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Over 34.2 million of the 35 million eligible voters have so far registered for the upcoming 5th general elections, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) said. Of the total voters who received their cards, over 16.4 million are women. The total number of the registered people is 95.4 percent of the eligible voters expected to get voter IDs for the elections. The 52-day deadline set by the Board for voter registration will end on 19 February (*ENA, Feb. 11*).

The registration of political party candidates for the upcoming national elections ends on Feb. 11. According to information obtained from the National Electoral Board (NEBE), a total of 38 political parties have registered over 1,306 of their candidates up until Feb. 10. Ten independent candidates out of whom one is a woman have also been registered. The EPRDF has registered 457 candidates for the House of People's Representatives and 1,222 candidates for the regional council. Other parties that registered their candidates include the Semayawi Party, Medrek and the Ethiopian Democratic Party (*Sendek, Feb. 11*).

Semayawi Party has complained that the allocation of media time for contesting political parties is not fair or just. The party told VOA that the media campaign time timetable gives more time for the EPRDF and meager time for others. A party spokesman told that a large number of members of Andinet party are now joining Semayawi Party. Some of them have said that both parties have virtually the same political program and so should not operate separately (*Yegna Press, Feb. 10*).

Ethiopia's Minister of Defense, Siraj Fegessa, and Ethiopia's National Intelligence Chief, Getachew Assefa, met with Abdirahman Mahdi, head of Foreign Relations of the ONLF, and Mohamed Abdi Yasin, Secretary of the ONLF. The two sides agreed to most of the principles of the dialogue. The ONLF and the Ethiopian government resumed their talks in Nairobi, Kenya. The international community is pressuring both sides to continue the talks in order to resolve the decades of conflict in the Ogaden. The Kenya-brokered peace talks were stalled on October 17, 2012 following the ONLF's refusal to accept a pre-condition imposed by the Ethiopian negotiation team. The Ogaden conflict is regarded as one of the longest wars in the history of Africa. More than 500,000 people have died, and more than a million have fled from the region. The ONLF was founded in 1984 (*Ogaden News Agency, Feb. 11*).

Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan will meet on March 1 in Khartoum to evaluate bids offered by consultation companies for conducting studies on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Egyptian Minister of Irrigation Houssam el-Moughazi said. Moughazi told the deadline for the five companies to submit their offers is Feb. 21, and the TNC will study the offers during a 10-day period. He noted that the office that will be chosen would conduct its studies within a period of 5 and 12 months. The three countries agreed during the Cairo negotiations in October 2014 to choose a law office to contract the consultant office that will be chosen by the 12-member Technical National Committee (TNC) of the three countries (*Youm7, 10 Feb.*).

Ethiopia will start using the Port of Berbera this month as per the agreement the two countries concluded in late Jan. 2015. Workeneh Gebeyehu, Minister for Transport, said, "Five to 10% of the country's imports will come through the port of Berbera, and we will be looking for proper ports for different areas of the country." "But the Port of Djibouti continues to be the major one," he added. According to Samson Wondimu, the communications director at the Ethiopian Roads Authority, the Jigjiga- Togo-Wuchale road is asphalt but that the road within Somalia is not suitable. Currently, the Ethiopian government is working with the government of Somalia in the quest to find a source for financing, he added (*Fortune, Feb. 11*).

The Patriarch of Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), Abune Matthias, is in Sudan accompanied by a number of priests and the Ambassador of Ethiopia to Sudan. The Patriarch and the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Abdalla Hamad Al-Azraq discussed the situation of the Ethiopian community and churches in Sudan as well as the firm historic ties between the Sudanese and Ethiopian peoples. The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church affirmed that the Ethiopian community enjoys all concern and support and lives in security, stability and peace in Sudan, lauding the distinguished relations between Sudan and Ethiopia in all domains (*Sudan Vision Daily, Feb. 11*).

