

A Week in the Horn

14th December 2012

- **Ethiopia-Qatar relations move onto a new bilateral level**
- **The olive branch remains extended: no change of policy towards Eritrea**
- **Ethiopia's growth double Sub-Saharan average says World Bank**
- **The fall of Jowhar to the Somali Armed Forces....**
- **...IGAD's Joint Committee on the Grand Stabilization Plan meets**
- **Ethiopia's Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Day**

News and Views (page 9):

- **Prime Minister Hailemariam lays corner-stone of new Djiboutian Port**
- **Ambassador Seyoum visits Singapore**
- **Ethiopia's mobile subscribers now number over 18 million**
- **US envoy Princeton Lyman travels to South Sudan**
- **AU plans a six-month Golden Jubilee celebration**

Ethiopia-Qatar relations move onto a new bilateral level

Last week, Prime Minister Hailemariam led a high-level Ethiopian delegation to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP18) in Doha. The Prime Minister took the opportunity to hold bilateral talks with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, on the sidelines of the Conference. The two leaders discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries. Prime Minister Hailemariam also met with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Heir Apparent, and held separate talks with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani. Sheikh Tamim commended Ethiopia's interest in the ongoing COP18 and effort to contribute to its success by sending a high-ranking delegation headed by the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Hailemariam also met with Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani to discuss bilateral relations, ways to enhance these and follow up agreements and memoranda of understanding, as well as cooperation on regional peace and security in the Horn of Africa and global issues.

Ato Sufian Ahmed, Minister of Finance and Economic Development also paid a working visit to the Qatar between December 1st and 5th, holding talks with Qatar's Minister of Finance and Economy, Yusif Husayn, on bilateral and related matters, focusing on pending issues of bilateral cooperation, specifically in the areas of labour relations, avoidance of double taxation, bilateral investment promotion and protection, an air service agreement, and agriculture and mining possibilities. Ato Sufian noted that the government of Ethiopia was preparing agricultural land for large-scale farming for Qatari investors. He said the detailed study of the areas would be finalized at the end of this month and then submitted to the Qatari side. The Qatar Finance and Economy Minister assured Minister Sufian that Qatar was ready to invest in Ethiopia. He noted that the Hassad Food company was preparing to take up investment opportunities in coffee, rice, livestock and cut flowers development.

Following detailed discussions between the Ethiopian delegation and Qatar officials the two ministers signed an Agreement on Employment of Ethiopian Manpower in the State of Qatar and a Memorandum of Understanding on Mining, in the presence of Prime Minister Hailemariam and

Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jasim Bin Jabir Al Thani. In addition to these agreements, the ministers also agreed to further discuss and finalize issues related to air services, investments and agriculture.

Last month, of course, Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani, headed a high-level delegation which included Dr Khalid bin Mohamed Al-Attiya, State Minister at the Foreign Ministry, on a two-day visit to Ethiopia. During the visit, the Qatari Prime Minister held rounds of talks with Prime Minister Hailemariam, and signed several agreements dealing with bilateral cooperation in the fields of diplomacy, trade and investment. The two countries also agreed to establish a joint high-level ministerial committee.

At a joint press conference, Sheikh Hamad said that his visit was a result of his meeting in February with Meles Zenawi, the late prime minister of Ethiopia, in London. He said Ethiopia was an important country for Qatar and that Qatar sought to promote cooperation and economic ties with it in many areas. He referred to Ethiopia and Qatar's long experience in promoting international peace and security and stressed Qatar's interest in achieving lasting peace in the region with the help of the excellent relationship that Qatar enjoys with the regional countries. Sheik Hamad noted Qatar's strong belief that peace is only possible through development, adding that Qatar considered Ethiopia as a model state in the field of development. Prime Minister Hailemariam praised the growing ties between Ethiopia and Qatar and expressed appreciation for its role, describing their meeting as a qualitative leap in bilateral relations. He said the formation of a higher ministerial committee would push the cooperation to the highest level. The Prime Minister noted that Ethiopia offered wide investment opportunities to Qatar investors and spoke of the possibility of future cooperation between the two countries in the areas of economics, labour relations, tourism and agriculture.

The visit was a significant development in Ethiopian-Arab Gulf relations in general and Qatar-Ethiopian relations in particular, and according to Qatari sources the visit launched a new phase in Qatar relations with the countries of the Horn of Africa.

