

Seven Days, Vol. 19 No. 21, July 23, 2012(\*)

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has been treated for an illness and is "in good condition", a government spokesman said, amid rising speculation about the health of a man in power for two decades in a poor, violent corner of Africa. Rumors that he is seriously ill have been rife since the former guerrilla leader, in power since ousting Mengistu Haile Mariam's military junta in 1991, failed to attend an African Union summit in Addis Ababa over the weekend (Reuters, July 18).

Ethiopian police clashed with scores of Muslims protesters complaining that the state is interfering in their religion, witnesses and officials said. The protesters, some wearing masks, blocked the entrance of the Anwar Mosque in the west of the capital Addis Ababa and hurled stones at riot police who had surrounded the compound after noon prayers. "Police broke inside the mosque and arrested many people, including several members of the (protest organizing) committee. They also fired teargas at protesters outside," said an activist who declined to be named for fear of reprisals. Another witness said he had seen empty tear gas canisters strewn on the ground. It was not immediately possible to verify these reports (Reuters, July 21).

Ethiopian police arrested an unspecified number of Muslim leaders involved in last week's unrest in the capital, Addis Ababa, Communications Minister Bereket Simon said. "Those arrested are people who instigated the violence," he said. "They were trying to undermine the constitution under the guise of religion." The arrest of a "self-appointed" committee from Awalia Mosque in Addis Ababa and others was made after obtaining a court order, Bereket said. He declined to say how many people had been detained (Bloomberg, July 20).

Deadly multiple blasts reportedly rocked Ethiopian troops in Somalia's central town of Beledweyne, a town which is under the control of Somali government soldiers and its allied Ethiopian troops, reports said. Eyewitnesses confirmed that roadside bombs targeted Ethiopian forces as they were walking east of Beledweyne, but could not verify the exact number of casualties to the Ethiopian military. Following the blasts Ethiopian forces momentarily halted business and public transportation operations, opening fire at nearby crowds indiscriminately, but no deaths reported. No Ethiopian military spokesman has briefed the media on the incident (Shabelle Media Network, July 17).

Foreign Direct Investment to Ethiopia has fallen by 82m USD to just 206m according to a World Investment Report released by the UN Conference on Trade and Development. The low performance is influenced by Ethiopia's position in East Africa which is a region of low FDI traditionally, said the report. The region's FDI flow increased in 2009-2010 and reached 3.96bio USD in 2011 which was just 5% lower than the peak seen in 2008. The discovery of gas resources in the area, which was long perceived as lacking natural resources, is expected to reverse the trend in the near future, added the UN report (Capital, July 19). The Ministry of Water and Energy has signed a contract agreement with the Chinese Poly Technologies and British companies for the execution of a solar energy project at a cost of 208m birr and 10m birr respectively. The 25,000 solar home systems costing about 208m birr are expected to benefit 125,000 rural communities. The 10m birr will be used for the purchase of PV testing equipment. The agreement was signed in the presence of the Minister, Ato Alemayehu Tegenu Alemayehu said that the contract agreement for the 25,000 solar home system includes different capacities starting from 8W up to 130W for light, charging mobile telephone, for radio, tape-recording and television services. The project will be undertaken in Oromia, Amhara, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's, Tigray, Benishangul-Gumuz, Somalia and Harari states, as well as Dire Dawa Administration, he said. He further indicated that over 900 institutional solar systems are being installed in rural primary schools and health institutions and 1,132 solar home systems are also being installed in 1,132 rural households to benefit 5,660 people, mainly in the off grid areas of the country (State media, July 15).

The Harar Water Supply and Sanitation Project, funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) to the tune of 33m USD, was inaugurated in the historic Ethiopian town on 8 July, during the celebration of International Harar Day. The project has created a major new water supply and sanitation service for Harar and the

surrounding small towns of Adelle, Aweday Dengego and Haromaya in the south east of the country (AllAfrica.com , uly 17).

Ethiopia and Kuwait signed a loan agreement amounting to 28.38m USD to finance the 67.5-km Dessie, Kutaber-Tenta road project. The project aims to support the economic and social development and the food security and poverty alleviation programs in South and North Wollo Zones. It is also expected to improve the regional and national road network to facilitate access to markets and social services in all weather conditions. The construction of road project will be completed by the end of 2015 (WIC, July 17).