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The website of Qatar-based news organization Al Jazeera has been blocked in Ethiopia, raising questions over the country's commitment to press freedom, under the new leadership of prime minister. According to reports and the website's users in Ethiopia, the English and Arabic websites of Al Jazeera have been inaccessible during the last six months. An investigation by Al Jazeera indicated that traffic from Ethiopia to their English-language website plummeted from 50,000 hits in July 2012 to just 114 in September. The sharp decline in Al Jazeera's traffic data began in early August (*Sudan Tribune, March 18*).

Eight people were killed during a violent conflict which erupted between cobblestone workers and members of the community at a place called Bole Lemi in Addis Ababa. One of the cobblestone workers cut the breast of a woman co-worker, an Oromo national, and violence ensued between local Oromo residents and the other workers. A policeman who tried to intervene was also killed after being beaten with cobblestones. The violence later turned into an ethnic-based conflict and eight Wolaitans were killed. The violence lasted three days and federal police were unable to contain it. A number of local residents have been arrested. All work in the area was suspended up until March 18 (*Yegna Press, March 19*).

38 people, including Dr. Yacob Hailemariam, have been released after two days in prison for participating in an unauthorized mass rally called to protest against the erection of a monument in Rome in memory of Italy's fascist war general Marshal Graziani. The protest rally was dispersed by police as demonstrators marched from the Sidist Kilo Martyrs' Monument to the Italian Embassy. At the time, Dr. Yacob Hailemariam and Engineer Yilikal Getinet, chairman of Semayawi Party, and others involved in the coordination of the rally were intercepted and held in custody. They were released after two days on bail of their ID cards (*Sendek, March 20*).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the World Bank's board should support an internal investigation into allegations of abuse linked to a WB project in Ethiopia. The Inspection Panel, the WB's independent accountability mechanism, has recommended an investigation into whether it has violated its policies in a project linked to the Ethiopian government's resettlement program." Villagization involves the forced relocation of some 1.5 million Ethiopians, including indigenous and other marginalized peoples, and has been marred by violence (*HRW press release, March 18*).

During his four-day official tour to Ethiopia, Germany's President Joachim Gauck was expected to meet Ethiopian leaders, civil society representatives and address the African Union. His meetings with members of Ethiopian civil society will give him plenty of opportunity to discuss freedom and individual liberty, a topic which the former Protestant pastor often raises at home. Ethiopian and German human rights groups, including PEN Center Germany, have sent open letters to President Gauck calling on him to press for the release of political prisoners and journalists in Ethiopia (*Deutsche Welle, March 18*).

A new USD 15.3m project, the Nile Cooperation for Results (NCORE), aimed at facilitating cooperative water resource management and development in the Nile Basin, was officially launched at the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) Secretariat in Entebbe, Uganda. The project was developed by NBI to strengthen the platform and knowledge based analysis of trans-boundary options for sustainable basin-wide cooperative planning, management and development of Member States' water resources (*WIC, March 19*).

Ethiopia will spend 900m birr to open its first industrial hub for export-oriented manufacturers in a bid to deliver faster economic growth, Industry Minister Mekonnen Manyazewal said. South Korean garment-makers are among companies in talks with the government about establishing operations at the planned site in the capital, Addis Ababa, Mekonnen said. The facility is scheduled to open before the fiscal year ends on July 7, he said (*Bloomberg, March 18*).

Samsung announced that it has concluded an agreement with the Ethiopian government to establish a laptop and printer assembly plant in the country over the next few months. According to Samsung Electronics East Africa's Chief Operating Officer, Robert Ngeru, Samsung has also finalized agreements to assemble television sets and refrigerators in the country (*AllAfrica.com, March 18*).

Two new U.S. government supported tourism destinations were inaugurated in the Central Rift Valley, Oromia Region, the Embassy of the United States of America said. The Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Alliance (ESTA) project with funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the new community based tourism sites in Lephis and Ziway are open for tourists. The statement said the sites were developed to present natural and historic attractions and activities in an eco-friendly manner that will maximize the benefit for the local community. The attractions and activities include, among others, traditional tukuls, the Lephis Waterfall, bird-watching, Tulu Gudo Island, viewing handicrafts made by area artisans and enjoying the fresh local grilled fish (*ENA*).