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The meeting of the Council of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ended on Saturday after electing the chairperson and vice chairperson for the Front. Council Executive Committee Member, Bereket Simon, told journalists that the Council elected the Deputy PM and Foreign Affairs Minister Hailemariam Desalegn as Chairperson and named Education Minister Demeke Mekonnen as Vice Chairperson of the Front. Bereket, who is also Government Communication Affairs Office Minister, said the council held a democratic election based on the principle of succession and unanimously elected the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson for the Front. The appointees will be sworn in at the inaugural ceremony of the parliament to serve as Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the country (State media, Sep. 15).

Ethiopia has pardoned two Swedish journalists jailed for assisting an outlawed rebel group and the pair are set for release alongside nearly 2,000 other prisoners, a government source said. Reporter Martin Schibbye and photographer Johan Persson were arrested in July, 2011, after entering the country from neighboring Somalia with fighters from the ONLF rebel group. The government source said the pardon was approved before the death of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who died on August 20 after a long illness (Reuters, Sep. 10). Ethiopia should slow the construction of Africa's largest hydropower plant to avoid the dam and other projects starving the rest of the economy of funds, the International Monetary Fund said. The government began work on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, situated on the Blue Nile River near the Sudanese border, in April last year. The 80 billion-birr project that will generate 6,000 MW, partly for export to the region, is scheduled to be completed in 2018 (Bloomberg, Sep. 14).

Millions of Ethiopians face severe food shortages as a result of the failure of crucial seasonal rains, a problem increasingly linked to climate change. The Ethiopian government announced last month that 3.7 million of its citizens will require humanitarian assistance between August and Dec. of this year, up from 3.2 million in January. The 16% increase follows the failure of the Belg rains, which normally fall between Feb- and May and are essential to the country's secondary harvest. The lack of rainfall is being blamed on climate change, with experts saying it is leading to erratic rain patterns and disruption to normal seasonal changes. - Agriculture is the backbone of the Ethiopian economy, employing 62 million people (about three-quarters of the population), ensuring more than 85% of the country's export earnings and contributing 43% of GDP, official figures show. Most parts of Ethiopia have two rainy seasons and one dry period. Long heavy rains from mid-June to mid-Sep., known as kiremt, enable the main crop growing season, Mehir, which leads to a harvest from Oct. to Jan.. The shorter and more moderate Belg rains are important for short-cycle crops such as wheat, barley, teff, and pulses, which are harvested in June or July, and for long-cycle cereals such as corn, sorghum and millet (Alertnet, Sep. 13). Ethiopia launched a Climate Resilient Green Economy Facility that is expected to equip the nation with a credible instrument meeting international fiduciary standard and requirements for Measuring, Reporting and Verification. The facility is expected to support a strategic approach to climate policy and offer technical and financial support to issues related to climate change reducing the cost and duplication associated with a project centered approach, said Ahmed (Ethiopian Business News, Sep.13).

The expansion project launched at Wonji Sugar Factory at a cost of 2.5 bio birr is expected to begin production in Oct., 2012, the factory General Manager said. The finance for the project was secured from the Indian EXIM Bank through loan. General Manager Mekasha Ketyibelu told that the construction of the sugar factory and the expansion of the sugar plantation, which was launched three years ago, is nearing completion. As part of the expansion of the sugar plantation, the size of the development of the sugar plantation has reached 10,000 ha. He said the expansion project has enabled the local farmers to engage in sugar plantation and other businesses. As a result, he added, the life of the farmers in the locality has been improving. - The factory can produce up to 60 million l of ethanol. The construction has also enabled Ethiopia to gain knowledge and technology transfer from Indian professionals. As charted by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the three to four million sugar production

capacity of the country reached 12 million q in a short period of time. According to the Project Manager, Eng. Fekade Sime, the construction of the factory engages 12 international and local contractors. The manager said utmost effort is underway to finish the construction of the factory in Oct. 2012. He said the factory has the capacity to crush 6,250 t of sugarcane and produce up to 7,000 q of sugar daily. The factory can also generate 31 MW electric power beside its 1.5 million q of sugar per year, he said. According to an Indian site engineer, the factory is being built with state of the art technology. About 1,500 Indians and Ethiopians are working at the site (WIC, Sep. 12).