africa Initiative and transfer it to the government of Ethiopia and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) will approve the finance once we find the finance from various sources" (*The Reporter, Oct. 25*).