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The Ethiopian air force pilot has defected to Eritrea, flying a helicopter across the border with his co-pilot and a technician, Ethiopian state-run media said on Dec.23. The three men had been missing since Dec. 19 soon after leaving their base on a routine training session, Ethiopian Television reported. "The military helicopter landed in Eritrea, flown by a traitor pilot who forced both his co-pilot and a technician while they took part in a training exercise," the report said, citing a defense ministry statement. It did not give further details. No official from either side was available for comment, but reports from pro-Eritrean government outlets and those of opposition groups said the helicopter was an MI-35 gunship (*Reuters, Dec. 23*).

The election of public observers was to kick-off on Dec. 21 across the country as scheduled despite opposition from the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (Medrek). In a recent demonstration, Medrek criticized the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in relation to the process of election of public observers. The party said the election of public observers is only "nominal" and alleged that the candidates are members of the ruling party. "Such comments do not hold water. The election process is guided by rules and regulations with the participation of all parties," Demissew Benti, NEBE public relations director, told disregarding the allegations. "No one is in a position to force the public to elect this or that observer and we have to respect the will of the people," Demissew said urging the public to go out in full force and elect their observers. In accordance with the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Amendment Proclamation (No. 532/2007), a public election observers committee is established at constituency and polling station level. Accordingly, each polling station will have five public observers who will be elected from among residents of the polling station. Each constituency election office will also have three public observers elected from among the polling stations' election observers established in the constituency. The public observers are tasked to follow up and observe the election process at all levels. The board disclosed the timetable for the upcoming fifth general elections on Oct. 30. Accordingly, candidates' registration will take place from Dec. 25 to Feb, 2015; polling stations will be opened as of Feb. 7, 2015 and voter registration will take place from Jan. 9, 2015 to Feb 19, 2015, and election campaigns will kick-off on Feb. 14, 2015 and will end on May 21, 2015 (*The Reporter, Dec. 20*).

Ethiopia's oil import bill for the current fiscal year is going to go down by USD 600m, an estimated 21% of the overall import bill. The Ethiopian Petroleum Supply Enterprise's (EPSE) projection said the entire oil import bill is going to be an overwhelming USD 2.9bn, which actually is one fifth of the overall import bill. Thanks to the decline in the international market's oil price, the enterprise gained some USD 400m from the decrease in the cost of oil import. It also expects this to grow as the year goes by (*The Reporter, Dec. 20*).

Israel-based hybrid power developer AORA Solar has signed a deal with Ethiopia's Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy to begin construction of a pilot solar-hybrid power plant. AORA Tulip installations produce 100 kW of electricity and 170 kW of heat while taking up an area of less than 3,500 m². The deal follows an MOU undertaken by the two entities in March, with construction set to begin by mid-2015. According to AORA, the Ethiopian government has plans to expand the deployment of installations to selected off-grid areas should the initial pilot scheme prove successful (*PV Magazine, Dec. 23*).

An Ethiopian official says a British tourist was shot dead by accident in Ethiopia's northern city of Bahir Dar. State Minister at the Government Communications Affairs Office, Shimelis Kemal, said police in the area have told him that a local resident who was on his way to renew the license for his AK-47 accidentally fired his rifle and killed the British national. Shimelis said the suspect has been apprehended and is under investigation. Ethiopia's Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Abdulfatah Abdullahi, said the incident is not related to terrorism or organized crime (*AP, Dec. 26*). - The body has been taken to Addis Ababa for a postmortem examination. A Foreign Office spokeswoman said: "We can confirm the death of a British national in Ethiopia." No further details were disclosed (*BBC, Dec. 25*).