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Some 17,000 Sudanese refugees returned recently to their homeland in the Blue Nile, announced Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. Fighting broke out between the Sudanese army and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-N) in the Blue Nile on the first day of September 2011 as direct result for the clashes with Khartoum in the south Kordofan state since June of last year Hailemariam said his country received some 35,000 Sudanese refugees who fled the violence that took place last September in the neighboring Blue Nile. He however said that 17,000 Sudanese have now voluntarily returned to their homeland, stressing that Ethiopia is pursuing a policy of receiving immigrants that are coming to its land and providing care until their problem is resolved (*Sudan Tribune, Jan. 30*).

Some 35 Ethiopian Christians face deportation from Saudi Arabia for "illicit mingling", the global rights body Human Rights Watch (HRW) says. Police arrested the group - including 29 women - after raiding a prayer meeting in the second city of Jeddah. In 2006, the Saudi government promised to stop interfering with private worship by non-Muslims. The group was arrested in a private home as they gathered to pray during the run-up to Christmas, celebrated by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians on 7 Jan. (*BBC, Jan. 31*).

The tax authority of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Revenue and Customs Authority (ERCA), collected 35 billion birr on the federal level over the last two quarters. The authority was also able to raise 3.2 billion birr in revenue and tax from Addis Ababa. The tax raised in the last two quarter exceeds the revenue collected for the same period last year by 10.2 billion birr. Aggressive reform programs and structural changes within ERCA are attributed with the significant increase in the money collected for tax and revenues in the country. ERCA carried out a survey that registered thousands of businesses for tax purposes and upgraded the tax status of existing businesses to increase the number required to come under the Value Added Tax system (*Fortune, Jan. 30*).

More than 250,000 ha of a total of 347,100 ha currently allocated for commercial farming in Ethiopia has been acquired by Indian firms and individuals. The agriculture sector has seen an 8% growth in recent years with output estimated at 13 billion USD, according to current GDP statistics. The report also established that only 12% of arable land is being used for rice cultivation, 17% for tea, 42% for pulses, 64% for oil crops and just 1% each for horticulture and cotton. The largest plot of land being utilized for commercial farming is operated by Karuturi Agro Products with 100,000 ha in Gambella Regional State. More than 42,500 ha of land acquired by six local firms and individuals comes in second place and a Chinese company has the third largest holdings with 25,000 ha allocated for sugar cane development. A total of 13,570 ha puts the combined investment of Ethiopian Diaspora investors in the fourth place and Saudi Star Agricultural Development follows in fifth place with 10,000 ha. The Ethiopian government allocated 3 million ha for commercial farming and is offering various incentives to encourage investors in the sector. Incentives include tax holidays extending from 3 to 7 years and exemptions from customs obligations on imported capital goods. Investors exporting more than 75% of their produce and reinvesting profits locally are also exempted from minimum capital requirements. There are currently no restrictions that put demands on the use of land or determine purposes and investors are allowed to use natural water resources free of charge (*Capital, Feb. 1*).

The mining sector in Ethiopia earned 293 million USD over the last two quarters according to the Ministry of Mines. 218.2 million USD of the revenue was earned by artisanal miners. The mining exports included Gold (5484 kg), Tantalum (145 t), Jewels and Minerals (7339 kg) Marble (532m³) and Platinum (350g). An Additional income of 600,000 \$ was earned by geological surveys carried out by the Ministry of Mines according to Bacha Faji, Department Head of Public Relations and Communication with the MoM. The ministry conducted 22,409 mining samples he noted. The total revenue earned over the last two quarters exceeded that of the same period last year by 1 million USD said Bacha (*Capital, Feb. 1*).

Ethiopia has started to export organic bananas to the international market in 2012. The country has, for the first time, exported 40 t of organic bananas by sea to Saudi Arabia. Agreement has recently been made with a foreign company to export 200 t of organic bananas to Jeddah markets on a weekly basis. Standard organic bananas for export have been cultivated in Arbaminch zuria and Mirab Abaya district of the zone in the Southern Region on more than 3,100 ha. Currently, over 11,400 farmers are engaged in the cultivation of the organic bananas. The Ethiopian Horticulture Development Agency (EHDA) has imported two high-yield and improved varieties from South Africa, namely, Grand Name and William, and distributed them among private investors and small farmers. Over 4,400 improved seedlings of the two varieties were distributed in the two localities. Market promotion activities have been made by the agency to diversify the volume of organic banana exports to Europe and Middle East countries (*State media, Jan. 30*).

Close to 44 million USD was obtained from the export of textile and textile products during the past six months, according to Ethiopia's Textile Industry Development Institute. The institute's Director General, Sileshi Lemma, said the revenue earned over the last six months exceeded that of the same period last budget year by close to 23 million USD. Aika Addis Textile and Investment Group, Ma Textile and Garment Factory, NovaStar Garment PLC, Almeda Textile, Elsie Addis Textile Factory and Kombolcha Textile Share Company were among the leading exporters, he said. The textile products were mainly exported to Germany, Turkey, Sudan, US, Italy, Djibouti, Belgium, Netherlands, China, UK and the United Arab Emirates (*WIC, Feb. 2*).

In the last budget year, Ethiopia generated 250 million USD from the export of flower, fruit, vegetable and herbs. Of the total export, 40 million USD was obtained from the export of 93,000 t of fruits and vegetables. This is, in fact, a huge amount of foreign currency that the country ever secured from the sector. In the current budget year, the country secured 112 million USD within a period of six months and the secured amount exceeded by 25 million USD compared to the same period last year (*ENA, Jan. 30*).