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Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Abdul Muttalib will head a delegation to Addis Ababa on Feb.. 10 to continue talks regarding the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Muttalib accepted an invitation from his Ethiopian counterpart Alemayehu Tegenu to discuss the "sticking points" regarding the construction of the GERD, which Egypt fears could have a detrimental impact upon its water supply. Sudan, which is also an interested party in these talks, will not be represented at the meeting in the Ethiopian capital. Spokesman for the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation Khaled Wassif told that this "is usual" because there are issues for Ethiopia and Egypt to discuss bilaterally. He stressed the importance of "direct contact" at this time (Daily News Egypt, Feb. 9).

The Unity for Justice and Democracy Party (UDJ) (Andinet) has established a formal lawsuit against public offices for denying it the right to hold protest rallies, harassing its members and confiscating its communication equipment. The party brought the case against the Addis Ababa Mayor's Office and the Addis Ababa Police Commission to the Eighth Criminal Bench of the Federal High Court. Andinet's lawyer, Temam Ababulgo, said the party was denied its right to hold the rally scheduled to take place at Meskel Square, and police beat its members and confiscated its equipment (Sendek, Feb. 5) .

Ato Asrat Tassie, one of the prominent opposition figures and former Secretary-General of the UDJ, was arrested on Feb. 7, 2014, disclosed. He was accused of holding a federal court in contempt as a result of his comments published in the private Amharic weekly magazine, Addis Guday. "Currently, the Akaldema drama is being aired over ETV. This is happening during the ongoing trial of UDJ versus the Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA) where ERTA is accused of defaming UDJ. We filed a suit against ERTA not expecting justice but for the sake of having it recorded in history," Ato Asrat wrote in the Jan. 2014 issue of Addis Guday (The Reporter, Feb. 8).

Semayawi Party on Feb. 1 held a protest demonstration at Meskel Square in Gondar town, and eight of its leadership members have been arrested for the second time. Over 4,000 party members and supporters gathered at the rally shouting slogans and carrying placards. The protestors demanded that the government disclose the nature of the border demarcation issue between Sudan and Ethiopia. Party activists said the people have the right to know what is going on. The arrested members were released the next day. Semayawi Party has accused the Ethiopian government of holding back scene political negotiations with Sudan on the border demarcation issue. Rally participants accused the government of selling Ethiopia's land to the Sudan (Yegna Press, Feb. 4; Ethio-Mihidar, Feb. 4).

Sudan's president, Omar Al-Bashir, is the closest and, probably, the only friend that the Eritrean president, Isaias Afwerki, has. The leaders of the neighboring states, both shunned by regional and international governments, find solace in each other's company. Now, according to our diplomatic sources in Sudan, Al-Bashir's longstanding proposal to normalize relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia is being received favorably by the Eritrean strongman. The relationship between Isaias Afwerki and Omar Al-Bashir intensified since Qatar's Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani handed the reins of power to his son, Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, in June of last year, and the Gulf state ceased being the lifeline of the two isolated regimes. After Isaias' visit to Sudan from Nov. 23-27, 2013, Al Bashir publicly stated his goals of reconciling Eritrea with Ethiopia. Now, according to our sources, Isaias Afwerki is pursuing this goal with a sense of urgency: in Al-Bashir's visit to Eritrea from January 16 to 18, 2014, Isaias Afwerki asked him to push for normalization of relations between the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments (Awate.com, Feb. 8).

Hiroki Co. Ltd, a Japanese-based leather producing factory, will start production in Ethiopia in mid-March, with an investment of close to 10m birr. The first Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) to Ethiopia in the leather industry, Hiroki, which already established the Hiroki Addis Manufacturing S.C. last year, will start producing leather garments, bags, wallets and shoes for export to the Japanese market (WIC, Feb. 4).

Ethiopia has earned 172 .6m USD in revenue from the export of minerals in the first half of this budget year, according to the Ministry of Mines (MoM). The

head of the ministry's Public Relations, Bacha Faji, told that the revenue was obtained from the export of gold, tantalum, marbles and gemstones. According to Bacha, the minerals were supplied by companies and artisanal miners. The ministry has failed to attain its target of making 1 billion USD due to lack of interest from buyers and the fall in gold prices at the global market, Bacha said. Currently, there are 147 foreign companies in Ethiopia engaged in exploration, excavation and production of minerals (WIC, Feb. 4).

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) said that over 253.8 million q of agricultural output is expected to be reaped in the 2013/14 harvest season. The ministry's head of public relations, Tarekegn Tsige, told the output will be harvested from 12.28 million ha developed across the country. The agricultural output expected to be harvested in the reported period exceeds that of the previous harvest season by 22.5 million q, he said. He attributed the increase to the awareness raising and skill trainings given to leaderships and 9 million farmers as well as well-timed distribution of agricultural inputs. Over 1.6 million MT of chemical fertilizer, 37 million MT of compost, 92,300 bags of bio-fertilizer and over 2 million q of select seeds were distributed among farmers, he said. The application of improved farming system by farmers such as planting teff, wheat and pulses in rows also played their part for the increase in the output, he said. Out of the total land developed in the 2013/14 harvest season, over 3 million ha was planted in rows, he said (WIC, Feb. 4).

The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), together with the Ethiopian Mapping Agency (EMA) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, has prepared a new tourist map for Gondar city. Culture and Tourism State Minister Tadelech Dalacho said tourism is vital economic sector for Ethiopia (The Ethiopian Herald, Feb. 7).

The Ministry of Health has announced that preparations are underway to do kidney transplants in Ethiopia. It was indicated that kidney cleansing procedures are being made at the Saint Paul Hospital and the procedure will also be done in other government hospitals. Ethiopian Minister of Health, Dr. Keseteberhan Admasu, said that the main reason why kidney transplants were not done in the country was the inexistence of a legislation prohibiting kidney selling and buying. But now that this legislation has been approved, the first patients to undergo kidney transplant in the country will get the service after three months, the minister said (Diretube, Feb. 3).