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The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) said the local and city administration council elections have been completed successfully across the country and vote counting has begun. NEBE Board Chairperson, Prof. Merga Bekana told the media that over 85% of the registered electorate voted until 6:00 pm, excluding voters in some areas where voting has not been completed at the stated time due to the large number of voters. Prof. Merga said the election was held in a peaceful manner across the country (State media, April 14).

Vote counting has begun in different regions and the Diredawa Town Administration in the country, the respective election coordination offices said. The offices told that the results will be made official at polling stations on Monday. Vote counting is being carried out in the presence of election observers and political party representatives. They said the election process was held in a peaceful and democratic manner (ENA).

33 opposition political parties in Ethiopia held meetings concerning the Addis Ababa and local council elections. The meetings were held simultaneously in the offices of Medrek, Andinet and Semayawi parties. The meetings described the local elections illegal, and called on the electorate to boycott the elections (Ethio-Channel, April 13).

Ethiopia's inflation rate fell to 7.6% in March 2013, according to the Central Statistics Agency. The Director of the Households Survey and Prices Statistics of the agency, Alemayehu Teferi, said the government has managed to bring price inflation down to a single digit as per its plan. The price inflation stood at 21% in Sep. 2012. Ethiopia Inflation rate fell to 7.6% in March vs 10.9% in Febr. (WIC, April 9).

Ethiopia's Trade Ministry commented in e-mail response to questions. Exports were less than 2/3rds of target. Coffee shipments rose 10% to \$453m, and volume advanced 54%. Gold earned \$389m from 7.6 mt; oil seeds dropped 0.1% to \$269m; pulse exports climbed 65% to \$151m; flower sales fell 5.3% to \$119m Ethiopia had a trade deficit of \$7.5b in the fiscal year that ended on July 7 (Bloomberg, April 5).

MIDROC is set to increase production with an eye on competing in global fruit export market. The long awaited transfer of three agricultural enterprises to MIDROC, and an affiliate, has finally been sealed with the signing of a contract between Mohammed Ali Al Amoudi (Sheikh) and Beyene Gebremeskel, director general of the Privatization & Public Enterprises Supervising Agency (PPESA). MIDROC acquired Upper Awash Agro-Industry for 860m Br, 35% of which it has paid in advance. HORIZON Plantations, its affiliate, also purchased Coffee Processing & Warehouse Enterprise and Gojeb Farm for 228.2m Br and 35.1m Br, respectively, paying 50% in advance for both. MIDROC Ethiopia will invest an additional 432m Br into Upper Awash and, in doing so, double its production, according to Jemal Ahmed, deputy general manager of HORIZON Plantations. Upper Awash Agro Industry Enterprise was established, in 1979, with a farm at Merti-Jiju, located on the border of the Afar and Oromia regions. It has a branch in Addis Ababa, which produces fresh and processed fruit and vegetables, as well as; cereals, cut flowers, seeds and fiber crops (Fortune, April 7).

The Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party reported that over 20 people have so far died following a recurrence of famine in Afar State. Commenting on this, the Afar State's head of communications affairs bureau, Ato Mohammed Yayo, admitted that the famine was caused by the lack of water and the absence of food in the region's coastal areas. He said the Regional Government has allocated over two million birr to transport water to the hinterland. Meanwhile, the head of public relations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ato Tarekegn Tsigie, said food has been ferried to both Somalia and Afar states where drought and famine are posing a real threat (Yegna Press, April 9).