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Four people were killed in eastern Ethiopia when a group of armed demonstrators raided a police station following protests over alleged government interference in Muslim affairs, an official said on Oct. 22. Thousands of people have staged weekly street protests and mosque sit-ins in the Horn of Africa country's capital for nearly a year, arguing that the government is promoting an "alien" branch of Islam - the Al Ahabash sect - which is avowedly apolitical and has numerous adherents in the United States. The protesters say the government controls Ethiopia's highest Muslim body, the Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs, and has prevented long-overdue elections that could bring alternative views onto the Council. - The incident late on October 21 occurred after postponed elections were held in the town of Gerba in the Amhara region, and sparked by the arrest of a protester who attempted to disrupt the vote, government spokesman Shimeles Kemal said (Reuters, Oct. 22).

A powerful landmine blast on Oct. 21 hit an Ethiopian military convoy in Somalia's central volatile city of Beledweyne, located 332 km north of Mogadishu. As residents confirmed, the blast went off as the Ethiopian convoy snaked its way through to eastern Hawo Tako residence for landmine detection. In the aftermath of the blast, the Ethiopian forces reportedly conducted operations in the area (Shebelle Media Network, Oc. 21).

Newly independent South Sudan plans to help resolve the long-running border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, a senior official said. South Sudan's minister for cabinet affairs, Deng Alor, said Addis Ababa and Asmara had given the green light for mediation talks on the border, which could start as early as November (Reuters, Oct. 24).

Ethiopia posted a trade deficit of \$7.5bio in the fiscal year which ended July 7 as a result of slowing growth in exports and increased import costs, according to Access Capital, an Addis Ababa-based research group.

The Ethiopian Grain Trade Enterprise (EGTE) is set to purchase grain, pulses and oilseeds worth 5.2bio birr this budget year. EGTE General Manager, Berhane Haile, told the enterprise is ready to purchase 6.4m q of coffee, grain, pulses and oilseeds. Berhane said all the items will be procured from farmers, associations, unions, grain traders and the Ethiopia Commodity Exchange (ECX). According to Berhane, the enterprise plans to earn 4.5bio birr income by supplying coffee, grains and oilseeds to local and foreign markets. The enterprise procured over 7.7 million q of grain, oilseeds and coffee, showing a 49% increase from the set target, the manager indicated. EGTE has been contributing its share towards stabilizing the market, Berhane indicated (WIC, Oct. 20).

The official representative of the Coca Cola Company in Ethiopia, the East African Bottling Company, has received land from the Bahir Dar city government to construct its plant in Ethiopia. The project is expected to cost a total of 800m birr. It is expected that construction work on the plant at Bahir Dar will begin early next year and be completed in a year. The East African Bottling has signed an agreement for the construction of the plant with Elmo-Olindo a construction company. The construction of the new plant is part of the 500m \$ investment launched by the company in April. The expansion initiative taken by Coca Cola in Ethiopia is to enhance what is potentially one of the most important markets for the company's products in Africa. Coca Cola currently produces 605 million bottles of soft drinks every year for the Ethiopian market (Fortune, Oct. 21).

A corner stone was laid on for the construction of the National Public Health Training Center, the first of its kind to be established in the country, at a cost of 4m USD. The center will be a state-of-the-art facility to be used as a training and support hub for Ethiopia's national public health monitoring, research and laboratory network. The US President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) committed the cost while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will manage the construction of the ground plus-three facility which is expected to be finalized by April 2014 (State media, Oct. 22).

In a report, the Ministry of Health said 61.9% of inmates at Kaliti Prison are suffering from high-level mental distress. According to the report, the prisoners are exposed to this condition because of several reasons including overcrowding in the prisons, enforced solitude and inadequate health services.

It was discovered that 7.7 out of every 100,000 Ethiopians commit suicide every year and that 3.2 attempt suicide. The situation has worsened due to the absence of adequate mental hospitals in the country. Currently, there is only one mental hospital called Emanuel Hospital. Another mental hospital called the Kotobe Mental Hospital is under construction (Sendek, Oct. 24).

Africa's only wolf species, the Ethiopian wolf, is genetically vulnerable and faces a risk of extinction, scientists say. Fewer than 500 of the wolves are thought to survive and a study of groups of the animals in Ethiopia's highlands has determined there is little gene flow between the small remaining populations, the BBC reported. The lack of genetic variation puts the animals at risk of extinction from disease or habitat loss, a team of British and German researchers said. The weak gene flow between the wolf groups could be because Ethiopian wolves, like gray wolves and red foxes, prefer very specific habitats and are unlikely to travel long distances, the scientists said. Such behaviors make it unlikely the wolves will join other groups, which would increase the likelihood of gene mixing. The researchers said efforts should be made to reconnect these isolated populations by creating habitat corridors linking them (UPI, Oct. 26).