

Seven Days, Vol. 18 No. 52, February 27, 2012(*)

Witnesses say Ethiopian and Somali government troops have clashed with al-Shabaab militants in southwestern Somalia. The sides battled Tuesday in a village between the towns of Luq and Bardale. Bardale is located 60 km west of Baidoa, an al-Shabaab stronghold that was once the seat of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government. Somalia's deputy prime minister said the allied government and Ethiopian forces are headed toward Baidoa and will take the area within days. Mohamed Mahmud Ibrahim said the regions will be liberated within this week, and that people will say their Friday prayers in freedom (*VOA, Feb. 21*).

Somalia's al-Shabaab insurgents suffered a major defeat Wednesday when they were forced to surrender control of Baidoa, the country's third largest city that was considered an important rebel base. A spokesman for Somalia's Transitional Federal government said the al-Qaida-linked militants withdrew from Baidoa without a fight as truckloads of Ethiopian and Somali troops approached. But a rebel spokesman said it was a tactical retreat and the battle to turn Somalia into a strict Islamic state will continue (*VOA, Feb. 21*).

Production from the recently opened Derba MIDROC Cement Factory in Ethiopia, part funded by the European Investment Bank, will reduce cement costs and end shortages of cement in Africa's fourth biggest economy. Derba MIDROC Cement Plc, Ethiopia's biggest cement factory will produce 8,000 t a day and reduce the need for landlocked Ethiopia to import building materials essential for continued growth of construction, housing and infrastructure in the country. Supported by € 33m in long-term funding provided by the European Investment Bank, the European Union's long-term lending institution, the Derba plant is expected to provide employment for 500 people and new transport, delivery and retail jobs for more than 10,000 (*the Financial, Feb. 22*).

The Feinstein International Center (FIC) at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy received its largest funding award yet in the form of a \$7.3m research grant aimed at fighting child malnutrition in Ethiopia. This award is expected to be disbursed over five years and is part of a larger grant of more than \$50m given by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to Save the Children, a non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting children in developing nations, according to FIC Director Peter Walker. Walker noted that the FIC's role in this larger plan of action is to focus on research. "We've also been asked to help with the monitoring and the evaluation of existing and future programs that are being implemented" He said (*The Tufts Daily, Feb. 22*).

The government of Germany said it will extend financial and technical assistance to enhance the quality of Technical, Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) in Ethiopia. The Head of Bilateral Cooperation of the German Embassy in Ethiopia, Dr. Bernhard Trautner, said his government would provide assistance to the TVET sector to attain targets set in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). The head accentuated the need to train capable manpower in construction, automotive, wood, mechanical and manufacturing technologies and speed up development. Ethiopia and Germany signed TVET bilateral agreements ten years ago. Some 14m € was allocated for the first phase TVET Program which ended successfully. 10m € has been allocated for the second phase and 30m € for the third. The representative of the Federal TVET Agency, Hailemichael Asrat, said six regional institutions and Addis Ababa TVET institutes have benefited from the German assistance. The director of the German Development Bank in Ethiopia, Dr. Ronald Steyer, said the cooperation framework includes the establishment of Centers of Competence in Addis Ababa, Adama and Harar towns to enhance the quality of TVET education (*State media, Feb. 24*).

Hawassa University has finalized preparations to launch a Chinese language program, the Dean of the University's Social Science and Humanity College, Dr. Nigussie Meshesha, said. He said more than 600 students have registered for the program. The center has been established as per the agreement signed by the Chinese Confucius Institute and Hawassa University. Knowing Chinese will help Ethiopians work better with Chinese companies in Ethiopia as they are engaged in various investment sectors. Students can compete and work in China and other countries by communicating effectively in the Chinese language, he said (*ENA, Feb. 24*).