The olive branch remains extended: no change of policy towards Eritrea

While in Qatar, Prime Minister Hailemariam also had an interview with Al Jazeera. It has received considerable coverage not least because his response to a question on Ethiopia-Eritrea relations was widely, and inaccurately, reported as a policy shift by Ethiopia. In fact, some media outlets didn't wait even for the broadcast of the full interview to present the Prime Minister's remark as a change in Ethiopian policy on the basis of short excerpts from the interview. Nor did they bother to check whether the Prime Minister's statement was actually something new or the reiteration of an often stated Ethiopian position that it would be prepared to hold talks with Eritrea on any bilateral issues at any time, anywhere.

As is well known ever since Ethiopia accepted the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission's Decisions in November 2004, it has repeatedly extended an olive branch to Eritrea for comprehensive negotiations, for the finalization of the demarcation process and the normalization of relations. Even in the face of persistent attempts by the regime in Asmara to carry out destabilization activities, Ethiopia has continued to make it clear its desire to talk. It also called in earnest for the start of talks on comprehensive normalization of relations. The Ethiopian government has had a firm and consistent position that the maintenance of lasting peace must go beyond the settling of border disputes.

It is also common knowledge that the late Prime Minister Meles said on numerous occasions and in many fora that that Ethiopia is ready to talk with Eritrea anywhere, any time and on any issue

relating to the relations between the two countries. This has been the case ever since November 2004, and there has been no policy change towards Eritrea since then. In other words, Ethiopia has never retracted the olive branch it extended in the aftermath of the bloody war fought between the countries after Eritrea invaded Ethiopia in May 1998.

The only addition made by Prime Minister Hailemariam was the mention of Asmara. In the past, Ethiopia has made it clear it would be prepared to talk to Eritrea any time or anywhere, though it has not mentioned Asmara specifically. This, however, can scarcely be classified as a policy change in any sense. The Prime Minister's remarks can only be seen in that sense if his statements are read in a total vacuum in the absence of any knowledge of the facts.

Regrettably, the calls for peace continue to fall on deaf ears in Asmara. As the Prime Minister said, the only thing that prevents talks is the "stubbornness of the leadership of Eritrea". The late Prime Minister Meles made numerous efforts to get talks going during the last decade. All failed due to the intransigence of the Eritrean government. In fact, if one thing can be shown to characterize the Eritrean government's behaviour in this last decade it is a belligerent foreign policy and its determination to continue with all manner of destabilizing activities within the region and most particularly against Ethiopia. Indeed, the last ten years has demonstrated considerable ingenuity by the leadership in Asmara in planning and executing such activities within the region. Equally, its sole profit from these adventures has been two rounds of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, and a general appreciation of an isolated Eritrea widely regarded as a pariah state. Indeed, the regime in Asmara is now virtually synonymous with brazen lawlessness and contempt for all the norms of international relations. To put it another way, it is very clear that the vocabulary of peace seems to have eluded the government of Eritrea over the past decade.

It is, however, of concern that so many media outlets and commentators apparently saw this comment of willingness to talk to Eritrea in Asmara as a policy change. It suggests that few, if any, had any real understanding, or knowledge, of the relations between the two countries. Worse, it apparently reduces the argument to an issue of venue. This, of course, has never been an issue to stall peace-making efforts. Ethiopia has never raised this as an issue, nor has it shown either preference for a venue or rejected any place. The mention of Asmara by Prime Minister Hailemariam merely demonstrated, yet again, Ethiopia's willingness to go the extra mile to bring peace between two brotherly peoples.

Indeed, Prime Minister Hailemariam stressed that restoring peaceful relations goes beyond avoiding tensions. He underlined that both countries could both benefit a lot from the peace dividend that would follow the normalization of relations. Ethiopia certainly envisages economic regional integration with all its neighbours, including Eritrea, to allow the Horn of Africa to thrive in the competitive global market. In a world where interdependence is the hallmark of regional and international relations, regional integration provides the obvious strategy for maximizing the benefit to be derived from development. IGAD is an African Union Regional Economic Community, and Ethiopia takes this principle seriously. Indeed, it is spearheading regional integration and has long made the extension of an olive branch to Eritrea a central element in this. There has not been, and there will not be, any change to that policy. Any suggestions of a policy shift are moonshine. The Prime Minister's statement is in fact an unequivocal confirmation of continuity of policy towards Eritrea.

