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Ethiopia said it has released 68 Eritrean prisoners of War (PoW), but seven of them have sought asylum in the country that once held them prisoner. The Eritreans were caught during a March raid on Eritrean military bases, which Ethiopia claims were used for "hit-and-run" attacks by subversive groups operating in the remote region. Monday's amnesty, according to the Ethiopian government, is to promote cordial relations between the two countries. The 68 PoW were freed under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (The Africa Report, Oct. 8).

Ethiopian security forces have seized hundreds of illegal weapons smuggled into the country from neighboring Sudan, federal police said. Ethiopian police in collaboration with regional border guards confiscated the weapons in Metemma town in the Amhara region which borders the Blue Nile state of Sudan. Police have seized a total of 481 pistols and 13,000 bullets, Fekadu Berhe of Ethiopia's Federal Police Media and Communication Department told. They added that a number of smugglers have been arrested during the operations without giving an exact figure. It is not yet clear if the smugglers belong to any rebel groups. The federal police also say they have managed to intercept a large amount of arms of various types during the past few months (Sudan Tribune, Oct. 13).

The House of Federation has unanimously approved the 2005 E.C. plan set by the Budget Subsidies and Common Revenues Affairs and Constitutional and Regional Affairs Standing Committees. The Budget Subsidies and Common Revenues Affairs Standing Committee Chairperson, Shiferaw Shigute, said a new transparent and fair subsidy budget formula has been put in place. Building the capacity of members of the various structures of higher learning institutions are the major tasks to be carried out in the budget year, he said (State media, Oct. 9). Columns of armored vehicles and military pick-up trucks carrying numerous units of Ethiopian troops are reportedly massed in the Somalia's border town of Luq located in Gedo province for battle. Somali national army (SNA) commanders in the area say the Ethiopian troops set up military bases on the suburbs of the town, where they are planning a major offensive against the remaining towns and locations controlled by Al Qaeda-linked militants of Al Shabaab. The situation is reported to be tense and looming as locals are fearful of possible fighting (Shebelle Media Network, Oct. 11).

The Ministry of Agriculture said it foresees a production of 225 million q of main crops in the 2004/2005 E.C. crop season. The head of the ministry's Public Relations Bureau, Tarekegn Tsige, said close to 12 million ha is covered with seeds and 14 million farmers are engaged in the production. The head said the targeted amount would surpass the previous year's by 7.4% (ENA, Oct. 7).

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) said Ethiopia obtained 47.6bio birr in loan and aid during the last Ethiopian budget year. The ministry's Public Relations and Information Director, Haji Ibsa, told some 28.2bio birr of the total sum was granted in the form of aid while the balance was in loan. The fund, he said, showed a 6.6% increase compared to the previous year. Meanwhile, over 324m birr of the country's debt was cancelled during the period, Haji Ibsa said. The African Development Bank (AfDB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Indian companies were among the institutions that canceled the debt (WIC, Oct. 9).

The Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation (EEPCo) signed an agreement with the Chinese GCOC Company for the construction of Adama II Wind Power Generation Project at a cost of 340m USD. EEPCo Chief Executive Officer Miheret Debebe said the project will enable industries in Adama town and its environs get reliable power supply. Including the already indentified potential areas, Ethiopia has immense wind energy resource, he said (state media, Oct. 11).

The Privatization and Public Enterprises Supervising Agency (PPESA) plans to privatize 20 state enterprises this budget year. Wondafrash Assefa, Corporate Communications Director at PPESA, told that the agency plans to fetch 3.3bio birr from the privatization. During the 2011/12 budget year, PPESA earned nearly 6.2bio birr from the privatization. Out of this, about three billion birr was obtained from the sale of Meta Abo Brewery. The enterprises include the Agricultural Mechanization Services Enterprise, Commercial Printing Enterprise, Artistic Printing Enterprise, Ghion Hotel, Adola Gold Mine Enterprise, Hamaressa

Edible Oil SC, Ethiopian Mineral Development SC, Coffee Technology Development Engineering Enterprise, Awash Winery SC, Bilito Farm and Arba Gugu Coffee Farm (WIC, Oct. 10).

Organization (UNESCO) added the Sheka forest to its global list of 599 biosphere reserves. Sheka forest is located in the Sheka Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Regional State. It covers a unique biogeographic unit extending from cold and very wet highlands bordering Illubabor zone of Oromia regional state and Kaffa zone to hot lowland areas bordering Gambella regional state and the Bench-Maji zone. The Sheka forest is adopted to be a biosphere reserve because it fulfills the three functions of biosphere reserve -namely, the conservation, development and logistics support functions to the desired level (WIC, Oct. 7).