

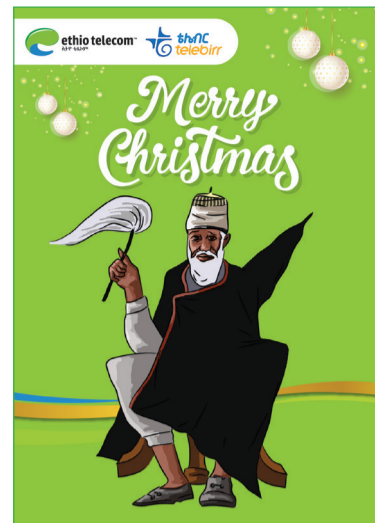


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Star rated hotels in Metropolis gear up for AU summit

BY ASHENAFI ANIMUT

ADDIS ABABA - Some star-rated hotels' representatives here in the capital disclosed that they have finalized all preparations to welcome the participants of the upcoming

AU assembly.

It was learnt that the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU and 44th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council is slated for 15- 19 February 2024.

Speaking to the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), Skylight Hotel Sales Department Head Ayehu Gesesse said that continental and international

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Dine for the Nation projects transform tourism sector: gov't officials

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"Quest for sea port, alternative port not Luxury": Economist

ADDIS ABABA - Ethiopia's quest for sea port and access to alternative port is not a luxury, according to the Addis Ababa University economist Atnafu Gebremeskel.

He, moreover, said that it is morally and legally appropriate demand consistent with

See "Quest for ... page 3

Ministry expects increased tourist influx this holiday season

BY BETELHEM BEDLU

ADDIS ABABA –Ethiopia is undertaking preparations to welcome great number of tourists and Ethiopian nationals during the upcoming holiday seasons, so said Ministry of Tourism (MoT).

In an interview with *The Ethiopian Herald*, MoT State Minister Seleshi Girma mentioned that many tourists from Europe, America and other countries including Ethiopian nationals would pay visit to the country to take part in the Ethiopian Christmas and Epiphany celebrations.

He said the tourists would take advantage of their New Year holiday break to visit different areas around the world in which unique religious and cultural celebrations such as Ethiopian Christmas and Epiphany holidays would their primary choice.

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An epitome of comradeship

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Ethiopia's access to sea port is a benefit to the entire region

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News

Nation needs to pay due attention to heritage preservation: Experts

BY MESERET BEHAILU

ADDIS ABABA – Ethiopia needs to pay serious attention to heritage protection and development to get adequate benefit from tourism, so said tourism experts.

Tourism Institute Deputy Director General, Yetaseb Seyoum told The Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) that Ethiopia has numerous natural and cultural heritages that enabled the country to be the first in Africa to register many heritages under UNESCO list.

However, he said, the tourism sector has not been availing adequate benefit to the people due to the poor attention given to preserve and promote heritages.

As to Yetaseb, tourism is known by creating employment for one person in ten people in the world though it has created only two million jobs in Ethiopia.

Among the challenges that hinder the sector from benefiting the people are the COVID-19 outbreak, conflict, lack of adequate skilled human power, infrastructure, and promotion limitations, he mentioned.

He also urged all concerned bodies to play due role to utilize the potential of the tourism sector to generate foreign currency, create more jobs, and get other economic significances that improve the life of the people.

Ethiopian Tourism Journalists Association President, Henok Seyoum on his part said that preserving and promoting heritages helps to attract more visitors and earn the required income.

However, he noted, preserving and developing heritages should not be left merely to the government.

Therefore, paying the necessary attention to the tourism sector and allocating adequate budget for heritage preservation, strengthening cooperation among stakeholders, and increasing community engagement in the area would bring the sector growth and its benefits, Henok suggested.

Mining, service industries expedite Ethiopia's economic diversification

BY TSEGAYE TILAHUN

ADDIS ABABA – The mining and service industry sectors are all an important for Ethiopia's economic diversification plan, the U.S Ambassador to Ethiopia Ervin Massinga said.

Recently, Ambassador Ervin Massinga attended the inaugural ceremony of Chebera Churchura Elephant Paw Lodge.

He told the local media that Mining and industry as well as the service industry are all very important as part of economic diversification plan. Tourism has a particular role to play a special relative to beautiful areas such as parks and others.

"I am looking forward to the growth of the tourism industry. I know Ethiopia is going to be a powerhouse of in tourism in coming years and my visit here just one small indicator of the reality."

Talking about Chebera Churchura Elephant Paw Lodge, he said that it is incredible, stunning, moving and emotionally involved.

"I indicated my desire and intention to see as much of Ethiopia I could as quick as possible. When I arrived, I have been busy since I have been on



Ambassador Ervin Massinga

working visits to regional capitals to have an important discussions."

"I am thrilled that it is my first opportunity to see one of the country's wonderful parks. And I look forward seeing many others, tourism in particular gives many Ethiopian young people an opportunity to share cultural heritage and their landscape in a healthy and productive way," he said.

Furthermore, the U.S and Ethiopia have a longstanding historic ties in different dimensions specifically in healthcare, education, agriculture and others. The relationship would get stronger and deeper in the future.

"Of course, the two countries will have discussions about key issues it will not always be easy, but their partnership is deep based on mutual respect," he noted.

Jigjiga undertaking 1.5 bln birr worth projects: City's Mayor

BY BETELHEM BEDLU

ADDIS ABABA - Over 1.5 billion Birr worth investment and infrastructure projects are being carried out in Jigjiga City of Somali state.

Speaking to the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), Jigjiga City's Mayor Eng. Ziyad Abdi said that the projects include investment, road, green development, as well as job creation.

Following the reform, the City has also been undertaking City Master plan and cadastral works. And, the 34 kilometer asphalt road that is currently under construction will be gone operational in this budget year, he said.

Emphasizing the revival of the investment sector due to the city's relative peace, he said that around 18 investors with over 600 million Birr capital are in the process to engage in service and trade sectors.

Utmost efforts are being exerted so as to make the city best investment center, he said, highlighting the active



trade movement in the city.

Special attention has been given to green development activities by the city as well as the community to make the city convenient and best destination, as to him.

The Mayor mentioned the ongoing activities that are carried out to tackle unemployment in the city adding that

several sheds are being built which will be distributed to the youth sooner than later.

Though most of the projects are carried out under federal, states and city administrations level, he called on the society to make their contribution towards the infrastructure development activities.

News

Dine for the Nation projects transform tourism sector: gov't officials

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA- Tourism destination expansion projects that have been constructed under *Dine for Ethiopia* initiative are laying foundation for the transformation of the tourism sector, said senior government officials.

Following the inauguration of the second *Dine for Ethiopia* project, Chebera Churchura Elephant Paw Lodge, senior government officials and ministers commented that these projects are transforming Ethiopia's tourism through diversifying destinations.

Commenting on the projects, House of People's Representative (HoPR) Speaker Tadesse Chafa told local media that *Dine for Ethiopia* projects like Chebera Churchura Elephant Paw Lodge are amplifying the beauty of natural tourism destinations and encouraging

tourists to have a long but comfortable time.

Economically, the construction of such projects will turn up local communities' income as it comes up with alternative source of earnings. "It also teaches us how much our resources are worthy and potentially important," he said.

Tourism State Minister Sileshi Girma also said that Projects under *Dine for the Nation* are being constructed to accommodate a large number of tourists.

All projects are ecofriendly and expected to attract larger number of tourists more than the usual thereby promote the overall development including job creation, he indicated.

Wonchi Dendi Lodge which is a part of the *Dine for the Nation* will be also inaugurated soon, according to the Project Facilitator, Daba Jinfiesa.

The construction of Wonchi Dendi Ecotourism

project which incorporates roads and tracks, sport and entertainment centers, cafeterias, restaurants, halls, bed rooms and other international standard lodge facilities has already been completed, Daba said.

