

No.30, September 22, 2014(*) **Seven Days**, Vol. 21

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia announced that it is going to recruit electoral officers for the upcoming election to be held in 2015. The recruitment will mainly focus on youth and women. The plan is to have one in every three electoral offices at each constituency, he said. The recruitment will be carried out with extreme care to get impartial people (*WIC, Sep. 16*).

A tripartite technical committee tasked with studying Ethiopia's mega-dam being built on the Nile River convened in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Sep. 20. The panel brings together four experts from Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan for talks on the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The two-day meeting will discuss the date and means of hiring an international consultant to conduct two studies on the Ethiopian dam project. The Head of the Egyptian delegation Ashraf El-Ashaal said that Egypt has come up with three points to be included in the agenda, but refused to detail them (*Anadolu Agency, Sep. 20*).

Egypt has expressed its desire to enter into talks concerning the Ethiopian government's plan to build a power generation dam on the Geba River, a tributary of the Baro-Akobo River. Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry had visited Addis Ababa last week during which he presented a message from his government to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. The message is said to carry a note to Prime Minister Hailemariam that the proposed Geba River power generation plant is not appropriate. Recently, the CEO of the Ethiopian Electric Power, Engineer Azeb Asnake, signed an agreement with two Chinese companies concerning the Geba River Dam project. Egypt complains that the Geba River is a transboundary river flowing into Egypt (*Reporter, Sep. 17*).

Ethiopia Mineral Development Share Company (EMD) concluded a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with CVMR Ltd during the Canadian Council of Africa's Canada-Africa Business 2014 summit. The proposed partnership has a preliminary estimation of U.S. \$ 3bio. The aim of the partnership is concentrate production and refining of Tantalum, Niobium, Lithium, Nickel, Iron, and PGM for quarter of a century. The Company's board chairman and State Minister of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Office, Bogale Feleke, noted that premium-priced specialty metal powders' demand is growing at a 26% annually. The Center further explained CVMR's patented production methods produce metal powders up to 99.999% purity and the company has higher recovery rates and more economically than other mineral extraction methods (*WIC, Sep. 18*).

The United Arab Emirates (UAE)-based, Al Ghurair Group, will build an aluminum factory in a joint venture with Tracon Trading Plc at an outlay of U.S. \$ 50m here in Ethiopia. The owner of the group, Majid Saif Al Ghurair, said after meeting with President Mulatu Teshome that preparations have been finalized to make the factory operational in the near future. He explained his company has been supplying aluminum in Ethiopia jointly with Tracon. Out of the total 60,000 ha of land that is needed for the project, the Ethiopian government is going to provide Al Ghurair 25,000 ha for the time being, the owner added. Tracon Trading's Deputy Manager, Elias Nur, noted the new factory would enhance satisfying the local demand and export to other East African countries. According to him, the factory is going to commence production within a year time (*state media, Sep. 17*).

Delonex Energy Limited, a UK based oil and gas exploration company, disclosed that it has been granted an exploration license by the Ethiopian Government to make exploration in the Abred-Ferfer area, Somali State. According to the , the license covers a total area of 29,865 sq. km. The license given for Delonex Energy grants it an exploration period of three years accompanied by a provision for two extensions of two years each (*Press release by the company, Sep. 15*).

The last Ethiopian budget year witnessed, export of cement to neighboring countries earning Ethiopia a total of U.S. \$9.5m. According to Solomon Yohannes, Cement and Related Products Industry Development Directorate Director at the Chemical and Construction Input Institute, the revenue surpasses the Country's 2012/2013 fiscal year performance by U.S. \$ 9m. He noted Ethiopia's cement was exported to nations such as Kenya, Djibouti, Somaliland and South Sudan (*WIC, Sep. 15*).

A close to 1.2bio birr agreement to upgrade the 107-km gravel road connecting Konso and Yabello to asphalt road was signed between the Ethiopian Roads Authority (ERA) and Teciju Civil Engineering Group. ERA Director-General, Zaid Woldegebreel said the cost of the upgrading would be covered by the loan obtained from the World Bank. The upgrading is necessary because the road has huge traffic and would also enable the agriculture sector which takes the lion's share in transforming the agriculture-led economy to industry-led economy, he explained. The asphalt road, besides providing market access to products of farmers, is in particular useful to the huge irrigation schemes the government is building in the locality, the director-general added. The road, which passes through the Addis Ababa- Mombasa-Nairobi corridor, will also play a big role in enhancing trade between Kenya and Ethiopia, in addition to creating a short cut to zones in SNNP and Oromia regional states, according to Zaid. Teciju Civil Engineering Group General Manager Cai XiaoBin said that his company would complete the work within the three years and five months deadline set in the agreement (*ENA, Sep. 19*).