While the Prime Minister's answers on Ethio-Eritrean relations received most attention, because of the inaccurate reports of a policy shift, he also spoke about the current situation in Somalia and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and its implications for the relations between Ethiopia and the downstream countries. On current developments in Somalia,

Prime Minister Hailemariam emphasized the progress of the Somalia peace process, describing this as a remarkable achievement for the countries of the region which had been worked closely with the Somali government. Referring to the establishment of a Jubaland state, he said that this was not a complex issue and would be “dealt with in the framework of IGAD”. He emphasized the cardinal importance of inclusiveness for the process, and dismissed as baseless any suggestion that Kenya was supporting a few clans in Kismayo in preference to others. He cited his discussions with President Kibaki where, he said, they had agreed on the inclusiveness of the process.

In relation to the Construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Hailemariam strongly denied any suggestion that Ethiopia had been secretive over the plans for construction. This was, he said, no more than a “lack of information” on the part of the interviewer. There was no secrecy about the Dam. He also emphasized the benefits of the construction for downstream countries, and highlighted the importance of the activities of the International Panel of Experts. This, he pointed out, was an Ethiopian initiative to provide an additional assessment of the possible impact, both positive and negative, of the dam on Egypt and Sudan. He totally dismissed the wild rumours of downstream countries considering military activity as nonsense, quoting the official statements of Egypt and Sudan denying any such suggestions.

Ethiopia’s growth double Sub-Saharan average says World Bank

The World Bank yesterday (13th December) launched its latest ‘Ethiopia Economic Update’. This states that Ethiopia has experienced strong and generally broad-based real economic growth of around 10.6% on average between 2004 and 2011. Over the past decade, the Ethiopian economy has been growing at twice the rate of the Africa region, averaging 10.6 percent GDP growth per year compared to 5.2 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report indicates Ethiopia’s growth is due to a number of factors, including the result of agricultural modernization, the development of the export sectors, strong global commodity demand, and government-led development investments. The growth over the last 5 years has lifted around 2.5 million citizens out of poverty, a decrease of over 9%.

The report further estimates that if inflation can be controlled, Ethiopia will be able to meet its Growth and Transformation Plan target to reduce poverty by another 7.4%. Guang Zhe Chen, World Bank Country Director for Ethiopia, says the Government target to reduce poverty to 22.2 percent by 2014/15 “is ambitious but attainable.” The report says the government has made progress in tackling the persistently high inflation which has affected the economy over the past two years by tightening its fiscal and monetary stance. As a result, inflation is on a decreasing trend, falling from 33 percent in 2011 to 15.8 percent in October 2012 (year on year). This is good news for the poor and for the overall economy.

Michael Geiger, the Bank's Country Economist for Ethiopia and one of the lead authors of the report says that Ethiopia is following a strategy of increasing exports to facilitate growth. “This is appropriate given the limited size of the domestic market and it is consistent with the development experience of some of the recently successful countries, particularly in East Asia”. He notes that the “growth of goods exports has mainly been driven by volume growth across a variety of product groups”. This suggests Ethiopia is increasingly diversifying its export base.

Overall, the report concludes that Ethiopia's fiscal performance appears to be adequate given the current state of the economy and financing requirements for development. The overall general government deficit (including grants) declined from 1.6 percent of GDP in 2010/11 to 1.2 percent of GDP in 2011/12. Tax collections have been boosted by the 2010 tax reform, while

public management reforms have strengthened public expenditures. Public debt is on a declining trend at 35 percent of GDP in 2011/12 and Ethiopia has a low risk of external debt distress.

The launch of the Ethiopia Economic Update was complemented with the presentation of a Survey Report on Chinese Foreign Investment in Ethiopia. At the request of the Government, the World Bank surveyed 69 Chinese enterprises doing business in Ethiopia and makes a number of recommendations to facilitate foreign investment. These include streamlining custom procedures and trade regulations, improving tax administration consistency and efficacy, and increasing the supply and quality of skilled workers.

