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In a new show of discontent over what they allege is the government's meddling towards religious affairs, thousands of Ethiopian Muslims staged protest rallies in Addis Ababa's two mosques. Following Friday prayers, protesters turned out in large numbers at the Grand Anwar mosque condemning the arrest of their fellow Muslims and calling for a stop to government interference in religious affairs (Sudan Tribune, July 26).— When police later arrived to the scene, protesters were seen throwing stones, causing damage to public and government properties. A police source confirmed that some protesters were arrested, but declined to give an exact figure (SudanTribune).

Semayawi Party has called another mass rally in Addis Ababa in protest against the government's violation of citizens' human and democratic rights. In a statement, the party said since the government has failed to give answers to the earlier protest demands, it has become necessary to call another rally. The party demands, among others, that the government stop violating the human and democratic rights of citizens, stop interfering in religious affairs and free all political prisoners (Yegna Press, July 24).

The UNHCR says thousands of South Sudanese have fled to Ethiopia to escape fighting in eastern South Sudan. The asylum seekers, mostly from Jonglei State's Pibor County, are fleeing fighting between government troops and rebel fighters in the Boma area, near the Ethiopian border. Since May, the UNHCR says, some 5,000 refugees have sought refuge in Gambella Regional State. Most of the arrivals are said to be women and children. The UNHCR says it is distributing food and non-food aid items pending a government decision on where to relocate the refugees. The UNHCR and its partners are also providing health care facilities, water and sanitation at a temporary camp. Ethiopia currently hosts more than 62,000 South Sudanese (AllAfrica.com, July 22).

Ethiopia has begun pulling troops out of a former rebel stronghold in Somalia, but it has no plans for a complete withdrawal from the fight against al Qaeda-linked insurgents, its foreign minister said on July 22. Somalia has enjoyed relative calm after military offensives by African Union (AMISOM) peacekeepers and Ethiopian troops, who have pushed al Qaeda-allied al Shabaab from urban strongholds in central and southern Somalia. But suicide attacks have reinforced concerns the militants remain a potent force and Ethiopia's sudden withdrawal in March from Hudur — the capital of Bakool province near the Ethiopian border — enabled al Shabaab to retake the town. Foreign Minister Tedros Adhanom said Ethiopia had begun pulling out of Baidoa — once considered the most important rebel city after the port of Kismayu — because it was now relatively stable and Somali forces were able to take over (Reuters, July 22).

The value of exports from Ethiopia, Africa's biggest grower of coffee, fell 2% in 2012–13 from a year earlier as a result of declining prices for the beans even as volumes increased, the Trade Ministry said. Ethiopia's exports declined to \$3.08 billion in the 12 months through July 7 from \$3.15 billion a year earlier, the ministry said in a statement. The Horn of African nation's \$43 billion economy is forecast to expand 6.5% this year, faster than the average of 5.6% for sub-Saharan Africa, according to the International Monetary Fund.— Revenue from coffee exports declined to \$746.4 million in 2012–13 from \$832.9 million, while volumes jumped 18% to 199,000 metric tons, the ministry said. Arabica coffee prices dropped 31% in the period, according to data compiled by Bloomberg — Gold, the country's second-biggest source of export revenues, fetched \$578.8 million, falling 4% from a year earlier. Earnings from other minerals, excluding tantalum, jumped 48% to \$12.4 million, while sales abroad of khat, a leafy plant that is used as a mild stimulant, raised \$271 million, an increase of 13%, the ministry said. Ethiopian exports have a limited impact on the overall economy, which is mainly spurred by public investment and private consumption, Lars Christian Moller, the World Bank's lead economist in the country, said by phone today from Addis Ababa, the capital. "The ambition is to have export-driven growth but Ethiopia needs to make further progress on improving competitiveness to realize this," Moller said. — Shipments of leather products increased 10% to \$121.9 million in the period as textiles rose 16% to \$97.9 million, the ministry said. Deliveries of oil seeds fell 6% to \$440.9 million, while exports of pulses surged 46% to \$233.3 million, the ministry said (Bloomberg Businessweek, July 26).

Ethiopia signed a \$700m agreement with China's Huawei Technologies Co Ltd to expand mobile phone infrastructure and introduce high-speed 4G broadband network in the capital Addis Ababa and 3G service throughout the country. Huawei, the world's second largest telecom equipment maker, has been involved in developing phone and internet services in the Horn of Africa country for several years. Africa's rapidly expanding telecoms industry has come to symbolize its economic growth, with subscribers across the continent totaling almost 650 million last year, up from just 25 million in 2001, according to the World Bank. The agreement will double subscribers to 56 million. The agreement is half of a \$1.6bio project split between Huawei and ZTE, China's second-largest telecoms equipment maker. Both firms will finance the amount (Reuters, July 26).

Ethiopia's Raya Brewery announced it has raised 500m birr to fund the construction of a new brewing plant. Located on the outskirts of Maichew, 670km north of the Capital in the Tigray regional state, construction of the plant which will have a capacity to produce 600,000 hl of beer annually is scheduled to be completed within a year time. Lieutenant General Tsadkan Gebretensae, Raya Brewery Board Chairman and former Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian Defense Force, told that the company has already ordered machinery from two European companies needed for the production plant (Capital, July 23).