China-based handset manufacturer, Tecno Group has concluded plans to build a factory in Ethiopia to enhance its presence in the African market, investigations revealed. Tecno, which already runs two factories in the Ethiopian capital, chose Ethiopia for the 'third phase' mobile phone assembly and production plant ahead of Nigeria because of what industry sources linked to security challenges facing nNigeria. According to *AllAfrica*, an online news report, the "Ethiopian government has already dedicated an investment area for the establishment of an ICT park to support the development of ICT." (*BusinessDay, September 17*)

Ethiopia's first break rubber factory, Hibret Manufacturing and Machinery Fabrication, which cost 350m Birr is going to start production in five months time. The factory is situated at Afar state and this is proof that the nation's wealth is being distributed in a just manner. In addition to this, the corporation noted, the factory's location is an indication that the country is working to create jobs for several people in the State and it is having ease of access to raw materials in the region. Upon starting production, Hibret is expected to play a vital role in saving Ethiopia's hard currency. The break rubber factory is the only one of its kind in the Easter Africa and it has the capacity to produce 3.2 Million units. This figure is good enough to meet the local demand and export to neighboring countries (*Fana Broadcasting Corporation, Sep. 18*)

A new information hotline is giving smallholder farmers across Ethiopia access to best practice agronomic advice revolutionizing traditional agricultural extension. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), and Ethio Telecom, the 8028 hotline was created by the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), who placed the extension information typically provided to agricultural Development Agents directly on a technology platform that can be accessed by anyone at any time. Twelve weeks after its launch in the Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and SNNP regions, the hotline received nearly 1.5 million calls from 300,000 farmers. The Interactive Voice Response (IVR)/Short Message Service (SMS) system currently provides smallholder farmers free access to information on cereal, horticulture, and pulse/oil seed crops, as well as a wide range of agriculture-related activities. Currently, 90 service lines connect smallholder farmers to automated and voice-recorded information on pre-planting, planting, crop protection, postharvest, fertilizer application, processing, irrigation and weather content. A push-based voice and SMS alert system also notifies extension workers and smallholder farmers of any pertinent agriculture issues (*WIC, Sep. 17*).

The Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy said the Aluto-Langano Geothermal Power Plant with installed capacity of 70MW will become operational this fiscal year. Energy Study and Development Follow-up Director Gosaye Mengistie told over 78% of construction of the geothermal plant has so far finalized. It is expected that the plant will commence operation in April 2015. The expansion project is financed with 12m USD grant from the government of Japan, 13m USD loan from the World Bank and 10m USD from the government of Ethiopia, the Director added. The country plans to generate 1,000MW from two geothermal plants, Tendaho and Corbeti geothermal plants, in the coming few years, he added. The Tendaho power plant due to be undertaken in Afar State will have a capacity to generate 100MW. Ethiopia has also signed an agreement with a US/Icelandic private developer, Reykjavik Geothermal (RG), to construct Africa's largest geothermal plant. The Corbeti geothermal project the country due to built with 4bio USD will be Africa's largest geothermal plant, with 1,000MW installed power (*ENA, Sep. 16*).

The Addis Ababa-Adama Expressway, the first of its kind in the country, was opened to traffic on Sep. 17. It is 84.7-km toll way with six lanes on two sides enabling six vehicles to move at a time at speed. The Expressway has reduced the Addis Ababa to Adama drive time to 45 minutes while curbing the traffic jam meaningfully. The toll way was constructed with 57% loan from Chinese Exim-Bank and 43% from the Ethiopian government.

The first Science Museum of Ethiopia, which is said to help promoting science and research in the country, was opened on Sep. 18 at the Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. The University has established the museum and Engineering and Mathematics Center, in cooperation with Israeli aid agencies based in the US. The center built with 16m Birr displays different research results and indicates the level of science at present. Students and educators can visit the museum and the center to help advance their knowledge and expertise in science, it was indicated (*Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC)*).