

No.15, June 10, 2013(*) Seven Days, Vol. 20

A peaceful protest rally in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, has sparked speculation the government may be relaxing its tight restrictions on political demonstrations, reports. The large turnout at the rally has also raised the profile of a little-known opposition party that seems to be attracting a large following among Ethiopia's disaffected youth. Sunday's demonstration drew thousands to the streets of Addis. But estimates of how many thousands varied widely. State-run television reported it was 2,000, while organizers said it was more like 15,000 to 20,000 (VOA, June 3).

Ethiopia's government said it's satisfied with an international study on a hydropower dam on the Blue Nile River that Egypt said was insufficient to assess the project's impact on downstream nations. Ethiopia, source of one of the two tributaries of the Nile River, may start filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile by 2015. The \$4.3 bio state-owned hydropower project may begin generating electricity in 2015 and is set for completion in June 2017. Construction began two years ago. Four neutral experts and four each from Ethiopia and the two downstream nations, Sudan and Egypt, submitted their final report to the governments, Ethiopian Communications Minister Bereket Simon said. The panel found the project and designs were of an "international standard," he said Bereket said, they did not say any negative things about it (Bloomberg, June 3).

Salafist Nour Party spokesman Nader Bakkar expressed his discontent with opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei after the latter issued an apology to Ethiopia for controversial comments made by Egyptian politicians during a meeting with the president. The meeting with President Mohamed Morsi on Ethiopia's dam 'crisis' on June 3, which was aired live without notifying the attendees, witnessed suggestions of sabotaging the Ethiopian dam through bribing Ethiopian tribes or spreading false rumors of impending an Egyptian airstrike on the dam as solutions to end the issue (Ahram Online, June 5).

More people are being arrested on charges of corruption. The latest detainees include two department heads of the Ethiopian Revenue and Customs Authority (ERCA). At the last court hearing, Ato Misale Wolde Selassie, head of information technology in the authority, and Ato Nigusse Kibret, director of the authority's internal audit, pleaded not guilty and demanded release on bail which they were denied. The two officials were arrested for complicity with the allegedly major offenders, including the authority's Director-General, Melaku Fenta (Reporter, June 5).

The Ministry of Health of Ethiopia is launching an emergency mass-vaccination campaign against yellow fever starting June 10, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday. The move is in response to laboratory confirmation of six cases in the African country earlier this month. The campaign aims to cover more than 527,000 people in some six districts, including South Ari, North Ari, Benatsemay, Selamago, Hammer, and Gngatatom and one administrative town (Jinka) in South Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia (RTT News, May 31).