He also invited tourists to enjoy the lodge service as of December 30.

The foundation of *Dine for the Nation* projects namely, Gorgora, Koysha, and Wonchi projects was laid in 2020 by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD).

On December 23, 2023, the Prime Minister had inaugurated the Elephant Paw Lodge which built inside the Chebera Churchura Park, located in South-West Ethiopia State. Several species of animals like elephants, lions, buffalos, leopards, and greater kudus are amongst dominant animals live in the park, it was stated.

Star rated ...

conferences would have a significance importance in bolstering the tourism industry in general and the development of the hotel industry in particular.

The head further remarked that as the sessions are graced with diverse senior personalities, it has an immense role to promote the country's hospitality and hotels status.

As to Ayehu, Skylight has made the necessary preparations to offer full-fledged services to the guests who are going to come to attend the meeting.

Recommending for the betterment of other hotels, the head emphasized that Skylight is made itself ready with the Ethiopian culture and other unique packages.

Seconding the above thought, the Grand Palace Hotel Representative Elias Mulugeta on his part stated that the events to be held here in the capital would create an opportunity to identify their capacity and further improvement.

Moreover, the event would also be an impetus to promote the country's tourism potentials, he remarked.

Hilton Addis Hotel sales department Director Daniel Gelaw said the hotel has been long preparing to host guests ranging from renewing rooms and the external part of the hotel.

The hotel has been undertaking activities targeting at introducing Ethiopia well and making its cultures, norms, and other crucial societal and cultural manifestations rife, he added.

"Quest for..."

the principle of international trade.

A joint workshop on the strategic interest of Ethiopia on the Red Sea and organized by Samara, Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa, Jigjiga and Mekelle universities was recently taken place in the Afar state's capital Samara.

Presenting his perspective on port and economy to Ethiopia's strategic interest, the economist said that logistics and product supply chain have become instrumental in modern global trade activities.

A port is key instrument in accelerating global trade and it enables countries to participate in international trade and ensure their economic growth, he elaborated.

According to the economist, among the trade barriers Africans face is sea port. Some 80 percent of the world's trade pass through ports.

The economist stressed that maritime transport has remained one of the major bottlenecks for African countries to facilitate their trade activities.

Africa, a continent with 17.8 percent of the world population, has only two percent the global trade share.

Atnafu pointed out that the annual GDP of landlocked countries is lower by 31 percent when compared with countries that have coastal access. Their inflation rate is also bigger by 26 percent.

Therefore, building standard port and producing quality produces as well as developing surroundings is vital in order to become competitive in trade and export-import.

He further said that global trade and investment cannot be met without regional integration.

Given the global context, Ethiopia's quest for sea port and alternative port is not a luxury but morally and legally correct.

DBU joining hands with institutions on human capital dev't

• Signs MoU with 14 organizations

BY TSEGAYE TILAHUN

ADDIS ABABA – DebreBerhan University (DBU) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with 14 private and public institutions to cooperate in human resource development and technology transfer.

During the signing ceremony, the DBU President Nigus Tadesse (PhD) said that the university has established a university-industry linkage advisory council and signed MoU with 14 private and public institutions including industries and business companies to expand knowledge and technology.

He noted that establishing the platform would contribute to integrate with industries on the areas of externship, staff exchange, research, technology transfer and others since producing qualified manpower requires the collaboration of all stakeholders.

In doing so, the President expressed that higher education sector would put milestone to have skilled entrepreneurs and others.

Organizations have a share to produce competent, skilled and qualified manpower working in collaboration with higher



Photo: Gebabo Gebre

education institutions, he said, adding that creating linkage with industries has a special benefit for both sides.

For his part, Armauer Hansen Research Institute Director-General Prof. Afework Kassu stated that the country has been trying to exploit science and technology sector to realize economic transformation for several years.

The current wide social and economic growth basic gap is the reflection of the poor attention given to education sector, science and technology and other important sectors, he added.

The DBU has been categorized under university of applied sciences aiming to ensure student efficiency, it was learnt.

Ministry expects increased tourist...

As to him, MoT has held discussion with the Ethiopian Airlines to better facilitate flight in these seasons.

To this end, they have reached to an agreement to have adequate flight frequency to the tourist sites in Lalibela and Gondar, he indicated.

Besides tourist information center, MoT is also closely working with Hotels and tour operators. Similarly, efforts are put to make outbound tour operators attract more international tourist to the country, Seleshi added.

The State Minister further said that his ministry is joining forces with relevant stakeholders such as Foreign Affairs Ministry to make the 37th AU summit which will be held after the holiday seasons more meaningful to the tourism sector.

Apart from offering packages to showcases the contribution of Ethiopia for the establishment of the African Union, more activities are being carried out to shift the tourism, which has been highly dominated by Europe and North America, to African market, according to the State Minister.

To this effect, he said, due attention has been given to building community lodge, making tourist information centers available, allowing hotel construction materials and equipment to enter duty free, among others.

Mentioning that tourist destination in Tigray State has become open to tourists, he indicated that SNNP, East, Addis Ababa and its surroundings have registered promising tourist movements especially in conference tourism.

On the other hand, he highlighted the significant contribution of the three heritages

that have been recently inscribed under UNESCO's list in attracting more tourists to the nation.

"Enlisting such heritages as an outstanding universal value would minimize nation promotion effort and in return could attract more local and international tourists. Thus, the media institution need to play a significant role in building nation's positive image," he underscored.

Nonetheless, private sectors as well as the entire community need to exert their share in promoting and enhancing the tourism sector across the country, Seleshi urged.

States' also need to play their active role in facilitating to attract private sector engage in investment. Moreover, they should preserve tourism resources be it inscribed or yet to be recognized heritages, he added.

Opinion

Exploiting opportunities through strengthening ties with partners

BY ABEBE WOLDEGIORGIS

Ethiopia is endowed with various natural resources which can elevate its economic status and the living conditions of citizens if they are fully exploited. It is also the second populous country in the continent with more than 120 million people in which 70% of it is below the age of 30 which can supply labor force to the economy.

It has vast arable land which can boost and transform agricultural production. The surface and underground waters also have high potential for the development of renewable energy and increase agricultural production through irrigation system and accelerate the nation's aspiration for ensuring food security. The mining resource also can enhance the nation's foreign currency earning capacity. However, the aforementioned resources are not fully explored and exploited due to various reasons and among others; lack of sufficient technology, finance and skilled labor force. As a result, the nation has remained as pauperized in the world.

The nation also faces various challenges which hamper the ambition to poverty reduction and attaining economic growth. The macroeconomic imbalance which is manifested by inflation, poverty, unemployment, poor debt service, shortage of hard currency, illicit trade, contraband, declining of the export trade performance and power interruption needs speedy remedial actions.

The government, in its 10 years perspective economic plan introduced in 2019, indicated that to improve the macroeconomic imbalance, it would take various measures. Among others; to enhance the nation's foreign currency earning capacity, it has taken boosting export through diversifying products and increasing volume as a way out mechanism.

It also strived to create enabling environment to the Ethiopian Diaspora to send the remittance through formal banking channel and to that end it allowed them to open bank account and deposit their hard currency in National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) and to use it based on the directive given by the bank. It also introduced new laws to attract foreign investment and to engage in the manufacturing sector and provided land and working places to investors in the industrial parks, provided tax holidays to incentivize them, availed one stop shot banking services in the industry parks. It also supplied electric and internet services in average price.

Investors engaged in textile and garment obtained facilities from the government to export their products to the foreign markets so that they can gain hard currency. Enabling environment also created to them to obtain

inputs for their production locally which again created linkage between agriculture and industry. The other sub sector of the manufacturing which attracted both foreign and local investors is the production of leather and leather products. The sector obtains inputs from local sources and export products. Both sub sectors created job opportunity for tens of thousands. Exporting live animals to the Middle East supports the nation's foreign currency earnings.

