

No.9, April 29, 2013(*) Seven Days, Vol. 20

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn has warned some public officials against corrupt and unbecoming behavior. In a report he gave to the House of People's Representatives, the Prime Minister gave details of his government's performance in the past eight months of his coming to power. Following his report, the MPs raised various questions even outside the scope of his report and he provided explanations. The Prime Minister was especially asked to comment on the recent eviction of Amhara nationals from Benishangul-Gumuz State and on the recent fratricidal conflict that erupted among the Shinile tribe of Somali region. On the bloody conflict in Somalia State, the Prime Minister said this problem is caused not by the people but by terrorist groups who still continue to infiltrate the people causing animosity and disturbances. He bluntly blamed the OLF and ONLF as well as their sympathizers for the problem. He explained that the federal government has intervened in both instances without infringing on the rights of the regional state. On the case of the eviction of citizens from Benishangul-Gumuz, the Prime Minister said it is not only Amhara nationals but also Oromo nationals who were evicted. He said appropriate action has been taken on regional state officials who authorized the eviction (Reporter, April 24). Voters in Addis Ababa City cast their votes in the election of members of woreda councils beginning from 6:00 a.m. local time on April 21. They voted at 1,524 polling stations set up in 116 woredas of the city. The voting process was launched in the presence of election executives and observers including representatives of civic societies, the public and political parties. Over 1.6 million voters out of whom more than 523,000 are women were expected to cast their votes in the election. Most parts of the nation were calm at the day for local and city council elections. Even the busy capital of the nation witnessed relative serenity, atypical of its usual bustling nature. Yet, the fervor of the general public was very far from the election. Rather, it was focused on the daily dealings of life. If anything, the day showed that the general public preferred to remain indifferent to the dynamics of the political space. Going out of their way, the coordinators of the election were seen knocking on the doors of the voting public, in an attempt to motivate them to go out and cast their votes. They even had the guts to check the thumbs of individuals who told them that they had already cast their votes. They were, indeed, very worried about the turnout of voters (Fortune, April 24).

Jemanesh Solomon, the famous actress of Radio and TV drama, has been arrested. Jemanesh was taken to the Arat Kilo police station and later transferred to the Gulele station along with one woman and two men. They have appeared at the First Instance Court located near Afincho Ber and will appear again at the same court shortly. Jemanesh has been acting as a mother in all the plays which mostly focus on religious issues (Addis Admas, April 27).

Ethiopia signed a contract worth nearly \$1bio with a Chinese energy company to build two transmission lines linking the country's largest dam to the country's central power grid. The three-year project, which will be fully funded by the Export-Import Bank of China, will start immediately. The two transmission lines, with a combined capacity of nearly 1000 KV, will run over 700 km to link the Grand Renaissance Dam to the main power grid near the country's capital Addis Ababa. EEPCo.'s CEO, Mihret Debebe, urged CET to adhere to the timeline set out in the contract for the project's completion, and admitted that securing funding for the large-scale project was a "challenge." (AFP, April 26).

A saline lake in Ethiopia that's baffled scientists by its 15-fold growth threatens to spill into the nation's longest river and damage plans by Africa's biggest coffee grower to become a commodities powerhouse. Lake Beseka in the Rift Valley has grown to its largest size ever amid irrigation runoff and seismic shifts in past years. Should salt waters contaminate the Awash River, they would risk Ethiopia's oldest state-owned sugar estate and an India-funded project downstream that's key to the government's \$5bio plan to turn the country into a top sugar exporter. "The fear is for the river," said Water and Energy Ministry groundwater chief, Tesfaye Tadesse. "If it discharges by itself without any control, the river is going to be contaminated forever (Bloomberg, April 23).

Taking advantage of its expanding hydropower and other renewable energy capacity, Ethiopia is building an extensive system of electric railways to ease

urban traffic congestion and reduce carbon emissions and pollution, officials say. The country is constructing nearly 2,400 km of national electric railways, plus 34 km of light rail in Addis Ababa as part of a five-year "Growth and Transformation" effort that ends in 2015. Ethiopia has been slow to embrace railway transport in recent decades. Work on the Addis Ababa Light Rail Project has been started by a Chinese firm, China Rail Engineering Corporation, which is also building the first phase of the new Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, which will have a total length of 327 km. The second section of the railway, from Mieso to Dewale at the Djibouti border, is currently under construction by China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation. The two projects combined are expected to cost close to \$2.5 billion, a sum that will be covered by the Ethiopian government and loan from the Export-Import Bank of China. A Turkish firm, Yapi Merkezi, has been awarded a \$1.7 billion contract for a railway from the eastern town of Awash to the northern city of Woldiya, with a total length of 389 km. The firm is preparing to begin construction (Reuters, April 23).

The US government has launched The Camel Milk Value Chain Development Project at a festive ceremony in Fafan Village, Somali Regional State, the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia said. The new project will support up to 50,000 smallholder livestock keepers. The project is launched as part of the U.S. President's Feed the Future Initiative in Ethiopia through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). A statement said that the project will improve the entire value chain of camel milk production, from the camels until the arrival at markets. To increase camel productivity, the project will focus on breed development, improved animal feed and fodder, and animal health service delivery. The project will give special focus to building the capacity of community animal health workers to diagnose and treat camel diseases (State media, April 25).