

Seven Days, Vol. 19 No. 32, October 8, 2012(*)

The Muslim community in Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella states on Sunday went to polling stations established in kebeles to elect Islamic Council members. Muslims elect 20 members in every kebele to be part of the council. In Afar State, Muslims elected council members in a peaceful and democratic manner, the State Ulema Council said. According to the state's Islamic Affairs Council chairperson, Hajj Keral Halifa, the majority of Muslims are going to the kebeles to take part in the election (ENA, Oct. 6). - According to reporters, in woreda 1 and 2 in Arada Sub-city in Addis Ababa, members of the Muslim community elected 20 people out of the 25 candidates. Five out of the 20 will become members of the council's executive committee. Mimi Dino Jemal of Woreda 10 said the election was transparent, fair and peaceful. The elected members will serve for five years. Out of the 1,420 registered voters in the two woredas, 1,120 cast their votes (ENA, Oct. 7).

Several thousand Ethiopian Muslims protested in the capital, Addis Ababa, against what they say is government interference in the election of Islamic council leaders, a participant said. An election for the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council is scheduled to be held on October 7, for the first time in 12 years. Some Muslims will boycott the elections, which the government is trying to force them to vote in, demonstrator Mudessa Omar said. Mudessa said "The government has candidates that don't represent the people." (Bloomberg, Oct. 5)

A tripartite commission, established by Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan will meet on 8 Oct. 2012 in Addis Ababa to discuss the impact of Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam on the three other countries. Ethiopia is building the \$5bio dam on the Nile, but other countries upstream of the river fear this could have an impact on water levels. Egypt has raised concern about the dam, since last year, saying it depended on the Nile River for much of its socio-economic activities. The commission, established after Egypt raised alarm, will discuss the effects of the Ethiopian on both Egypt and Sudan. However, Ethiopia maintains that the dam over the Nile River will not affect either Egypt or Sudan (The Africa Report, Oct. 4).

Young members of the Ethiopian diaspora are returning in large numbers to their country of birth. There are about 3 million Ethiopians living abroad - mostly in North America and Europe. But in recent years, thousands of young professionals have come back to Ethiopia to look for business opportunities. The total investment capital of the returnees is an estimated \$1.1 billion. That's almost as much as the \$1.4 billion Ethiopia received last year in remittances. But investment is more important in the long run says Feisel (VOA, Oct. 5). Marathon Oil Corporation (NYSE: MRO) announced that its subsidiary Marathon Ethiopia Limited B.V. has entered into a sale and purchase agreement with Agriterria Limited to acquire their 20% working interest in the South Omo concession in Ethiopia. The companies expect to close the transaction, subject to completion of the necessary Ethiopian government approvals, before the end of the year. Tullow Oil is the operator of the South Omo concession with a 50% working interest, and Africa Oil holds the remaining 30% working interest. The concession has an area of approximately 29,465 gross sq. km). An exploration well is anticipated to spud in South Omo in the fourth quarter of 2012 (Globe Newswire, Oct. 3).

Ethiopian-Saudi investor, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi is this week expected to partner with an Italian firm in the construction of a \$764m steel factory. Officials said \$593m will be allocated to constructing the factory, with the remainder being set aside for power, water and land leasing. Al-Amoudi's company, MIDROC Ethiopia will this week sign an agreement with Danieli SpA, Italian steel mill engineers to construct Toussa Steel Mill, located some 376 km in the north of the country. The new steel mill is expected to be the largest in Ethiopia, with an estimated annual production capacity of 1.3 million t. Toussa will manufacture reinforcement bars, billets and hollow sections amongst other steel products. It will also produce steel railway tracks in its second phase, according to the company (The Africa Report, Oct. 2). - The Project Director of Al-Amoudi's Derba Group, Shimelis Eshete, said the steel plant will take three years to build at Gelissa near Kombolcha town, and will convert scrap metal

imported mainly from Europe and the U.S. to meet growing steel demand in Ethiopia and East Africa (Bloomberg, Oct. 5).

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) announced that due to the favorable rainfall distribution this year, the number of people in need of emergency humanitarian assistance is expected to be much lower than forecasted earlier last year. In July, the ministry indicated that humanitarian assistance was needed for over 3.5 million Ethiopians. State minister for Disaster Prevention and Preparation and Food Security at MoA, Mitiku Kassa, told that the rain distribution across the country up to mid-September was evenly distributed enabling those who were feared to face severe food shortage to produce more (The Reporter, Sep. 29).

The Ethiopian Railways Corporation (ERC) plans to complete 42% of the Addis Ababa Light Rail Transit Project, a 34.25 km double track electrified light rail transit, this budget year. The corporation began the implementation of the much awaited project in Dec. last year after securing funds from Exim Bank of China, reports (WIC, Sep. 29).

The cultivation of Jatropah plant, a potential source of biodiesel, is underway in six regional states. The cultivation is underway on over 2.5 million ha of land in Tigray, Amhara, SNNP, Somali and Benishangul Gumuz regions. Six investors are also developing the plant on 85,208 ha of land. The construction of Jatropah processing plants is underway in various parts of the country.. In addition to its use as a source of energy, Jatropah has a significant contribution to environmental conservation activities as it grows on depleted land (WIC, Oct. 2)