Mining is also one of the sectors which attract foreign investors and boost export. Gold, opal and tantalum play crucial role in this regard. It is also proved that the nation has petroleum and natural gas reserve in the Somali region but needs more investment and technology and if the projects undergoing there are finalized and become operational, they can shore up the nation's foreign currency crunch.

The other sector which is expected to boost the nation's foreign currency earning capacity is energy. About 80% of its energy source is derived from hydropower and currently the nation started supplying electric power to the neighboring countries such as Sudan and Djibouti and could able to earn handsome amount of currency. The stretching of electric line to Kenya is completed and sooner exporting power will be started and the nation will gain additional income.

It is understood that Ethiopia annually earns 3 billion Dollars from export but it imports goods worth of 18 billion Dollars and this clearly indicates that how the nation is indulged in negative trade balance. Hence, to narrow the gap, exerting more effort is essential. Side by side with boosting export, the government assumed import substitution as a way out in saving the nation's hard currency so that it is capable to enhance the reserve. As mentioned above, Ethiopia's economy is agrarian yet it imports agricultural products such as grains, cooking oil and other products which can be substituted by local products and it is possible to save the hard currency that has been allocated for the importation.

Currently, due to various reasons, more products such as live animals, coffee, oil seeds, cereals, vegetables and fruits are illegally exported to the neighboring countries. As a result, the nation annually loses billions of Dollars; but, had the products been exported in the legal channel, the nation would have gained a lot. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, up to 10 thousand cattle are illegally exported to the neighboring countries every week and for the poor country such as Ethiopia, such evil act is not tolerable. What is sad is that the neighboring countries re-export Ethiopia's cattle to the third country and boost their hard currency income generation.

Therefore, to reverse the situation, the law enforcing bodies should take strong measures against the culprits.

The other approach the government step up to garner foreign currency is to make dialogue with international financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It has tried to secure loan and rescheduling debt service through negotiation. In addition to these, it earns hard currency in the form of loan and grant from partners through bilateral relation.

According to the recent report of government, Ethiopia is owed 28 billion Dollars from the western partners and China and the debt to the poor country such as Ethiopia is unbearable. Currently, the nation annually allocates two billion Dollars for debt services. So far, it made dialogue with the western partners that the debt payment to be rescheduled but on their part they put their own preconditions that should be fulfilled by Ethiopia to be part of the rescheduling program. Some of the criteria's are devaluation of the local currency against Dollar which aggravates inflation. Among the requirements, apart from devaluation of Birr against Dollar, include privatizing public profit making enterprises such as Ethio-telecom, Ethiopian Air Lines and Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. However, such requirements do not get acceptance by the government because they have their own negative repercussion on the economy.

Currently, one Dollar is exchanged by 54 Birr in the formal market in the banks but in the parallel market it is exchanged by 110 Birr and the widening gap between the formal market and the black market might push the government to accept the international financial institutions request at least to narrow the gap. Recently, some media outlets announced that the National Bank is ready to devalue the Birr against the Dollar but the NBE denounced it sooner.

On the other hand, the Ethiopian Economic Association recently announced that Ethiopia needs to reform its financial system to create vibrant financial markets comparable to member states in the BRICS. The study conducted by the Ethiopian Economics Association proved the argument.

The study titled: "Does Ethiopia Benefit from Joining the BRICS? Perceptions and Global Trends" was presented at the Ethiopian Economics Association last week. The association has employed a perception survey of some 233 economists as primary data on the expected costs and benefits of Ethiopia from this emerging bloc. The study stressed that the financial reform would allow Ethiopia to maximize its benefits from the BRICS membership.

It is remembered that Ethiopia was invited to join the emerging-market bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) at the end of August 2023.

Presenting the study, Ethiopian Economics Association Research and Policy Analysis Director Degye Goshu said that BRICS provides great opportunities in human resource development, information and technology development as well as development finance. But Ethiopia has to work with both the BRICS and western financial institutions like World Bank and IMF, he suggested.

According to him, Ethiopia does not compete with other member states in terms of financial institutions, financial market development and other things. However, the country will benefit from the bloc (BRICS) if it improves on these. It is especially imperative to make banks autonomous.

The director urged the nation to focus on financial policy, and bank governance reforms that will allow it to reach the level that many countries have reached.

More importantly, Ethiopia should strengthen its capacity for effective operation of financial markets, he added. "The country is required to create vibrant financial markets comparable to member states in the BRICS," the director stressed.

The study has given context on the ongoing global trends in the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and those factors pushed Ethiopia to join the BRICS bloc. NIEO is an economic movement proposed with the primary objectives of reforming the international financial institutions and redistribution of wealth between developed and developing countries.

The other aim of the New International Economic Order was to ensure sovereignty of developing nations and enhancing South-South cooperation. However, Degye believes that the New International Economic Order has not yet realized its primary objectives.

According to him, the governance gap between the developed and developing nations has been increased. For instance, voting power at the World Bank Group (WBG) and IMF is controlled by few countries. Out of 189 countries in WBG, 5 countries have 37% vote; whereas 162 countries have only 30% vote. This has resulted in income and export gaps between high income countries and least developed countries and the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows and outflows remain unchanged.

Editor's Note: The views entertained in this article do not necessarily reflect the stance of The Ethiopian Herald

Editorial

Diasporas' participation key for intended National Dialogue

Ethiopia has relentlessly been working on healing the long heaped societal wounds, grudges and rivalries with a view to bringing about meaningful change in all aspects. For a similar purpose, it has set up an independent national dialogue commission, which has been working to come up with better national consensus by conducting inclusive national consultations on very basic public matters. In so doing, it has helped all citizens, be they are at home or Ethiopians and foreigners of Ethiopian origin, to promote a culture of trust, spirit of firm fraternity and inclusive cooperation.

Of the myriads of activities it has been undertaking since its inception, the Commission has called on Ethiopians in the Diaspora to take advantage of this historic opportunity to actively participate in the national consultation, which is expected to play a vital role in bolstering peace, peaceful coexistence, amicable way of running activities at every nook and cranny of the nation.

The commission has been holding talks with Ethiopian Diasporas across the globe using zoom meeting. True, its call is a timely horn to get every citizen, especially the Diaspora, get alarmed to fully engage in this timely and indispensable move.

Unequivocally, the Diaspora would play a vital role in supporting the effort of the commission towards creating a stable country accommodating all the interests of its citizens. The Diaspora can particularly share the experiences of different countries that successfully passed through similar challenges, and support the effort to build a better political culture, improve cohesion and soothe incongruity.

Since Ethiopia has rich values in dialogue and consultation, it has to capitalize on those values via organizing platforms for close discussion and honest dialogs so as to level the gaps calculatingly or unknowingly created among/between nations and nationalities. True, creating a fertile ground for the relationship between the National Dialogue Commission and the Diaspora is of paramount importance in garnering real public trust and national stability. It has been carrying out various activities with collaboration of various stakeholders at federal and regional levels in the process of realizing the national mission.

Needless to state, national dialogues are negotiating mechanisms intended to expand participation in political transitions beyond the political privileged. Unquestionably, the goal of the dialogue would be to build enough trust and to design the process through which the country might resolve some of its most contentious evils. It would also be instrumental in building a common understanding of different societal phenomena, challenges and opportunities through the experiences gained from local or Diaspora participants.

Dialogues are being held on topics on which more in-depth understanding is needed in Ethiopia and which concern a large number of citizens at the national level. The topic of the dialogue and its handling must not exclude any particular group of people as the broader understanding of the subject must also benefit the public management. In this way, the dialogue can also be used to influence the development of society, promote the prosperity of the country.

