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The health condition of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi continues to be a subject of controversy in the media. Both local and international news sources have been reporting different stories on the Prime Minister's health. Quoting the International Crisis Group (ICG), EAST Radio had earlier reported that the Prime Minister had died. The Economist magazine, which is regularly read by the Prime Minister himself, said the government's power is now concentrated in the hands of people close to the Prime Minister. In its report, The Economist described the prime minister as dynamic and the voice of Africa. It said the prime minister, following his treatment at a Belgian Hospital, is now resting in his country. The Economist also reported that the official duties of the Prime Minister are now being performed by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. According to the magazine, official state duties are handled by Ato Hailemariam Desalegn but that the real power is exercised from behind by Ato Miles's close officials including Army chief of Staff General Samara Yunus (Yang Press, August 7).

Efforts have started in Addis Ababa to resolve the conflict among different Muslim factions through the arbitration of elders. Eight Muslim elders have started efforts to bring the feuding groups together and resolve the conflict. The Muslim elders include university scholars and lecturers. According to the elders, this initiative has created conflicting views from the Muslim community. They said the arbitration move has been welcomed by some while it is being perceived with suspicion by others. The government has not yet said anything in response to the arbitration initiative (Sendek, August 8).

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated on August 9 Ethiopian authorities must release a journalist who has been detained for almost three weeks, and allow three Muslim news outlets to resume publishing immediately. Local journalists believe the Muslim press in Ethiopia is being targeted for its coverage of protests by the Muslim community. - At least eight police officers raided the home of Yusuf Getachew, editor of YeMuslimoch Guday (Muslim Affairs) and took the journalist to the Maekelawi Federal Detention Center, according to local journalists. The police also confiscated four of Yusuf's mobile phones, his wife's digital camera, books, and 6,000 birr, the same sources said. Yusuf was charged the next day with treason and incitement to violence, but the state prosecutor did not cite any YeMuslimoch Guday articles as evidence, local journalists told CPJ. Yusuf has not been granted family visits, and his defense lawyer saw him for the first time on Wednesday, the journalists said. Two other YeMuslimoch Guday journalists, Senior Editor Akemel Negash and Copy Editor Isaac Eshetu, have gone into hiding, local journalists told CPJ. The police have had the homes of both journalists under surveillance since late July, and stopped only recently, local journalists said. YeMuslimoch Guday, which actively covered the Muslim protests in the capital, has not been published since Yusuf's arrest, the same sources said. - On July 20, police also raided the offices of the privately owned Horizon printing press in Addis Ababa and confiscated copies of Selefia and Sewtul Islam, two Muslim weeklies, according to news reports. Authorities detained Horizon's owner overnight, and neither Selefia nor Sewtul Islam has been published since, according to reports and local journalists (Sendek, August 8).

Ethiopia's annual inflation rate remained stubbornly high at 20% in July, data showed, though the pace of increase in food prices slowed marginally (Reuters, August 7).

Ethiopia exported just 183 tons of cotton out of several thousand tons of surplus production in the 2011-12 financial year. The exports for the fiscal year were executed after the government lifted its 18 month export ban in March of 2012. Ethiopian cotton went to Portugal earning 5.1m birr, according to a report released by the Ministry of Trade. Exports would have been higher if it had not been for the ban, said a manager of the Ethiopian Cotton Producers and Experts Association. Exports didn't increase even after the ban was lifted because there were still stringent requirements put in place by the Ministry of Trade and the Textile Development Institute, he noted (Fortune, August 7). The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) said it has designated more than 125,000 ha of land for investors engaged in the agriculture sector. The director of Agro-investment support and follow up in the ministry, Esayas Kebede, told that some

100 ha of land would be given to potential investors and the remaining plot would be developed by the government. He said the government would offer various support to investors engaged in the agriculture sector. The ministry will make public all information related to land offers through its website to ensure transparency and accountability, he said. So far, more than 5,200 investors have taken investment plots (ENA, August 6).

Ethiopia is to privatize six publicly owned enterprises including the Addis Ababa Ghion hotel according to the Privatization and Public Enterprises Supervisory Agency. The other enterprises that have been made available for sale are Awash Winery, Coffee Technology Promotion, Batu Construction, Limu Agricultural Development and Batu Housing Construction. PPESA plans to privatize 20 publicly owned enterprises in the 2012-13 financial as part of the plan of the Agency it announced. Bahr Dar Textile, Bale Agricultural Development, Arsi Agricultural Development, Kombolcha Textile, Bekelcha, Comet and Woyra Transport companies are expected to be part of the 20 companies will be offered for auction this year. Adami Tulu Pesticide could also be offered as joint venture development with the government retaining a share according to sources who wished to remain anonymous (The Reporter, August 10).

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) is collaborating with Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV) and USAID to provide smallholder farmers of fruits and vegetables with grafted fruit trees and quality vegetable plants. The programme is known as Small Holders Horticulture Programme. The MoA-MASHAV-USAID Smallholders Horticulture project is encouraging the cultivation of fruits and vegetables that serves as "insurance policy" for smallholders. The project was implemented by MASHAV in partnership with MoA and USAID targeting at transferring agricultural technology as well as building farmers' capacity in the areas of plant bio-technology, irrigation, horticulture and water management. The programme has set up five nurseries--a place tion. As part of the programme, a training was given for local development experts by Israeli agricultural experts on Methodologies of Extension for four days at Butajira Center of Excellence. The training is expected to build the capacity of local agricultural experts. The joint project is working in four states: Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and peoples states. The programme which started in 2005 will phase out in 2012, but will be succeeded by new projects. The follow up programme will take place between 2012 to 2015. The upcoming programme is designed to scale-up these activities within the framework of the US Feed the Future Initiative and Agricultural Growth Programme of Ethiopia. The objective of the new programme is to promote sustainable economic growth in rural areas by strengthening the commercial viability of smallholders in fruits and vegetable production with recognized market potentials. The programme will support and establish additional nurseries and tissue culture.