These two reports form part of a World Bank service which is a part of its economic policy dialogue with the Government of Ethiopia. The Bank is now planning to release an Economic Update report for Ethiopia every six months, along with specific products in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

The fall of Jowhar to the Somali Armed Forces....

On Sunday, (9th December) the Somali National Army and AMISOM forces took over one more strategic town in South Central Somalia - Jowhar, the capital of Middle Shabelle region. The largest town that remained in the hands of Al-Shabaab, it is a strategic centre. Jowhar is an economic and agricultural hub in the Shebelle River valley, and the roads connecting the central regions of Hiiraan and Galgadud to Mogadishu pass through it. It has been the centre of Al-Shabaab operations since they were forced out of Mogadishu and its loss is a significant blow to the psychology and morale of the extremists, reinforcing the effect of the recent losses of a string of important towns, including Baidoa, Belet Weyne, Hudur, Merka and Kismayo, to the Somali National Army, supported by AMISOM forces, with the help of Ethiopian troops.

There have been reports that more and more Al-Shabaab fighters are fleeing from the Middle Shabelle region into parts of Galgadud region further north. The Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a administration in the central Somalia region of Galgadud warned on Monday (10th December) that Al-Shabaab/Al-Qaeda militants from Middle Shebelle and Hiiraan regions were fleeing into Galgadud. Sheikh Mohamed Yusuf Hefow, Ahlu Sunna's executive committee chairman, urged locals to be vigilant against militants fleeing from the government offensive in Middle Shabelle. He said militants who fled from Jowhar town in advance of the government advance were now reaching areas between Bulo-Burto and Haradhere, and were threatening to carry out what he called asymmetrical surgical operations aiming to terrorize locals in the region.

The movement of Al-Shabaab northwards reinforces existing reports that Al-Shabaab has been trying to move its centre of operations into the Galgala Mountains in the north east of the Puntland administration. On Friday last week [7th Dec], Puntland commandos carried out a successful night-time attack on an Al Shabaab operations base 45km west of Galgala village. Puntland intelligence says the location served as a home for senior members of Al Shabaab and was where wounded fighters received medical treatment. The Puntland units inflicted heavy casualties and captured weaponry and other material, though some terrorists escaped into nearby valleys and caves in the mountainous terrain. Equally, reports suggest that the Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a administration is right to remain cautious as parts of Galgadud and Mudug regions, including the former pirate centre of Haradhere and other nearby coastal towns, were until recently centres of Al-Shabaab activity as well as providing possible escape routes by sea further north or even to Yemen.

In Jowhar itself, the Somali government forces have already been conducting extensive security operations inside the town and in neighbouring villages to ensure against any further surprise

attacks and to weed out Al-Shabaab supporters. Local residents appear to have welcomed their liberation from Al-Shabaab. Certainly, local politicians believe the community on Jowhar and surrounding areas had become simply tired of the attitude and behaviour of Al-Shabaab, and of its brutal suicide attacks, the assassinations and the targeted killings against key figures in the local community. AMISOM's Force Commander, Lt. General Gutti said the joint forces were now consolidating the city's defences and he appealed to the residents to remain calm. He described the capture of Jowhar as going "a long way towards improving security for the civilian population in Hiiraan and the Lower and Middle Shabelle regions. Lt. General Gutti, who congratulated the Somali National Army troops on their success, said AMISOM would continue to enhance the capability of the Somali National Army through training and mentoring. He noted "AMISOM is building up the capacity of the Somali National Army to train its troops within Somalia and we have already begun courses for Somali trainers at the Al Jazira Military Training Base."

Meanwhile, despite the loss of Jowhar, the highly secretive Sheikh Mukhtar Abu Zubayr 'Godane', the leader of Al-Shabaab, released a message on Al-Kataib Media Foundation, a favourite website for Al-Shabaab, claiming that the organization is regrouping and that it has launched an insurgency and a struggle which will be long and similar to the one in Afghanistan. In this context, he mentions Mullah Omar of the Taliban of Afghanistan and Al-Zawahiri, the head of Al Qaeda. For the first time, he also refers to Ethiopia, claiming the death of Meles Zenawi offers "a golden opportunity for the Muslim to liberate themselves from the oppression of the Crusaders." He also welcomes "Muslims seeking secession along the Kenyan coast and demanding the restoration of their liberties and the rights to their land's mineral wealth from the Kenyan government."