This national dialogue is supposed to be inclusive, broad, and participatory authorized negotiation platform aiming at resolving deep-rooted political crises and conflicts, and lead the nation into political transition. Hence, it has to typically involve principal national elites, including the government and armed or unarmed opposition parties, and other concerned bodies. Even the participation of the representatives of civil society, women, youths, business, and religious or traditional actors would make it much more meaningful.

As Ethiopia has now badly required a comprehensive, open and participatory negotiation platform like this, the international community needs to help it make its national dialog fruitful, and the Diaspora should also move in unison with the commission concerned, too.

Opinion

Joining efforts can give diplomatic leverage

BY GIRMACHEW GASHAW

In this globalized world where a group of countries are now working together, a single country can hardly survive by closing its door. That is the primary reason for many countries to form and assemble under the umbrellas of diverse groups such as Group 7 and Group 20, which hold different political, economic, and social interests.

The 'Group of Seven' (G7) and the 'Group of Twenty' (G20) are informal forums bringing together the heads of state and government of the world's leading industrial countries.

When we come to the Africa region, where poverty is rampant, there are regional economic communities (RECs), or regional groupings of African states, which are the pillars of the AU. All were formed prior to the launch of the AU, have developed individually, and have differing roles and structures.

As we all know, the purpose of the RECs is to facilitate regional economic integration between members of the individual regions and through the wider African Economic Community (AEC), which was established under the Abuja Treaty (1991). This treaty, which has been in operation since 1994, ultimately seeks to create an African Common Market using the RECs as building blocks. Thus, regional integration helps countries overcome divisions that impede the flow of goods, services, capital, people, and ideas.

Though the creation of these teams has made an immense contribution to their respective regions, the way in which they are established may not necessarily allow them to loom over one another. If one or two groups have an interest in toiling together, they cannot do so in the absence of the Africa Union. In short, they can only collaborate through the will of the AU.

Issues related to Nile waters and the projects that are going on in connection with them require the consent of all riparian countries. If that is so, I couldn't find an immediate response to my question: why have countries remained for so long without establishing an international group?

Though Nile waters and projects that are carried out in the river are burning issues that need more consultation from the riparian countries, so far, these countries have not formed such an international team in order to redress the water dispute or disagreements.

Some scholars who spend much of their time studying the case of Nile waters and serving as members of the GERD technical committee, including Addis Ababa University Lecturer Professor

Yakob Arsano, suggested that the east and northern countries need permanent mutual cooperation and security bondage on fair access to the sea and unleashing their prevailing potential.

Presenting his thoughts under the thematic area of "Littorals and Riparians in Northeastern Africa: Geopolitical Cooperation and Regional Security" at the joint workshop today, Yakob said that sharing the water within the region enhances regional development and security.

Ethiopia's desire to have access to the sea is also another important issue that should be resolved based on the principle of give and take as well as on shared interests with neighboring countries. In whatever way, the desire of Ethiopia would be fulfilled if and only if the IGAD could discharge its responsibilities.

Likewise, the North Easter African countries need to foster shared aspiration and self-reliance, strengthen regional organizations such as IGAD and COMESA, establish task forces on littoral and riparian issues, engage in reactivated negotiations, and boost mechanisms of peace and security.

Africa is known for its untapped resources. However, due to disagreement and nonalignment, its resource became a curse. When a given country raises a certain development agenda, others search for a stabbing block to break off the project instead of coming up with a business idea that ensures the benefit of all countries. Observing the loophole or crake created among African countries, some western countries are using it as a means to promote conflict.

However, transforming regional geopolitical relations, ensuring equitable and reasonable utilization of regional resources, protecting and conserving shared water resources, and enhancing economic cooperation are among the promising opportunities in the region.

The countries of north-eastern Africa are destined to stay together. Cooperation on shared resources can be the engine of prosperity, sustainable peace, and security. Furthermore, cooperation among riparian and littoral nations should be guided by principles of mutual trust, empathy, and equitable and reasonable utilization of littoral and riparian resources.

Now is the time that the countries in North East Africa should embark on a new milestone of regional cooperation on shared endowments. Hence, in the coming New Year, 2024, the north and eastern African countries are expected to draw near one another and come up with a new outlook for establishing a group that works for the interests of all.



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Editor's Note: The views entertained in this article do not necessarily reflect the stance of The Ethiopian Herald

Business & Economy

Attention for the harvest season

BY BACHA ZEWDIE

For Ethiopia, where agriculture is the basis of its economy, this is the main harvest season. More recently, summer irrigated wheat cultivation has begun. This season will be given a great place in the effort to increase the agricultural production and productivity.

It is known that extensive preparations have been made for the 2023 production season as a country in an effort to increase the production and productivity of the agricultural sector. For this reason, although there have been complaints about the supply of fertilizers in some regions, the government has subsidized 21 billion Birr for the purchase of fertilizers for the production season.

During the harvest season alone, 17.5 million hectares of land was covered with seeds, and the crop harvesting has begun earlier. The information received from the Ministry of Agriculture indicates that the work has been intensified. In the current main harvest season, it is expected to fulfill 101% of the plan via harvesting crops from the abovementioned land seeded in the country.

Regarding the crop harvesting, Kebede Lakew, Executive Director of Public Relations and Communication of the Ministry of Agriculture, told Ethiopian Press Agency that the work of early harvesting of crops, particularly in the lowlands and highlands, has continued to be strengthened. Thus, until the first week of December, the regions have harvested 9.6 hectares with traditional harvest method and over 844, 922 hectares with combiner, for a total of 10.8 million hectares of land.

When the product is harvested in a traditional way, it will be stored and threshed later on. If it is with a combiner, it will be threshed immediately. Out of the crops harvested from 10.5 million hectares of land that of from 4.1 million hectares has been threshed. From this, 114,239,964 quintals of production was obtained. Kebede said that the work of harvesting the crops has continued, but most of the crops harvested in the traditional way have not yet been threshed; it is still piled up.

As to him, there are some immature crops; there may be unseasonal rain; based on the weather forecast data provided by the National Meteorology Institute, it is recommended that the farmers, the management, the general public, and the development station workers have to strengthen the work of harvesting and putting in the barns and the work is underway accordingly.

Kebede explained that regarding preventing harms occurred from pests, unseasonal rains, grasshoppers, and other pests; recommendations have been given to the farmers and agricultural experts before the damage occurs. He mentioned that the weather is sunny, dry and windy and the farmers are doing well in harvesting the crops.



Mechanized harvesting protects loss of crops

Harvesting work is being done intensively in the regions. Amhara Region Agricultural Office has announced that the work of collecting crops in the region has continued. Amsalu Gobaw, Head of Public Relations of the Regional Agriculture Bureau, mentioned that 5.1 million hectares of land was covered with crops in the 2023 harvest season, out of which 160 million quintals are planned to be harvested.

As it is the harvest season, 3.5 million hectares of crops have been harvested in the region so far. This will be about 68% of the expected harvest. The product harvesting process is done in two ways; one is the traditional, and the second is the way the product is harvested using modern technology.

The Bureau Head mentioned that it is the traditional way that the farmers cooperate with each other to harvest the produce by their own efforts. For the harvesting process carried out by the modern way by using a combine harvester, he explained that the region has deployed 29 combine machines and is doing a lot of work.

Amsalu mentioned that these modern product harvesting machines are doing extensive work, especially in East Gojam, West Gojam and North Shewa areas. He stated that the produce of 7,200 hectares of land in the region was collected by combine harvesters.

As to him, the region has not gone through harvesting the produce it cultivated during the harvest season as planned. The other will be collected at the rate of growth of the product. Next, there will be harvest until the end of January and beginning of February. Various crops including pulses are harvested during this season.

