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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has urged lower riparian countries to accept the assessment report presented by the Tripartite Panel of Experts on the impact of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The Spokesperson of the Ministry, Ambassador Dina Mufti, told journalists that Ethiopia accepts the report and stressed the need for Egypt and Sudan to do so. The construction of the dam is underway taking into consideration the benefits of lower riparian countries, Ambassador Dina said, adding, so far, 28% of the construction has been completed. He said the reporting of some Egyptian media and government officials linking the dam construction to the safety and security of Egypt is inappropriate.- The final report of the Panel in general made it clear that the on-going GERD project is being undertaken in line with international design criteria and standards. It also specified that the project would not result in any significant adverse impact on the two downstream countries. The dam will also solve the problem of siltation in dams in lower riparian countries, a problem that costs millions of dollars in rectification annually, and produce a more constant water flow. The experts were also unanimous in saying that the GERD would solve the problem of the frequent flooding to which the Sudan has been prone. In general, GERD was identified by the Panel as producing major benefits to the three countries, not least the provision of clean energy for the countries and the region as a whole (state media, Sep. 17).

Senior sources at the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation have said that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are preparing for an initiative to resolve the differences between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam. They added that the Gulf States, except Qatar, are pressing to construct a giant project in Egypt, Sudan and South Sudan to make use of the capabilities of the East Nile Basin countries (Al-Masry Al-Youm, Sep. 18).

Djibouti has launched the railway project to link the Red Sea nation to neighboring Ethiopia, according to official sources. The project linking Djibouti to Addis Ababa through Ethiopia's Dire-Dawa town will cost the two countries 600m USD being loaned from the China EXIM Bank. China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) won the tender for the construction of the infrastructure project (Shanghai Daily, Sep. 16).

The China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC), the company which is constructing the first light rail transit in Ethiopia, hopes to finalize civil works and commence electromechanical works this year. The construction of the 34 km Addis Ababa Light Rail Transit project (AA-LRT) began in January 2012. EREC agreed to complete the project within three years under a contract it signed with the Ethiopian Railways Corporation (ERC) in Sep. 2009. Initially, delivering the project within the agreed timetable had seemed to be a daunting task for the project owners given the difficulties to ensure right of way particularly due to public utility lines and buildings. Behailu Sintayehu, project manager said with the current momentum, they expect to finish civil works this year in all areas where right of way is secured. That means the contractor could move to the next project stage of electric and electromechanical works, including track laying and power sub-stations for the electric powered rail transit. The corporation will also purchase signaling and communication equipment as well as tramcars from China this year, according to the project manager. ERC has announced that it has, so far, completed 43% of the overall project. The 475m USD project went in full-swing after obtaining 85% of the budget from EXIM Bank of China. The remaining 15% is covered by the government (WIC, Sep.18).

In a bid to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of universal primary education, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has launched a massive nationwide awareness campaign to send millions of children back to school. The two-year campaign targets 3 million children between ages 9 and 15 who, according to a study, remain out of school. Earlier in the week, Ethiopia was credited for reducing mortality among children under five by two thirds, thereby achieving the MDGs target on child survival three years ahead of time. Now, the MoE, in collaboration with UNICEF and UNESCO, wants to replicate the same success in education. The MDG target 2 says a country shall ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (WIC, Sep. 17).

The Addis Ababa Administration Health Bureau said the city health coverage reached 86% last Ethiopian budget year. The Head of the Health Bureau, Fantu Tsegaye, told WIC that the construction of 61 health centers in the past four years has raised the health service coverage to reach 86%. Expansion projects were undertaken at the Menelik and Yekatit Hospitals. Two buildings accommodating 350 beds are under construction with a total cost of 400m Birr. Fantu said that tremendous efforts have been made to meet public satisfaction in health service delivery. City health extension projects are also being undertaken door to door, in schools and youth centers. About 215, 340 model households are getting health service, Fantu said, adding that training has also been given to 31,421 young people, women, teachers and students (WIC, Sep. 17).

In the desert of northern Ethiopia, there's a great rift in the ground which has long thought to have been the starting point of a new ocean, but a recent discovery has scientists wondering if they called that right, or if they're instead seeing a whole new kind of feature forming. The Afar Rift has been called 'an ocean in the making', as this is where the continents of Africa and Asia are slowly spreading apart from one another. Presumably, sometime in the future, the continents would get far enough apart that water from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden would rush in and we would be witness to the birth of what would someday become a new ocean. Scientists have seen similarities between the Rift and the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where magma wells up to make the ocean floor spread. However, a research team recently discovered a massive blob of magma, measuring around 500 c.km in size, lurking deep beneath the region, and that's unlike anything they've seen before. - When magma rises up from deep down under midocean ridges and volcanoes, it tends to form reservoirs just beneath the surface, and these reservoirs act to feed the activity of the ridge or volcano. The magma doesn't stay deeper down in the mantle because it's too buoyant it gets forced upwards into the crust by the pressures around it. In the case of the magma under the Afar Rift, though, it's quite far down, roughly 10 km below the surface, and the blob is huge extending downward to a total depth of around 35 km and it's roughly 30 km wide. Also, this apparently isn't just a recent development, as the researchers say the volume of magma implies that it's been there for tens of thousands of years. Although this new discovery has sparked a lot of discussion amongst geologists and geophysicists, the researchers have one possible explanation for what they're seeing. Reservoirs of magma that gather near the surface feed volcanoes and mid-ocean ridges, and these tend to provide these formations with 'fuel' to cause localized or sporadic events. A huge magma reservoir that stays deep down in the mantle, like this one, could be what causes enough strain to build up in the crust to actually split continents apart (Geekquinox, Sep. 18).