

Seven Days, Vol. 19 No. 20, July 16, 2012(*)

Twenty Ethiopians, including a prominent blogger and opposition figures were jailed for between eight years to life on charges of conspiring with rebels to topple the government. Ethiopia has said it is fighting separatist rebel movements and armed groups backed by its arch-foe Eritrea. But rights groups say the Horn of Africa country, sandwiched between volatile Somalia and Sudan, is using broad anti-terrorism legislation to crack down on dissent and media freedoms. Addis Ababa denies the charge. - Blogger and journalist Eskinder Nega, who was arrested last year and accused of trying to incite violence with a series of online articles, was jailed for 18 years. Five other exiled journalists and a blogger were sentenced in absentia to between 15 years to life. - Opposition official Andualem Arage was jailed for life. Two other prominent opposition figures Berhanu Nega and Andargachew Tsige, who are out of the country, also received life sentences. "The court has given due considerations to the charges and the sentences are appropriate," Judge Endeshaw Adane said during the proceedings in Addis Ababa. - The 20 were charged last year, most of them in absentia, with six counts including conspiracy to dismantle the constitutional order, recruitment and training for terror acts and aiding Eritrea and a rebel group to disrupt security. They were also accused of belonging to Ginbot 7, a group branded a "terrorist" organization by the Ethiopian government. Another four people charged alongside them were not sentenced on Friday and were being treated as a separate case, said court officials. Exiled opposition leader Berhanu Nega, was also jailed for life on charges of treason in the aftermath of 2005's disputed parliamentary election, but was later pardoned ((Reuters, July 13).

Ethiopia's year-on-year inflation fell for the fourth consecutive month to 20.9% in June from 25.5% a month before due to slowing food prices, the statistics office said. The Central Statistics Agency said food inflation dropped to 21.5% from 29.2% in May, while non-food inflation rose slightly to 19.8% from 19.6% . Month-on-month, prices did not change, compared with a rise of 0.9% in the previous month, the agency said (Reuters, July 9).

Ethiopia has supplied over 154 t of tantalum to the foreign market over the past ten months, the Ministry of Mines said. The ministry's Public Relations Director, Bacha Fuji, told that the nation has secured over 7m USD from the sale of the tantalum. The director said the revenue obtained surpassed last year's by 4m USD. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian Geological Survey said the country has over 300 million tons of coal deposits at various sites. Survey Director General, Masresha Gebre Selassie, said that studies conducted at various times revealed that Ethiopia has enormous mineral reserves including coal. He said activities are underway to exploit coal deposits in Delbimoyo, Chilga, Yayu and Qunzila potential areas. According to Masresha, the mineral resources are used for manufacturing cement, steel and fertilizer. The director said there are plans to map out 20 potential sites of mineral reserves in the Growth and Transformation Plan. He said some 12 potential sites have been mapped out so far in West, Central North Western parts of the country (ENA, July 11).

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved the Eastern Electricity Highway Project, which will connect Ethiopia's electrical grid with Kenya's, create power-sharing between the two countries, reduce energy costs, promote sustainable and renewable power generation, better protect the region's environment, and pave the way for more dynamic regional cooperation between the countries of East Africa. The new project marks the first phase of a regional East Africa power integration program which is likely to cost US\$1.3bn at completion, eventually benefiting 212 million people living in five countries with a combined GDP of US\$107bn.

Survival International said it has received disturbing reports from members of several tribes in Ethiopia's Lower Omo Valley, which describe how the government is destroying their crops to force them to move off their land into designated resettlement areas. Those most affected by the land grabs are Suri, Bodi and

Mursi pastoralists, and the Kwegu hunter-gatherer people. Many families are now desperate as they have no sorghum, and their cattle grazing land is also being rapidly destroyed as the government continues to lease out their land for sugar cane and oil palm plantations. A Mursi woman speaks out against the destruction of the tribe's crops. Her identity has been hidden to protect her from reprisals. Some Bodi communities are already being moved in to camps against their will. A Bodi man said, 'They are taking our land by force. The bulldozer even cleared the gardens where our crops were growing. They went right through where our sorghum was growing.' The Mursi have been told they must sell their cattle, and will be moved to the resettlement camps by the end of this year (press release, July 11).