The Bureau Head further said that the farmers are coordinating all their capabilities and working on harvesting the crops. Therefore, the regional agriculture office announced that it is providing the farmers various support as much as their capacity allows. The farmers have continued to strengthen their agricultural work despite the current security situation in the region, he said.

As per the explanation of Amsalu, the region has been doing various activities to achieve better results in organizing and coordinating the farmers and using technology. For this, the office is providing support using several strategies. The agricultural experts in every area are supporting the farmers by reaching out to the farmers in the areas where there is no security problem in the region.

Various agricultural information is being made available to the farmers through the media. As agriculture is a year-round activity, appropriate information is being made available to the farmers by connecting it with the agricultural calendar in a timely manner regarding activities such as crop harvesting, irrigation, taking care of and monitoring the seedlings so that they are not damaged or uprooted.

Recalling that in the past, various supports were given in terms of using new technologies that can support and improve the agricultural work; he said that this support has recently decreased compared to last year due to the security problem in the region. He added that in the past, they used combines from the Oromia region to work in coordination with other neighboring zones, but currently, such cooperation has decreased. Unseasonal rains and crops' consuming birds had also occurred in the region so that prevention work has also been strengthened. The office has done everything it should have done, he said.

"According to the Agriculture Bureau, it is working to achieve the plan that says that the agricultural work should not stop. Whatever happens, agriculture is like the work of the Red Cross. Just as the Red Cross saves a person who is about to die and has an accident, the work of agriculture as a food producer does not stop." He announced that it is being done with the belief that it should continue.

As to Amsalu, identifying what the farmers want in terms of mechanization; various machines will be provided based on the needs of the farmers. Whether it comes from Oromia, South, or Benishangul Gumuz and

if there are favorable conditions, it will be alright.

Amsalu pointed out that after the invasion of birds and locust swarm, an independent expert group has been set up and information is being collected regarding the amount of damage caused by the unseasonal rain and the birds' flock and locust swarm. Currently, it is not possible to say about the amount of damage caused by the birds or the locust swarm.

Amsalu said that the Agriculture Bureau has an emergency communication plan to reduce such incidents. For example, there is an independent plan to be prepared in case of locusts, floods, and droughts. On top of that, he said, the public relations are consistent and provide information that can keep the society from getting confused.

In relation to the loss of crops, Amsalu said that most of crops produced by the farmers under harsh situations of mud and cold, rain and sunshine are wasted. According to studies, 33 percent of the crops produced by the farmers are wasted. In particular, a grain of cane crop is cut and falls in the opening parts of the ground. Besides, it is also wasted when it is threshed by cattle. So everyone should work together to reduce this waste. It is necessary to harvest and market the crop carefully, without waste.

Amsalu stressed that if the products and wealth obtained through hard work cannot be used properly, neither the farmers nor the urban dwellers will benefit. Therefore, the media should explain and inform the farmers about the economic benefit of preventing production loss.

He mentioned that Amara region has very large rivers that flow throughout the year, and announced that the farmers should use these underground and surface waters to replace the production they may lose and produce more than that. It is appropriate and necessary to do this important, vital and unstoppable agricultural work in cooperation and coordination.

In the Sphere of Diplomacy

An epitome of comradeship

BY STAFF REPORTER

Ethiopia and Djibouti, which are located in the turbulent yet strategically important Horn of Africa, share deep sense of comradeship. The cordial friendship may be seen as the epitome of mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

The two neighboring nations have persevered all-weather partnership in spite of all regional odds. The collaboration can serve as a valuable model of instance for Africa and beyond as the two neighboring nations continue to enjoy unbreakable bond to date.

The historic ties that date back to 1984 have grown to be stronger over time. Linked by electricity networks and other services, Addis Ababa and Djibouti have seen a more optimistic phase of collaboration, albeit regional dynamism. It is also not overstated to say that the partnership is regarded as one of the most solid and seamless ones, significantly enhancing the safety and tranquility of the region, plagued by violence.

The two countries have been able to enhance their bilateral collaboration in a number of areas, and the unbreakable bond has persisted over time and is only getting momentum. Ethiopia sends fresh fruits and water to Djibouti, while the former is mostly dependent on the latter for its imports and exports.

Ethiopians and Djiboutians are bound together by geography as well as shared cultural practices, linguistic traits, and a common destiny. The collaboration in infrastructure connectivity grew stronger over time.

Both nations' socioeconomic development is supported by the longstanding people to people partnership. In addition to the shared opportunities, both countries deal with similar threats. A few to name are the growing militarization, piracy, terrorism, and illegal arms and human trafficking. To address these issues, the two countries have signed a number of accords and have been working together. The countries resolve to fight common threats was evident in their battle against the terrorist organization Al-Shabab. The friendly relationship has also been sustained by the leaders of both nations' unwavering stance in elevating close bond.

In order to achieve mutual benefits, the two nations have been collaborating on shared projects including ports, water, highways, railroads, electricity, and other crucial services. Accompanied by mutual trust, the countries are experiencing encouraging collaboration in infrastructure, trade, politics, and economics.

Regretfully and with shame, there have been many who have attempted to misconstrue the Prime Minister's remarks about the Red Sea. These groups have been



Ethiopians and Djiboutians are bound together by geography as well as shared cultural practices, linguistic traits, and a common destiny. The collaboration in infrastructure connectivity grew stronger over time

spreading misleading information, alleging that Ethiopia's ambitions in the Red Sea make it a threat to its neighbors. This slanderous allegation and disinformation campaign cannot ruin the amicable ties between the two nations.

Ethiopia has stated unequivocally that it does not intend to use force to protect its interests in the Red Sea. Furthermore, the nation's proposition merely supports a compromise. Ethiopia firmly believes that utilizing the Red Sea in a win-win manner will help the entire area and open the door for regional development. It is important to remember that the growing relationship won't be harmed by foolish propaganda or bad deeds in this regard. And, last week both nations agreed to cement bilateral cooperation.

The president of the Djibouti National Assembly, Dileita Mohamed Dileita, stated that Ethiopia and Djibouti must forge a solid bilateral partnership in order to further guarantee peace and regional integration.

Dileita Mohamed has addressed the House of People's Representatives last week. According to him, the foundation of Ethiopia and Djibouti's relationship is people-to-people links and the cooperative philosophy. Building strong people-to-people ties between the two nations are essential to establishing robust cooperation, ENA reported.

Dileita Mohamed Dileita said that the purpose of his visit is to deepen the bilateral ties between the two nations in a number of areas.

He stated that sports development is also crucial and that we must work in this area. He also mentioned that we have launched a number of initiatives in this area that would foster constructive bilateral relations between the citizens of the two nations.

The President of the Djibouti National Assembly emphasized that the countries' continuous cooperation in a number of areas has to be expedited.

He clarified that other African nations might look to the infrastructure development between the two countries

in terms of energy connections, water supplies, railroad lines, and fiber optic projects. Among the many development schemes initiated by the leaders of the two countries, green development is the driving force. This will be of great importance to increase forest development and prevent desertification.

Better movement of the people among the countries is vital, he said, citing the fruitful consultations held to strengthen people-to-people relations. This is the main purpose of my visit, the president said, adding it is to strengthen cooperation.

We understand that Ethiopia is a strong country. It has a population of more than 120 million. That is why the two countries have to work together, he stressed.

"The challenges we are facing are same, our values are same. Our desire for peace and prosperity is the same. The challenges we are facing are the same.

The responsibilities on our shoulders are the same. The problems faced in Ethiopia are not different from ours. Any event that takes place in the world affects our two countries. This is the same issue we have seen during COVID.

Hence, we must exert efforts to address these challenges together and overcome them."

Djibouti and Ethiopia are trade partners based on mutual benefits and are also the main investors for one another, he said, adding, "Djibouti is a country with a developing economy. It is our willingness and desire to strengthen this relationship. That is why we need strong and mutually beneficial economic ties."