....IGAD's Joint Committee on the Grand Stabilization Plan meets

On Thursday last week (6th December), IGAD's Joint Committee on the Grand Stabilization Plan for South Central Somalia met in Addis Ababa. The Committee, set up by IGAD following the endorsement of the Plan by the IGAD Heads of State and Government, has now been expanded to include Somalia as well as Ethiopia and Kenya. General Mohamed Sheikh Hassan led the Somali delegation to the committee and the Somali team has been mandated to liaise with the office of the Somali Prime Minister and the Somali Foreign Ministry. Last week the Committee met at the Office of the Facilitator for Somalia Peace and Reconciliation, and drew up a draft Memorandum of Understanding, aimed at ensuring effective and timely coordination between the Committee and the Somali government and its institutions in order "to support the development of an inclusive process, in determining the political and administrative arrangements for the liberated areas and the expressed willingness and commitment of the government of Somalia to work within the IGAD framework" as well as recognizing the partnership engagement required for greater stability in Somalia. The MoU also noted the emphasis given by the UN Security Council "to the importance of stabilizing liberated areas, promoting peace and reconciliation, law and order, the delivery of basic services and strengthening governance at district, regional, state and federal levels." The Committee will also have the job of encouraging the international community to provide coordinated assistance to ensure timely implementation of the Stabilization Plan.

The MoU specifies that it is intended to create a platform for the Joint Committee, of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, to operate, "in the spirit of good neighbourly relations and in line with the initiatives of IGAD." The aims of the parties are outlined as follows: facilitating stabilization by promoting peace and reconciliation and an inclusive process to determine political and administrative arrangements in the liberated areas; develop and implement joint strategies for the re-establishment of government institutions in an inclusive manner, security sector arrangements, rule of law and order, humanitarian and cross-border issues; to establish interim

administrations through a consultative process to lay the foundations of functional regional and district governance structures; share information through jointly agreed mechanisms; ensure agreement is developed on the basis of mutual understanding for strengthening coordination of political and security initiatives on the ground. The MoU details that the parties should cooperate through direct communication and consultation as well as through the IGAD Office of the Facilitator; that the parties should meet regularly, that the Facilitator should represent IGAD and that the parties should be guided by the rules of procedure. Any misunderstandings are to be resolved by dialogue, and the MoU should be reviewed on a regular basis.

Meanwhile on Thursday, (13th December) Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon announced the appointment of five State Ministers and twenty Deputy Ministers, with each Ministry receiving two Deputy Ministers. The clan balance between the five clans has been maintained with each being given the same number of appointments. Once again, the administration has upgraded the status of the minority clans to provide them with a share equal to the numbers of those appointed from the four major clans. These appointments do not require Parliamentary approval.

Ethiopia's Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Day

The seventh Ethiopian Nations Nationalities and People's Day was celebrated on Saturday (8th December) in Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara Regional State, under the theme: "Unity with Diversity: Through Meles's Vision and the Constitution for Our Renaissance." Prime Minister Hailemariam, senior government officials, ambassadors and invited guests attended the celebrations. Representatives from over eighty ethnic groups gathered in the city and displayed their music and dancing in traditional dress and decoration, demonstrating the unity within diversity of Ethiopia's many ethnic groups. The constitution of the country has ensured the rights of the many nations, nationalities and peoples who were abandoned and ignored under previous regimes. Other outcomes of the constitution have been the rapid economic development that has been registered during the last decade and the national consensus obtained on national issues.

Prime Minister Hailemariam called on all Ethiopians to renew their commitment to achieve the Growth and Transformation Plan and bring about good governance. He also told his audience that Ethiopians needed to use the celebration as an opportunity to recommit and scale up their efforts. The occasion, he said, would add force to the efforts to realize the vision of the late Prime Minister Meles who had given his life for the equality of nations and nationalities and to build a prosperous Ethiopia. The Prime Minister said the government would continue to exert all efforts to improve agricultural productivity, reduce the rate of unemployment and control inflation as well as improve infrastructure. He emphasized that Ethiopians from all walks of life should maximize their efforts to support the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam by improving their savings culture. He urged everyone to contribute their share to the efforts to build a democratic and prosperous Ethiopia.