Ethiopia has replaced Kenya as the largest refugeehosting country worldwide with a total of 587,700 refugees, and simultaneously as the largest recipient in sub-Saharan Africa, a new report by UNHCR shows. This shift, the report says, was due to the mass inflow of 159,000 South Sudanese refugees during the first half of 2014. With a total of 537,000 refugees, Kenya was the second largest host country on the continent by mid-year, followed by Chad with 454,900 refugees (*The East African, Feb. 10*).

ASCOM Mining, an international mining company exploring gold in Ethiopia, is going to get a license from the Ministry of Mines for large scale gold mining. ASCOM has been involved in gold exploration in the Benishangul Gumuz State, Assoasa Zone since 2009. In March 2014, experts from ASCOM had made a presentation to officials from the Ministry of Mines about a discovery of primary gold in the license area covering 268.17 m<sup>2</sup>. The gold deposit is estimated to be more than 70 tones and was discovered in a mountain commonly known as Dish Mountain (*The Reporter, Feb. 8*).

In a press release on February 13, Yara International said a feasibility study; carried out on behalf of Yara International confirms significant potential to extract potash in the Danakil depression in northeastern Ethiopia. The independent study identified an annual production of 600,000 MT sulfate of potash (SOP) over 23 years from reserves (Kainite, Carnallite and Sylvinite) at Yara's Danakil concession. The company, which aims to begin mining activities in 3Q, 2018, is now seeking equity partners to develop the project (*The Reporter, Feb. 8*).

The Swedish based agro forestry company VIP disclosed it is keen to invest in Ethiopia's forestry. Managing partner of VIP, Akal Mamo, said, "As per our desire, we were working for the past seven months to prepare memorandum of understanding (MoU), which we expect to be signed soon with Ministry of Forestry and Environmental Protection (MoFEP)". VIP intends to start a project it dubbed Paulownia Forest Project. The project will enable the company to produce fast growing multipurpose trees which naturally provide ethanol that serves for hardwood timber. The project is expected to cost USD 200m and it is planned to be undertaken in degraded lands of Oromia State, Amhara State, Tigray State and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples State, Teka explained (*Fortune, Feb. 12*).

Ethiopia will complete expansion work on the capital's airport in 2018 to triple the number of passengers it handles from 7 million a year now and will soon pick a site for a new hub to deal with 10 times the number in future, a senior official said. Bole International Airport, on the edge of Addis Ababa, is ranked the largest by revenue in Africa. Less than a decade ago, the airport handled 1 million passengers a year but that rose to 7 million in 2014. Officials expect it to climb by 18% a year in the next few years. Ethiopia is now looking at sites for a new international airport to serve up to 70 million a year, Hailu said. "We have whittled down potential sites from eight to three, all of which are within 60 to 70 km from Addis Ababa," Hailu said, adding the site would be picked within six months although construction might take eight years after that as designs, financing and related issues are being finalized (*Reuters, Feb. 12*).

Ethiopia is in negotiations to finalize a deal with a Chinese firm, Dongfang Electric Corporation, to construct a 120 MW wind farm in a place called Ayisha near the Djibouti border. Miskir Negash, External Communications Director of the Ethiopian Electric Power (EEP), told that with the country embarking on a green economy strategy, wind power is one key component. He added that the Ayisha project is estimated to have a current power generation capacity of 300MW (*newbusinessethiopia.com, Feb. 11*).

Ethiopia has been tipped to become a popular holiday destination in the coming years by one of Europe's biggest long-haul tour operators. The East African country can boast some of the continent's most dramatic landscapes, has been included among a list of emerging destinations in Kuoni's annual travel trends report. Around 20,000 Britons visit Ethiopia each year, according to the Foreign Office, but that could increase with Kuoni offering trips there for the first time. The country's highlights include the monolithic rock-hewn churches at Lalibela; the Simien Mountains National Park, a Unesco World Heritage Site that is home to a number of endangered species, including Ethiopian wolf and walia ibex; and the otherworldly Danakil Depression, with its colorful sulphur and salt lakes (*The Telegraph, Feb. 10*).