He underlined the need to increase the historical relations of the friendly peoples of the two countries by taking parliament to parliament relations to a higher level.

The president stressed that members of parliament should work hard to further enhance the strong diplomatic, economic and social ties between the countries.

He commended Ethiopia's efforts to establish continental organizations and Africans to be economically connected, as well as to create integration among neighboring countries based on mutual benefit.

Dileita Mohamed Dileita also said Ethiopia and Djibouti will work to strengthen their cooperation through technology and infrastructure.

A delegation led by Djibouti National Assembly President, Dileita Mohamed Dileita is in Addis Ababa for an official working visit to Ethiopia.

The delegation held bilateral discussions with government officials and visited various development projects in Addis Ababa.

Law & Politics

Ethiopia's access to sea port is a benefit to the entire region

BY FITSUM GETACHEW

In recent weeks there have been lots of talks and discussions on how Ethiopia could potentially have access to a port along the Red Sea in a legal, diplomatic and negotiated manner with its neighbors. With only sixty kilometers from the sea it is difficult to explain how on earth a country of more than 120 million people could be deprived of access to the sea which would be extremely important to sustain its economic growth trajectory and even benefit indirectly its neighbors and the subregion as a whole. It is clear that relying entirely on the best wishes of others that grant her access to the sea can hardly suffice for a country that is even by the estimates of the IMF one of the fastest growing economies in Africa.

The bottom line is that Ethiopia needs an independent and lawful access to the sea and such arrangement is not impossible in a world that is more and more interdependent and interconnected with one another and with obvious mutual benefits. Many argue that it only takes some good faith and vision to realize such a possibility.

The issue of access to sea was launched a few weeks ago by the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) who made a presentation to the nation about the present situation and the implications that could follow in the not too distant future. The immediate reactions have been mixed depending on what kind of political views one may have. Be that as it may, Ethiopia according to the premier cannot afford to sit idle and not raise this issue seeing where the situation of status quo could lead.

One does not need to be exceptionally farsighted to see what sort of situation is developing in a country such as Ethiopia is found currently and look at its relations with its neighbours when it comes to the issue of access to a port. It should be recalled that Ethiopia had abundant access to the sea for generations and only recent political and historical mutations, some say errors, deprived it of such a bounty. But all the same many believe that this situation could be remedied with sustained diplomatic and political efforts, with negotiations based on logic, justice and compromise. There are many instances of negotiations and successes between landlocked countries and others which have access to sea in the vicinity.

However, there are people who tried to misinterpret this suggestion of the premier as a covert call for aggression against the countries that share common boundaries with Ethiopia. But the premier has immediately made it unequivocally clear that his government has no intention whatsoever of pulling the trigger against

its dear neighbours whom he refers to as brothers and sisters. There are of course political groups which are not necessarily friendly with Ethiopia who have tried to misinterpret this idea of the premier as once again 'beating the drums of war' or Ethiopia trying to flex its military muscles against its neighbors.

The premier's explanations are clear but those who have their own political agenda have continued to try and attach to them 'a call for war' or an attempt to have a right to the sea using military force. However, there is no indication of such intent in the words of the premier and he surely knows that it would only secure the condemnation of Ethiopia by the international community if there were such intentions in the mind of the premier. The grim reality is however that Ethiopia is one of the forty four landlocked countries of the world with the largest population and with a visible and easy possibility of securing access to sea when one realizes that it is very near to its border. The solution can be found in negotiations with its neighbours based on an exchange of mutual benefits. .

Given Ethiopia's location just adjacent to a long area bordering with the sea and given its excellent relations with its neighbors there is no reason why a deal cannot be reached based on mutual advantages. Experts say the countries of the Horn of Africa could constitute a big economic block if they can manage to pull together their resources and collaborate in a large and powerful economy rather than stand alone and individually without exploiting their full potential. Ethiopia has shown that it bothers for regional integration while constructing on its own the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile which can benefit countries in the subregion availing them readily with clean energy at cheap prices.

Ethiopia's population is composed mostly of youths who reach to constitute almost 70%. The economic potential is clear. The issue is that this population could double in about thirty years and the current economic growth may not suffice to address all their needs unless it expands with the use of access to a port that could expand its interactions with foreign markets. That is why Ethiopia needs access to sea so that it can expand the number of trading partners with its growing economy. Economists have determined that landlocked countries are limited in their trade exchanges and growth and such fate for a country such as Ethiopia could have immense repercussions not only to it but to its neighbours as well. It is as if its economy is strangled with the current state of affairs continuing for long without addressing it. The huge economic potential is frustrated by absence of a sea port that can facilitate trade with which ever country is willing

and ready to do so with Ethiopia.

We see a tangible population growth and the reality of economic growth also favoured by new sources of energy with the completion of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and that of the Koyisha Hydropower Project. At the same time tourist resorts and attractions are being constructed in several localities and this will further stimulate the expansion of tourism which naturally feeds to the growing economy reaching new heights. The recent additions to the UNESCO World Heritage List of certain localities in Ethiopia such as the Bale Mountains and festivals such as the Shewalid religious festival of Harar will certainly increment Ethiopia's reputation in the world as a fascinating tourist destination.

All these factors add up to further contribute to a growing economy raising the GDP of the nation to new highs. If Ethiopia is to expand its exports many of which are nationally produced items including agricultural products that are now growing, it will definitely need easy access to the sea without being conditioned by changing criteria and without having to sustain immense costs for usage of ports on which it has little control or need to travel very long distances to reach it. That is why in the long run this situation could be impossible to sustain without leading the country to an economic stagnation and crisis.

Such a country cannot afford to be suffocated from its natural growth as things stand today unless some sort of arrangement is made in terms of benefiting from an outlet to the sea. Some are tempted to saying that Djibouti is a reliable port and Ethiopia does use it for its access to the sea but it should not be forgotten that this has been a huge burden to the economy because the costs have been increasing and there are other costs that the economy is forced to sustain continuously. The impact on its economy is huge because the payments are made in foreign currency which is precious for a country such as Ethiopia not availing so much of it.

Djibouti is a country of brothers and sisters and Ethiopia's relations with it are the closest possible with a neighbor and the importance of this port to the economy of Ethiopia is admittedly crucial. Some mention Kenya, Sudan and even Somalia as alternative routes to the sea. However, it is clear that in the long run it is difficult to sustain the costs without too much sacrifice. The momentum of economic growth of the country is affected by these huge costs and its relations with outside markets are also forced to be restricted. Ethiopia's expansion in other words is circumvented by conditions on the ground and better solutions with better alternatives

must be sought in peaceful negotiations and diplomatic ways with both parties benefiting from an eventual deal.

A solution to this issue would be to the benefit of the countries that are willing to seal a deal with Ethiopia in a give and take arrangement instead of rejecting a priori every proposal as an attempt to breach the sovereignty of any nation. Ethiopia has repeatedly stated that it has no intention of violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any nation which would only result in its being isolated from the international community and be a subject of condemnation. Such move has never been part of Ethiopia's history nor will it be now as clearly stated by the prime minister. The truth is that whenever there is an economic crisis the first thing that happens is for the unemployed population to try and leave the country and migrate in search of better livelihood prospects. Illegal migration is one of the terrible issues many countries are suffering from today. Ethiopia does not want to be part of this problem but the solution.

Logically a big country such as Ethiopia with an enormous population definitely needs space to expand its economy to match such population pressure. One of the key elements in this equation is the existence of a free sea port that can facilitate its commercial relations with its trading partners all over the world. Ethiopia's export is bound to increase because it is bound to be industrialized and with its relatively cheap labour, the products to be exported are going to be attractive to importers. Now that it has joined the BRICS economic group Ethiopia is also destined to trade more at preferential terms with these economic giants.

