

No.42, December 15, 2014(*) **Seven Days**, Vol. 21

Ethiopian authorities released on bail about 80 activists, including the head of an opposition group, arrested while protesting for fair campaigning in 2015 elections, a Blue Party spokesman said. Security forces made arrests on Dec. 5 when members of the Blue Party and eight other opposition groups took to the streets of the capital, Addis Ababa, to call for greater freedom to hold meetings and rallies, Yonatan Tesfaye Regassa, the party's head of public relations, said. Organization leader Yilkal Getnet was among those freed, while four other opposition members are still detained, possibly because they refused to co-operate with investigators, according to Yonatan. Investigations into the activists continue, he said (*Bloomberg News*, Dec. 11).

Medrek Party has secured an official permit to hold a public rally on Dec. 14 on the upcoming May national elections. Medrek's head of public relations, Ato Tilahun Endeshaw, said demonstrators will also demand immediate solutions to the frequent electric power disruptions, water shortages and telecom network disconnections (*Netsanet*, Dec. 6).

Seven Ethiopian and two Eritrean nationals have been charged with espionage on Ethiopia's defense force stationed at the Ethio-Eritrean border. The charge alleges that the defendants maintained clandestine communications with the Eritrean Intelligence Agency. The suspects are accused of spying on the current status of Ethiopia's defense force. Federal prosecutors also accused one of the suspects of prohibited traffic of arms including Kalashnikovs and ammunitions and grenades (*The Reporter*, Nov. 29).

Berlin-based Transparency International has rated Ethiopia 110th place in the list of corruptprone counties of the world. The organization said Ethiopia is going deeper into corruption as its economy shows remarkable growth. Ethiopia stood 110th from among the 175 countries studied for corruption. The country is rated one of the four fastest growing economies along with China, Turkey and Angola. It said if the current corruption trend is not contained, Ethiopia's economic development may be derailed.

Consultations among experts of Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt aimed at determining the impact of Ethiopia's \$4.8bio dam project on the Nile's upper reaches halted amid differences between Egypt and Ethiopia, an official said Sunday. The Tripartite National Committee (TNC) – a 12-member experts' panel responsible of facilitating implementation of recommendations of the International Panel of Experts concerning Ethiopia's hydroelectric dam project – had so far held two working sessions in Addis Ababa and Cairo. "The third session was supposed to be held in Khartoum on Dec. 4-6,

but could not be held due to disagreements," Bizuneh Tolcha, a senior official with the Ethiopian Ministry of Water, Energy and Irrigation, told (*Yegna Press*, Dec. 9).

A jump in food prices helped push Ethiopia's year-on-year inflation up to 5.9% in Nov. from 5.4% in Oct., the statistics office said. Prices of sugar, fruits, vegetables, oil and other food rose 4.8% in Nov. from the previous year, up from 2.9% in Oct., The Central Statistics Agency (CSA) said. Non-food inflation, however, dropped to 7.1% in Nov. from 8.3% the previous month. CSA attributed the drop to a slower rise in the prices of clothing, footwear and household goods (*Reuters*, Dec. 9).

One m³ of land in Addis Ababa was sold at a lease rate of 305,000 Birr representing the highest lease rate ever in the history of the city. This was observed during the land lease public bid offered recently for 449 m³ of land in the Berbere Terra locality of Mercato. This means the total land area is worth 136.9m Birr. According to sources, only 205 of this amount was paid in down payment and the remaining will be paid within one year. A company called Zway International obtained the land lease. The company had already secured land lease in the same locality and built a trade center (*Reporter*, Dec. 7).

During the first three months of the current fiscal year, Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC) revoked over 65 investment licenses claiming they did not become operational in the time set for them. The Commission sent letters to concerned offices to take back lands given to the investors and also relinquish title deeds in addition to any other incentives the investors were granted. Nonetheless, the latest report by EIC did not include the names of the licensees and the type of investments whose license has been canceled. In the same period, EIC extended 101 new investment and 34 expansion licenses. Among the 101 investment licenses given, 99 of them are Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). EIC's report indicates the Commission offered the necessary support for 54 investment projects to enable them to go operational. It furthered these projects have an aggregate capital of 4.47 Billion Birr. In addition to this, the Commission managed to register only USD 66.98m in the first quarter of the fiscal year while its aim was USD 75m (*The Reporter*, Dec. 6).

Ethiopia, which is currently in the middle of a biannual spike in malaria, is scrambling to protect millions of citizens from the parasitic disease, the Health Ministry said on Dec. 7. "Some 60% of the [country's] 90 million population lives in malaria-prone areas, which cover 75% of the size of the country," Hiwot Solomon, coordinator of the Malaria Prevention Program at the Health Ministry, told. "[Yet] malaria has not surfaced on an epidemic magnitude and 23 million beneficiaries [of the program] only represent those who are feared to be affected during the peak season," she said. Peak malaria season in Ethiopia is from September to December and April to May, coinciding with Ethiopia's harvest seasons. "Our prevention activities focus on malaria-prone areas; we have already begun spraying anti-mosquito chemicals on over 5.4 million residential houses," Solomon said. "Side by side with the spraying of the chemicals, distribution of canopies and the necessary medical equipment is also underway," she added. The authorities have also launched an awareness-raising campaign, via the media and health workers, on means of preventing malaria. A parallel campaign to drain swampy areas is also being carried out with the participation of the public (*Anadolu Agency*, Dec. 8).

Heaven's Light Church in Harar, Ethiopia, was demolished Nov. 28 by order of the Shenkore administrative district that just days before had forcibly removed the church's sign, according to International Christian Concern. After the demolition, Heaven's Light Pastor Zemach Tadesse, his wife Aster and Pastor Yosefe Hailemariam were all detained for hours after attempting to photograph their damaged church. As all the land in Ethiopia is publicly owned, churches are unable to legally purchase property and build permanent places of worship. Instead, congregations must lease land until they are forced to either renegotiate the lease, or vacate the premises and undo any changes they made to the property (*Worthy News*, Dec. 9).