

## **Seven Days, Vol. 19 No. 8, April 23, 2012(\*)**

Thirty-nine fighter jet pilots and 201 technicians graduated in Ethiopia, the biggest number ever to graduate in one go, as the country works on strengthening its air force. Handing awards to the 39 pilots and 201 technicians at an air force base in Debre Zeit, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, vowed to strengthen the country's air force. Meles said missions geared towards the defense of the nation from anti-peace forces have been successfully accomplished. Ethiopia's defense budget has been on the rise in the past few years, reaching US\$350m from the country's US\$7bio budget (*News Dire, April 20*).

Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian Muslims have taken to the streets to protest the government's oppression on their community and interference in their religious affairs. "This is the first time I see Ethiopian Thousands of Muslims protested across the capital Addis Ababa following the Friday prayers to protest the government oppression of their community. Protestors say the government is spearheading a campaign in collaboration with the Majlis to indoctrinate Muslims with the ideology of a sect called "Ahbash". The government of Ethiopian Premier Meles Zenawi has put the Ahbash in charge of the religious affairs of Ethiopia's Muslims. Muslims say the government move was in violation of the constitution, which prevents the government interference in religious affairs. Founded by Ethiopian-Lebanese scholar Sheikh Abdullah al-Harari, Ahbash is seen by the West as a "friendly alternative" to Wahabi ideology, which the West sees as extreme and militant. Muslims say Ahbash imams are being brought over from Lebanon to fill the Majlis and teach Ethiopians that „Wahabis“ are non-Muslims. The government, however, insists it was not interfering in the religious affairs of Ethiopian Muslims. Zenawi also defended mass arrests of Muslims, saying it was part of efforts to combat extremism in the country (*OnIslam.net, April 22*).

Sudanese president Omer Hassan al-Bashir has sought Ethiopia's support to resolve escalating tensions with South Sudan over disputed Heglig, an oil-rich town recently taken control of by South Sudan army (SPLA). Mustafa Osman Ismail, an adviser to the Sudanese president, met Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa and delivered a message from Bashir. Ismail also met with AU commission chairman Jean Ping, chairman of African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), Thabo Mbeki, and Ramatan Lamamra the Commissioner of AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) (*Sudan Tribune, April 18*).

Heavily armed militants from the Al-Shabaab insurgents ambushed an Ethiopian convoy alongside Ahlu Sunna fighters, a government-allied Sunni Islamist group control in central Somalia, reports said. Locals said at least three Ethiopian soldiers were confirmed to have been killed in a landmine blast that ripped through an army convoy traveling on a road between Wabho and Daac, two small villages in Somalia's Galgaduud region of central Somalia. A senior Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a (ASWJ) official, confirmed the attack by Al-Shabaab, but denied any casualties on their soldiers and the Ethiopians. Sheikh Abdiasis Abu Musab, the spokesman of Al-Shabaab militants for the military operations told a rebel-run radio station that they have inflicted heavy losses on the Ethiopian troops during their ambush attack (*Shabelle Media Network, April 19*).

Ethiopian troops fighting al-Qaida-linked militants in neighboring Somalia will soon return home. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said regions of Somalia currently controlled by Ethiopian forces will be handed over to troops from Burundi, Kenya, Djibouti and Rwanda. Meles said the mission has accomplished "very good results" in fighting al-Shabaab militants (*AP, April 17*).

The Central Statistics Agency (CSA) announced that the inflation rate in March has shown an increase of 4.6% compared to February. Consumer prices rose from 2.7% in Feb. to 4.6% in March, and the rolling inflation rate rose from 35.9% to 36.%. The highest contributors to the negative share were food with a rise of 40.9%, beverages 39%. From among foodstuffs, grain and meat showed the highest inflation rate of 53% and 82.7% respectively (*Mesenazeria, April 18*).

The Ministry of Industry said 193.5m USD was secured from the manufacturing industry sector from exports during the last nine months. Industry Minister Mekonnen Manyazewal said the revenue was earned from the export of leather and leather products, textile and garment, agro-processing, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. The amount exceeded by 55.9m USD (40.7%) that of the same period last year (*state media, April 20*).

The German Government donated 405 personal protective aprons valued at 5m Birr to the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO). The Ambassador of Germany to Ethiopia, Lieselore Cyrus, on the occasion said the successful work of EMAO within its humanitarian demining program is more than supporting Ethiopia's fulfillment of the legal obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty. Above all, she said, it contributes to the improvement of food security and agricultural development in Ethiopia. According to the Ambassador, Germany has so far provided close to 2.2m € assistance to humanitarian mine action in Ethiopia (*ENA, April 19*).

Ethiopia has immense wind power potentials that could generate over one million MW of electricity, a study indicated. The first draft master plan study on Ethiopia's wind and solar energy potential conducted by Hydro China Corporation, a Chinese company, was tabled for discussion. The representative of the Hydro China Corporation, Xu Lushi, said the plan has incorporated the wind and solar energy potentials of Ethiopia. He said the wind and solar energy is greatly helpful to Ethiopia to meet its growing energy demand and reduce global warming (*ENA, April 19*).

Ethiopia will embark on a plan for conservation of three of the country's large carnivores, the cheetah, the wild dog and the lion, conservationists say. The plans -- a Cheetah and Wild Dog Action Plan and a Lion Action Plan -- were developed by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, with input from key NGOs including the Wildlife Conservation Society, Zoological Society of London, Frankfurt Zoological Society and the Born Free Foundation, a WCS release reported (*UPI.com, April 20*).