Other speakers included the Speaker of the House of Federation, Kassa Tekleberhan, who noted that the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia were now able to give their attention to fighting poverty as their equality was guaranteed by the Constitution. He stressed that the celebration of the Nations Nationalities and People's Day was aimed at strengthening the unity of the nations and nationalities of the country and consolidating their participation in the efforts to create a single political-economic society. The Chief Administrator of the Amhara Regional State, Ayalew Gobeze, said this year's celebration was unique as it coincided with the public determination to realize the vision of the late Prime Minister.

The country's Federal Constitution has helped bring development, build democracy and consensus among the Ethiopian people. It has shown itself to be the best means of accommodating multi-national and multi-ethnic diversity. Federalism allows the decentralization of politics and has also enhanced participation of the nations, nationalities and peoples in the political process of the country.

These celebrations of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Day have maintained the internal stability of the country. Further, they play a role in ensuring peace and stability in neighbouring countries and in the region as a whole. They have become an example for the rest of the region. Ethiopia is one of Africa's second most populous countries with a population of nearly eighty million with over eighty ethnic groups. For many years, the different peculiarities and identities of the various Nations, Nationalities and Peoples were ignored, and indeed they were oppressed and exploited for centuries, deprived of their basic human rights and their fundamental democratic freedoms. Many nations, nationalities and peoples were forced to live as second-class citizens in their own country until the demise of the military regime in 1991.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia opened a new chapter of political history in the nation. It ensures basic human rights and fundamental democratic freedoms for all the Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples for the first time in their history. There has been real progress towards removing exploitation, oppression and inequality. The country has entered a new era of equality and mutual cooperation to safeguard and ensure the common interests of the peoples. The tone is set by the preamble of the FDRE constitution: "We the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia". Equality of all Ethiopian languages, religions, beliefs, traditions, cultures, is constitutionally ensured without any discrimination. No language, religion, belief, tradition or culture is inferior or superior to any other. Today, therefore, the Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples are united in their struggle against their single common enemy – poverty. They are, therefore, consolidating their efforts for development through their own Growth and Transformation Plan.

The country began to commemorate Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Day seven years ago after the decision passed by the House of Federation to celebrate the day of the adoption of the Ethiopian Federal Constitution. This year was the seventh occasion of the Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Day. Previous occasions were celebrated in the city of Addis Ababa, in Hawassa, in Addis Ababa as the capital of Oromia, in Dire-Dawa (as a collaboration between four neighbouring regional states, Oromia, Afar, Harar and Somali), in Addis Ababa, Mekelle and now Bahir Dar. Next year's host for the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Day will be the Somali Regional State.

News and Views:

Prime Minister Hailemariam lays corner-stone of new Djiboutian Port

Prime Minister Hailemariam headed a high-level delegation on an official visit to Djibouti on Wednesday (12th December). The delegation included the new Foreign Minister, Dr. Tedros Adhanom. The Prime Minister was attending the celebration of laying the corner-stone for the commencement of the construction of the new Tadjoura port. Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Ethiopia's commitment to fostering closer ties and enhanced cooperation with Djibouti. He cited various agreements on rail, electricity and port projects currently being implemented between the two countries. Djibouti's President, Ismail Omar Guelleh, underlined the fact that on completion, the new port would address the needs of both Ethiopia and Djibouti. Among other things, **it will also bring development to the northern parts of Djibouti. Tadjourah is going to be provided with a rail link to the Afar, Amhara and Tigray Regional States of Ethiopia.** This will also provide for the export of the substantial potash deposits being developed in the Afar Regional State. The Canadian company, Alana Potash has an indicated resource of 1.3 billion tonnes of potash in its concession and expects to start production in 2014. In September [2012] it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Djibouti Port and Free Zones authority to build a potash terminal at Tadjourah.

