

No.51, February 17, 2014(*) Seven Days, Vol. 20

At a press briefing on Feb. 10, Prime Minister Hailemariam noted that Ethiopia had witnessed robust economic development over the last decade producing double digit growth. This, he pointed out had helped the country to rank among the fastest growing economies in the world. He also noted that the economy was expected to continue to grow at the same level this year, an average of 10 or 11%. This growth, he said, could be maintained as a result of the rapid and unprecedented growth in the agriculture sector. He indicated that the current rapid growth and investment inflow for the industry sector would help the country's economic transformation continue to accelerate. In addition, the expansion of the service sector would make an enormous contribution to translate this year's economic plan into a reality and help reduce the number of people suffering from poverty (ERTA, Feb. 12).

The new round of talks between Ethiopia and Egypt has ended in deadlock. Within hours of the meeting between Ato Alemayehu Tegenu and Abdel Motteleb in Addis Ababa, Egypt demanded the immediate stop of the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam. In his encounter with newsmen, Ato Alemayehu said Ethiopia acceded to the Egyptian Minister's request to come to Addis Ababa for a new round of bilateral talks. When he came, the Egyptian Minister immediately requested that Ethiopia stop building the dam and asked for the setting up of a new international technical team to study the project's implications (Reporter, Feb. 13). - Prime Minister Hailemariam told local and foreign journalists on Feb. 10 that Ethiopia and Egypt had no other option except dialogue and negotiation to provide a win-win solution over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. In his briefing, the Prime Minister said Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan had now held three rounds of discussions on implementing the recommendations of the International Panel of Experts on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project. He said Sudan and Ethiopia agreed that Egypt's request to set a new International Panel of Experts was unnecessary. He added that although the meetings had failed to meet their objectives, he believed that the discussions would resume since dialogue and discussions were a necessity for an acceptable solution (ERTA, Feb. 12) .

The Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Party (Medrek) said it strongly condemns the crimes recently committed against members of the Arena-Tigray Party for Democracy and Sovereignty. Medrek said the criminal acts have taken the country's political situation from bad to worse. Members of the party were arrested, tortured and harassed when they were carrying out agitation programs in preparation for a peaceful protest rally in the region. Medrek said Arena is a legally recognized party and has the right to hold peaceful demonstrations. It warned that the naked actions of the ruling party serve no purpose except to pit the country in chaos and instability. The party alleged that the rally was forbidden under the pretext that it would disrupt the festivity of the TPLF's anniversary celebrations (Addis Admas, Feb. 8).

Survival International said the United States Congress has acted to prevent its aid to Ethiopia from being used to fund forced evictions of tribal peoples in the south west of the country. The provisions in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for 2014 represent a slap in the face for USAID, which last month said that 'there are no reports of widespread or systematic human rights abuses' in the region. In fact, tribes of the Lower Omo Valley are being violently evicted from their villages by the government to make way for lucrative cotton, palm oil, and sugarcane plantations whose irrigation will be made possible by the controversial Gibe III dam. Transferred to designated resettlement areas, the once self-sufficient tribes will be left with no access to their livestock or lands and, consequently, will be unable to sustain themselves. Intimidation tactics, such as rape and beatings, have reportedly been used against those who resist resettlement (Press release, Feb. 12).

Hundreds of Ethiopian forces have poured into Guriel town of central Somalia's region of Galgadud, according to residents of the town. Ethiopian army was officially integrated into the African Union in Somalia to help the fight against the Al Qaeda linked group of Al Shabaab. According to residents, the Ethiopian forces entered the town and stationed at former Somalia military camp outside Guriel town. The town, as part of the Galgadud region, is administered by the moderate Sufi militia known as Ahlusuna which has been an active ally for

both Somalia government and the Ethiopian army. The move came as AMISOM and the government of Somalia both declared the start of a joint operation to eliminate the militant group from Somalia territory within this year (RBC, Feb. 12). No fewer than 2.7 million Ethiopians may need food assistance in spite of the reported bumper harvest of 231 million q of grains in the 2013 fiscal year, local media reported. The Ethiopian Government had recently announced an 8% growth in the country's agriculture sector over the period of 10 years with an upbeat bumper harvest of 231 million q of grain for the current fiscal year. According to the report, the projection was based on the document of the joint meeting of donors and the Ethiopian government who deliberated on the issue on Jan. in Addis Ababa. The joint Government and Humanitarian partners' Document showed that 2.7 million of the 91 million people in the nation, according to the latest estimate by the World Bank are in need of humanitarian aid. It said the total food requirement was estimated at 388,635 MT. This comes against the government's recent announcement that agricultural productivity in the nation is projected to grow in leaps and bounds. The report said in spite of the normal and above normal 2013 rains, which further improved the food security situation in the country, humanitarian challenges will continue in 2014 in north eastern Amhara, Afar and the southern Tigray regions (Business Day, Feb. 12).

The government of Ethiopia and the EU have reached agreement to work together towards unleashing the tourism potential of the country. The EU and The Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) on Feb. 10 launched a joint project known as 'Promoting Heritage and Culture for Ethiopia's Development'. The EU granted 10m € to the MoCT to help promote the country's heritage under five classified projects that include capacity building activities, palaeontological heritages, state cultural development projects, training institutions in the music sector and grant scheme for cultural industries. The financial agreement between the two parties was signed in July 2013 to execute the project over the coming five years (The Ethiopian Herald, Feb. 13).