At the same time, Ethiopia is also bound to exchange a lot of products with its neighbors and such exchange of trade is a benefit to all. There are things that these neighbours can export to Ethiopia and others which they import from it. Closer ties that call for more integration is the formula of the future because the current economic scenario of the world demands that smaller economies continue to integrate more among each other so that they can withstand better the pressures of the bigger economies who dictate the rules of the game transacting enormously.

Hence if an agreement could be fixed the risks of a future instability could be avoided or averted and the benefits would be to its neighbours as well beside it being an asset to regional peace and stability in the already volatile region of the Horn of Africa. Solutions are not impossible to figure out as long as there is good will and good faith and a vision to build a better regional block, a more integrated region enjoying common benefits.

Society

Irreplaceable socioeconomic worth of gender equality

BY MENGESHA AMARE

In a country where women have been denied equality, fair share out of the world of work and impartial treatment in all social, economic and even political aspects, it is hard to think of bringing about real development and change.

Keeping these and other related facts revolving around women and girls in mind, *The Ethiopian Herald* had a stay with Misrak Kebede, who earned her BA and MA degrees in sociology and gender studies respectively from Addis Ababa University, to grasp a piece of information about the significance of mainstreaming gender issues.

She said, “Gender equality embodies ideas, values, and identities, allocates labor between different tasks, activities, domains to determine the distribution of resources as well as assigns authority and decision making power towards balanced and semi-balanced state of affairs.”

This means that gender inequalities are multi-dimensional and cannot be reduced to some single and universally agreed set of priorities following the sole effort of a given nation and its people as the matter itself demands the combined effort of all at national, regional, continental and even global level.”

As to Misrak, gender relationships are not internally cohesive. They contain contradictions and imbalances, particularly when there have been changes in the wider socioeconomic environment. The same could be said of any set of policies that seeks to improve women’s access to resources. Some may be more strategic than others, but all have transformation potential as long as the change in question is a genuine expansion of women’s choices, rather than a token gesture of paternalist benevolence.

As to her, women’s access to education may improve their capacity to sign their names on a document, but unless it also provides them with the synthetic capacity and courage to question unjust practices, its potential for change will be limited. Women’s access to paid work would also give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, but if it is undertaken in conditions that erode their health and exploit their labor, its costs may outweigh its benefits. Women’s presence in the governance structures of society clearly carries the potential to change below the belt practices, but if the women in question are drawn from a narrow elite, if they have been invited rather than elected, and if they have no grassroots constituency to represent and answer to, their presence will be only a nominal one.

“Some 80 % of the population in Ethiopia resides in rural areas and women provide the majority of the agricultural labor. However, their contributions often go



largely unrecognized and their fathers or husbands often restrict access to resources and community participation. Worse even, as studies show, one in three women experience physical, emotional or sexual violence and the majority of women have experienced female genital mutilation,” she added.

She further said that although the primary school enrollment rate of girls in Ethiopia has climbed high over the last few years, the majority are unable to transition to secondary and tertiary school due to distance, some security concerns and other related socioeconomic challenges.

As girls grow older, academic participation becomes increasingly difficult as it takes time away from essential income generating activities. The number of undergraduate university female students who drop out in the first year is not cushy, too. At the same time, female leadership at the university level is extremely low. To tackle all these challenges and better support the continued education of the next generation of female Ethiopian leaders, the government has to focus on improving women participation in all aspects of life, Misrak opined.

“Women often face different and more basic economic constraints than men, including less access to credit and limited market access. To support women’s ability to create businesses and secure their own livelihoods, the country needs to encourage financing for female-owned businesses through various financial institutions,” she added.

She further elucidated that gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. A woman is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty as empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities and to improved

prospects for the next generation. Besides, Misrak said since women and girls are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence, ensuring equality in all circumstances is a timely measure to make a difference. The cognition of women to control their own fertility is also absolutely fundamental to their empowerment. When a woman is healthy, she can be more productive and is capable of passing a sound decision on limiting the number, timing and spacing of her children as well as making decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

In clear terms, and as the very principle stipulates down, she expound gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share every bit in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions.

A pettifogging aspect of upgrading gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on distinguishing and amending power imbalances and giving women more liberty to manage their own lives.

Misrak said, “Women empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined, but are socially determined, changeable as well as dynamic in their nature unless conservatively restricted among the society, with very limited degree.

Most importantly, political entities, social and legal institutions have to work to confidently guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in

employment and earning, and social and political participation, she said.

Even parents are expected to equally nurture their children of both genders. For instance, if parents view daughters as less likely to take paid work or earn market wages, they may be less inclined to invest in their education. Here, the very important point that needs to be well comprehended is that empowering women through education has to be prettily capitalized as education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the qualifying summons.

“It is a way of looking at how social norms and power structures impact the lives and opportunities available to different groups of men and women. Understanding that men and women, boys and girls, experience poverty differently and face different barriers in accessing services, economic resources and political opportunities help target interventions. However, gender roles and relationships are not fixed; they evolve based on circumstance,” Misrak added.

She further said if women, who account for half the nation’s working-age population, do not achieve their full economic potential; the economy of the country will suffer. Not only is gender inequality is a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge that has highly compromised the lives of all. Moreover, its prevailing aspect in education prevents progress in due course of overcoming poverty, underdevelopment and subsistence way of leading life.

Misrak exhorted her concern urging the government and the general society to move in unison if they would like to come up with a country with development and progress it deserves and a more peaceful and equitable nation. The potential sources of risk of internal conflict between/among citizens of the country at every corner have to get dried for good as they would exacerbate gender inequality.

International

Uganda takes the lion's share of FDI into region, creates 6,300 jobs

Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda attracted over \$13.3 billion worth of foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2022, helping them create thousands of new jobs.

The latest investment report by business advisory firm Ernst & Young shows that Uganda recorded a high of \$10.2 billion — the highest in East Africa — creating 6,300 jobs.

Investment inflows into Kenya increased by 117 percent year-on-year, bringing in \$2 billion in capital investment and generating 7,819 jobs, with most of the investment going into the business services, technology, and transportation and warehousing sectors.

In Tanzania, FDIs rose by 133 percent to reach pre-Covid-19 pandemic levels, with 21 projects worth \$1.3 billion and creating 4,566 jobs.

Key investments in Tanzania included those by Burundi-based Intracom, which is planning a \$250 million integrated cement plant in the Kigoma region to supply cement to the Lake Tanganyika region, featuring Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Kenya's Electricity Generating Company



(KenGen) is also looking to invest in two geothermal drilling projects in Tanzania.

UAE-based Masdar has also signed an agreement with Tanzania Electric Supply Company Ltd (Tanesco) for the development of renewable energy projects with a capacity

of two gigawatts (GW).

France was the top investor in the country with two massive investments in the oil and gas sector. The country also saw investments from Kenya in the consumer sector.

The East African

Nigeria: at least 16 people killed in an attack in the centre of the country

Gunmen killed at least 16 people Sunday (December 24) in an attack on a village in central Nigeria, a military official said.

"There was an uprising after the incident but the situation has been brought under control," Captain Oya James told AFP. The attack took place in the village of Mushu, in Plateau State, a region that has been plagued by religious and ethnic tensions for several years.

"We were sleeping at night when all of a sudden there were loud gunshots. We were scared because we weren't expecting any attacks," explained Markus Amorudu, a resident of the village.

"People hid but the attackers captured many of us, some were killed, others were wounded", he added.

The governor of the state, Caleb Mutfwang, condemned the attack, describing it as "barbaric, brutal and unjustified".

Security and military personnel were deployed after the attack to monitor the area and prevent public disorder.

