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The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) is finalizing preparations to hold the election of the country's next Patriarch. Serious controversy has arisen between the local and exiled synods of EOC following the death of the 5th patriarch, Abune Paulos. Efforts were made in the past few weeks to resolve the dispute through peaceful negotiations and to reinstate the exiled Ethiopian Patriarch to power. But the local Holy Synod has now decided to go ahead and conduct the election unilaterally (Ethio-Mihidar, Dec. 25). The Ethiopian government has said it has no objection to the return home of the exiled 4th Ethiopian Patriarch, Abune Merkorios. In a statement, the Ministry of Federal Affairs said the constitution stipulates that the government should not interfere in religious affairs (Sendek, Dec. 26).

The Ethiopian Ministry of Industry has made 10 plots of land available for eight domestic and international investors in the manufacturing sector who have requested land to build industrial zones. These plots are a part of the 13 reclaimed by the Addis Ababa City Administration for failing to properly develop them. The plots each cover 2, 800 m² and are located in the Akaki Kality and Mekanisa Lebu districts. The companies that are granted the land are involved in the manufacture of garments, shoes, metal and agro-processing sectors. Four of these companies are domestic companies - Aziza & Sons, Mool, Pissel and Mimon garment factories as well as Kingson Leather Shoe company -- while two international shoe manufacturers, Turkish Global Leather and the Indian Pior Loti shoes, domestically based Eliana coffee and EFESOL Technology were granted the remaining plots. These were the only eight companies that passed the technical evaluation after 259 companies showed interest following the Ministry's call for interest (Fortune, Dec. 26).

The Ministry of Mines and a private company, Ezana Mining Development Company, signed an agreement to enable the company to produce gold. Mines Minister Sinknesh Ejigu and company manager Atikilti Araya signed the agreement to produce more than 2,000 km of gold. As per the agreement, the company plans to produce the gold in two years with a budget of 393.7m Birr. Minister Sinknesh said currently, 135 local and foreign investors are running 250 exploration and production projects. The minister said Ezana Mining is the second company engaged in gold production. The company has discovered gold, silver, copper, zinc and lead reserves in Lailay, Adiyabo woreda of Tigray State. The company also found gold reserves in Asgede Tsimbila woreda of Northern Western Tigray Zone. Besides generating foreign earnings, it will create dozens of jobs. It has been conducting mining exploration in the northern part of the country in the past 20 years (State media, Dec. 27).

The Modjo Dry Port Service, under the Ethiopian Shipping and Logistics Enterprise, facilitated 70% of the nation's imported items since 2001 E.C.. It is undertaking expansion projects at a cost of 718m Birr. Modjo Branch Director Getaneh Abate told that the ongoing expansion projects in three phases would enhance the port service to a higher level. The director said the construction of international standards containers' terminal is underway on 8.6 ha of land. The projects carried out in the second phases include the digging of two deep water wells, construction of containers' terminal, stores, alley, heavy truck terminal and gas stations. Upon completion of the projects this fiscal year, the port will accommodate 9,500 containers that was limited to 6,300 previously. The port is working 14 hours a day with 275 permanent and contractual workers (ENA, Dec. 24).

The government of Japan has extended 105m birr for a food security program in Ethiopia. The assistance aims to help Ethiopia promote food production with the supply of agricultural inputs. Ambassador Kishino said Japan had extended the grant-in-aid as part of its support to the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), which has set a projected average annual growth rate for agriculture of 8.6% for five years from 2010/11 (WIC, Dec 25).

Ethiopia is closing in on its target of becoming self-sufficient in sugar production to meet its domestic demand, the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation (ESC) disclosed. The country aims to fully satisfy the domestic demand for sugar, which is estimated to be as much as 500,000 t per year by the end of 2013, Asfaw Dingamo, Advisor to ESC Director-General, told. The three existing sugar

factories in the country, Metehara, Wonji Shoa and Fincha, produce around 300,000 t of sugar per year (WIC, Dec. 22).

The Ethiopian Shipping and Logistics Enterprise (ESLE) said it would receive nine vessels built by Chinese companies at a cost of 4bio Birr until the end of this budget year. The enterprise's Chief Executive Officer, Ahmed Tussa, said the vessels would enhance the ship cargo capacity to 50% from 20% at present. The CEO said the enterprise has started implementing a multi-modal transport system to load containers from Djibouti Port in the shortest possible time. There were 8,000 containers in July 2004 E.C., and only 1,200 containers remained at the port after the implementation of the system, he said (ENA, Dec. 29).

Tuberculosis (TB) deaths have declined steadily in Ethiopia, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH). The ministry's TB Prevention and Control Program Technical Advisor, Dr Andargachew Kumsa, told the death rate declined from 500 in 1990s to 240 now per 100,000 people. Wide-ranging activities are also underway to cut the death rate to 156 by the end of the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). Some 90% of the 159,000 TB patients who were treated last budget year were also cured, Dr Andargachew said. According to the advisor, the number of TB diagnosis and treatment centers has reached more than 3,000 from an insignificant number in the past (WIC, Dec. 24).