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It seemed like a routine overnight flight until the Ethiopian Airlines jetliner went into a dive and oxygen masks dropped from the ceiling. Only then did the terrified passengers - bound for Italy from Addis Ababa - realize something was terribly wrong. The co-pilot had locked his captain from the cockpit, commandeered the plane, and headed for Geneva, where he used a rope to lower himself out of a window, then asked for political asylum. Authorities say a prison cell is more likely. One passenger said the hijacker threatened to crash the plane if the pilot didn't stop pounding on the locked door. Another said he was terrified "for hours" on Feb- 17 as the plane careened across the sky (AP, Feb. 17) .

An Ethiopian opposition leader charged with contempt of court after writing an article critical of the country's judiciary has been released from jail with a conditional sentence, officials said. Asrat Tasse, a senior member of the opposition Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), was arrested on 7 Feb. after publishing an article accusing the Ethiopian justice system of being biased toward the government. Government spokesperson Shimeles Kemal said the opposition figure has now been released, but he has been given a suspended sentence meaning he can be automatically jailed for five months for committing any crime (AFP, Feb. 18) .

Intelligence coming from the Luuq district in Gedo region shows that a intense fighting took place between the Ethiopian troops and government forces on one side in opposition to Al-Shabaab, in Kureed territory; 12 km south of Luuq district. The battle comes after fighters from Al-Shabaab ambushed a convoy belonging to the Ethiopian and government troops when they were passing by Kureed in Gedo. In addition, for a brief period there was an exchange of extreme gunfire between the Ethiopian forces and Al- Shabaab members, but the fatalities it has caused is still unclear. There has been no claim of victory after the battle between both sides in Kureedt (Mareeg.com, Feb. 20).

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved funds to help Ethiopia upgrade the country's road system, strengthen road maintenance and reduce travel time along interregional corridors. The Road Sector Support Project is supported by a US\$ 320m IDA credit as part of the US\$ 385m total project cost. The government of Ethiopia will contribute US\$ 65m. The project aligns with Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) and supports economic expansion by improving the quality of roads serving areas producing exportable agricultural products. By helping secure access to all-weather roads, the project will also help Ethiopia achieve its goal of halving the proportion of the population living below the poverty line. The new funds will build on these accomplishments and will be used to upgrade about 258 km of the Nekempte - Bure road, which provides an important link between the Oromia and Amhara regions. The upgraded road will help to reduce travel time and facilitate the marketing of wheat, vegetables and other agriculture crops. The project also aims to enhance Ethiopia's road asset management practices by supporting the maintenance of selected roads covering about 200 km; the Government will fund a further 200 km of road under a parallel financing (allafrica.com, Feb. 20).

A project was launched on Feb. 17 at the Prime Minister's Office under the theme 'Connecting 1,500 Women and Young Girls to the Export Market' to empower women. Launching the project officially, First Lady Roman Tesfaye said empowering women economically is not only respecting their human rights, it is also a means to be successful in economic, health, poverty reduction, education and similar social security issues. According to Roman, a woman is economically empowered when she is skillful enough to become competitive in the sector and make her own decision on the profit of her products. As Roman indicated, the two-year project will directly benefit 1,500 poor women and their families and also aims to provide a skillful working force to exporters who have problems in utilizing market opportunities lacking quality products. The Executive Director of the Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE), Nigest Haile, said: "The whole purpose of the project is to establish an efficient value-chain that will deliver high quality and range of products which satisfy customers' expectations at different levels." Nigest also added that the project aims at providing life changing technical skills to the identified target group and train them to adapt to the production of products for new and growing markets (WIC, Feb. 17).

The Ethiopian government has recognized the role of non-government and charity organizations in accelerating development. Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen said that the number of implemented development projects, the funds used, the extent of outreach and the geographic coverage of charities has been encouraging indeed. Ato Demeke said although there is more room for improvement, the contribution of developmental charities has certainly been notable and worth appreciating in the areas decentralized health services, education services and the supply of potable water (ENA, Feb. 13).

Feyera Gameda of Ethiopia won the 18th Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon Men's Overall Champion title, while in the Women's Marathon, Rogalet Rehima Kedir of Ethiopia overcame two-time defending champion Demise Misker Mekonen to win the Overall Champion title. Great expectation surrounded the Marathon Challenge as the runners assembled in the early morning on Feb. 17. Mr. Tsang Tak-sing, Secretary for Home Affairs, officiated at the gun-firing ceremony, which set thousands of runners on their way in the 42.195km race. The Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon 2014 maintained its status this year as a Silver Label Road Race, as awarded by the International Association of Athletics Federations, and a total of 73,000 runners started the race after months of training, cheered on by family, friends and the general public (AsiaTravel.com, Feb. 17).