Ambassador Seyoum visits Singapore

Ethiopia's Ambassador to China, Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, who is also accredited to Singapore, paid a working visit to the Republic of Singapore last week (2nd to 4th December). The delegation included senior officials from the Ethiopian Airports Enterprise, the Ethiopian Civil Aviation and from Ethiopian Airlines. The delegation held discussions with officials in the Republic of Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Changi Airport Group, Changi Airport International, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Aviation Academy of Singapore. Talks covered establishing an Ethio-Singapore Special Economy zone in Ethiopia, cooperation in the field of multi-modal logistics, a bilateral visa waiver agreement for diplomatic and service passports and cooperation in human resource development and capacity building, with especial reference to the civil aviation industry and technical and vocational training. The officials of Ethiopian Airlines, the Changi Airport group and other relevant bodies of the Republic of Singapore also discussed the prospect of a direct flight between Addis Ababa and Singapore. Both sides expressed a desire to further expand and enhance the relations between the two countries, and Ambassador Seyoum noted that cooperation in aviation was an important venture opening a window of opportunity to further strengthen the partnership between the two countries. A joint government-business delegation from the Republic of Singapore paid a visit Ethiopia in September this year to assess the country's business environment.

Ethiopia's mobile subscribers now number over 18 million

Dr Debretsion Gebremichael, Information and Communication Technology Minister with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister, has announced that the government is trying to increase access to Information and Communication Technology in the country, as well as improve its quality. Opening the 2nd Annual Ethiopian ICT Entrepreneurship Conference on Monday (10th December), Dr Debretsion said ICT infrastructure was expanding. The number of mobile subscribers in the country was now over 18 million and of these, the Minister said, 3.4 million mobile subscribers used the system to access internet services. The aim was to be able to reach 45 million subscribers by the end of 2014. He noted that wireless coverage of the country had now reached 73 percent.

US envoy Princeton Lyman travels to South Sudan

The Office of the Spokesperson in Washington DC said the U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Ambassador Princeton Lyman, travelled to Juba, South Sudan on Wednesday (12th December) for a series of high-level meetings with government officials, members of civil society, and representatives of international organizations working in South Sudan. His visit came at a critical time in the delayed implementation of the historic agreements between Sudan and South Sudan signed on 27th September. Ambassador Lyman was discussing implementation of the agreements as called for by the AU Peace and Security Council in its 24th October communiqué, including the issue of Abyei, the creation of a safe demilitarized border zone and the resumption of oil production between the two countries. Ambassador Lyman was expected to underscore the United States' commitment to supporting South Sudan's economic development and growth as a full-fledged democracy that respects human rights and the rule of law. Following his discussions in South Sudan, Ambassador Lyman is proceeding to Addis Ababa, where the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism is due to start on Saturday 15th December. The White House recently announced that Special Envoy Lyman is stepping down in the New Year from his current post as U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan. He has held the post since March 2011. No official reason has been given for Ambassador Lyman's resignation and no official replacement has been announced. The respective Defence Ministers of the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan have both expressed hope that they will reach an understanding on the implementation of the agreements signed earlier. In a statement on Monday [10th] following week-long negotiations in Khartoum, they said they had asked the African Union High Level Implementation Panel to help them work on the practical details of withdrawal of troops from the disputed border area. Both sides have agreed this was a necessary precursor for resumption of oil exports but failed to agree on how to do this. Sudan's Defence Minister, Abdel Raheem Mohammed Hussein, said the two sides would meet in Addis Ababa to continue dialogue on how to implement the cooperation deals; South Sudan's Defence Minister, John Kong Nyuon, said some issues remained unresolved, but expressed his hopes for a successful outcome of the next round of talks. Oil production was originally scheduled to restart on 15th November.

AU plans a six-month Golden Jubilee celebration

The Chief Advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Professor Mekonnen Haddis, announced last Friday (7th December) that the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union, its Golden Jubilee, would be celebrated with a range of events over a period of six months. This followed the decisions taken at the 16th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in January 2011. Professor Mekonnen said the National Organizing Committee and the Secretariat Office set up for the celebration are undertaking various activities to make the celebration of the 50th anniversary a success. He said that embassies of different African countries, the Addis Ababa City Administration, members of the business community, scholars, women and youths will all be taking part in the commemoration. Professor Mekonnen called on the media to publicize and promote the contribution of African leaders towards the establishment of the OAU and its progress during the last 50 years. The Organization of African Unity was established on 25th May 1963 in Addis Ababa. It was originally established to promote unity, solidarity and cooperation among the newly independent African states. The OAU served its purpose and was transformed into the African Union in order to address the current needs of the continent more effectively. The decision to transform the OAU into the AU was announced at the final summit meeting of the OAU in July 2001; the Heads of State and Government of the Assembly of the African Union met for the inaugural session of the African Union in Durban, South Africa on 10th July 2002.