"Proactive measures will be taken by the government to curb ongoing attacks on innocent citizens", said Gyang Bere, the governor's spokesman.

In Nigeria, people living in the north of the country have been forced to flee their homes.

Africanews.

Tunisia records low turnout for election of 2nd chamber of parliament

Tunisia's local elections on Sunday (December 24) faced significant voter disapproval as citizens largely rejected the initiative.

The elections, intended to establish a second parliamentary chamber, are seen by the opposition as another step in President Kais Saied's authoritative governance.

According to the Independent High Authority for Elections (Isie), a mere 11.66% of the 9 million eligible voters (out of a population of 12 million) participated in the polls.

President Saied, elected in October 2019, has consolidated all powers since July 25, 2021. Having amended the Constitution through a summer 2022 referendum, the new structure includes a two-chamber Parliament: the Assembly of People's Representatives (ARP) and a National Council of Regions and Districts.

The ARP, which has very limited powers, took office in the spring of 2023 after legislative elections were boycotted by the opposition and massively rejected by voters (11% turnout).

The investiture of the second chamber is scheduled for June 2024, at the end of a complex process of local ballots and draws.

The Council will decide on the state budget and regional development projects.

On Sunday, Tunisians were invited to elect more than 2,000 local councillors from around 7,000 candidates, according to the electoral authority Isie.



In addition to the 2,155 councillors elected (some of whom will be elected after a second round at the beginning of 2024), 279 people with disabilities will be drawn at random from a thousand candidates. Regional councillors will then be drawn by lot from among the local councillors, who will then vote among themselves to appoint district councillors.

At the top of the pyramid, the 77 members of the second chamber of parliament will be

chosen by votes from regional and district councillors.

Most polling stations in the centre of Tunis were open from 08:00 to 18:00 local time, with low turnout, AFP reported.

What are the people saying?

"I have never seen such a low turnout for elections held in Tunisia since 2011," the year that marked the start of the Arab Spring, the president of a polling station in Tunis

told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"I understand the people who are shunning these elections", Salah Habib, a man in his sixties who has just "voted to mark my presence", told AFP.

"I didn't understand anything about this election and I don't want to understand anything," said Nadia Majer, a 23-year-old student leaving a gym.

When will the results be announced?

The Isie will announce the preliminary results of the first round on 27 December. The second round is scheduled for February.

The opposition has called for a boycott of this "illegal" vote, which it claims was "imposed" by President Saied to complete his "authoritarian" process.

Since February, the authorities have imprisoned more than twenty opponents, including the leader of Ennahdha, Rached Ghannouchi, and the co-founder of the National Salvation Front - the main coalition of opponents - Jawhar Ben Mbarek, as well as former ministers and businessmen.

More than 260 prominent Tunisians have signed a nationwide petition opposing a "pointless" election, saying that those in power "continue to implement their political project imposed on Tunisians".

According to the signatories, the purpose of these elections is to "weaken local power, disperse it and turn it into another docile instrument in the hands of the executive".

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Planet Earth

Bench Sheko forest needs to be rescued from danger to join UNESCO list of world heritages

BY FIKADU BELAY

The South Western part of Ethiopia is well known for its dense, natural and indigenous forest resources. In addition, to their role in balancing the ecosystem, the forest can be harnessed for food, drinks, spices, medicinal and tourism purposes.

Yet, like many of the natural resources in the country, the forest in these areas are vulnerable to various causes of damage and need the necessary intervention to rescue them. Successful rehabilitation and conservation of the forestry will add their potential to be registered as world heritages by UNESCO further increasing their contribution for the economy of the country.

Ethiopia's forests play a vital role in supporting the environment, economy, and livelihoods of its people. In the southern regions of Ethiopia, particularly in places like Bench Sheko, forestry has been a significant focus due to the region's rich biodiversity and forest resources.

The region is home to various forest types, such as moist evergreen forests and dry woodlands. These forests provide invaluable ecosystem services such as water regulation, soil erosion prevention, and habitat for numerous plant and animal species. This forest plays a vital role in protecting watersheds and regulating water resources. The conservation and sustainable management of forests are crucial for maintaining water quality, reducing soil erosion, and ensuring a stable water supply for communities.

The forestry sector in Bench Sheko zone and surrounding areas plays a crucial role in the local economy, providing employment opportunities, timber resources, and non-timber forest products, and contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the region.

Goji Kaisa, Head of Natural Resources Forestry and Environmental Protection in the Bench Sheko Zone Agriculture Department, told *The Ethiopian Herald* that forestry covers 406,849 hectares of land in the Bench Sheko Zone, while natural forest covers approximately 221,000 hectares of land.

According to him, in this natural dense forest, about 108 associations are working to conserve and develop the forest. He also stated that these associations have generally provided jobs for about 13,000 individuals.

Studies show that the dense forest of the Bench Sheko zone has a variety of native flora. The forests of Bench Sheko are a source of valuable timber species like African mahogany, juniper, and various indigenous hardwoods, which are utilized for construction, furniture making, and other industries.

He mentioned that other communities in the area use trees that have fallen for a variety of woodworking activities. Moreover, the forests in Bench Sheko support the livelihoods of local communities through the collection of non-timber



forest products such as honey, medicinal plants, wild fruits, and mushrooms. These resources are often harvested sustainably and contribute to the income and food security of the communities living in and around the forested areas.

Each forest type supports a unique array of plant and animal species, contributing to the overall biodiversity of the region. This forest supports a diverse range of wildlife species, including mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians.

He said that numerous animals were using this dense forest as a place to live. He mentioned that there are other animals in the dense forest, such as lions, buffaloes, elephants, and an array of indigenous birds.

Furthermore, notable species found in the region include the Ethiopian wolf, Menelik's bushbuck, and various primates such as the black-and-white monkey. A protecting and managing forest habitat is essential for the conservation of these unique and often endangered species.

In addition to agroforestry, forest-farming systems are practiced in Bench Sheko zone and other southern regions of Ethiopia. These efforts involve the cultivation of various crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and spices, within or near forested areas. Forest-farming systems promote sustainable land use, biodiversity conservation, and the diversification of income sources for local communities.

According to him, the local community endeavors to ensure food security in addition to preserving the natural landscape by planting cash crops, coffee trees, and fruit items as part of the green legacy program.

He further stated that the forests of Bench Sheko Zone are rich in medicinal plants, which have been traditionally used by local communities for medicinal purposes. Traditional medicine plays a significant role in the healthcare practices of the region, and the sustainable utilization of medicinal plants is essential

for preserving cultural heritage and supporting traditional healthcare systems, he added.

Through the absorption and storage of carbon, it has also helped to mitigate climate change. Ethiopia has taken a leading role in global programs like Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), which offers financial incentives to countries in order to encourage environmentally friendly forest management and decrease deforestation.

He said, "In our zone, establishing forest user groups encourages communities to participate in benefit-sharing arrangements, decision-making processes, and the monitoring and preservation of forest resources."

Community-based forest management initiatives have been developed in Bench Sheko Zone to guarantee the active participation of local communities in the conservation and sustainable exploitation of the forest. To preserve and responsibly use the country's forests, the regional government has put in place a number of policies, plans, and initiatives. This includes initiatives to stop deforestation, promote afforestation and replanting, and involve nearby communities in the management and conservation of forests.

Addressing issues like deforestation, climate change, and unwise ways of using land requires cooperation between government agencies, community members, researchers, and foreign partners. To sustainably conserve Ethiopia's southern forests, it is essential that local communities, government officials, and other stakeholders continue to work together.

Additionally, the regional government has been trying to strengthen the capacity of forestry institutions, increase forest governance, and adopt sustainable forestry practices in partnership with international organizations and partners. This includes

campaigns to support agroforestry, restore degraded areas, and increase public understanding of the value of forests and biodiversity preservation.

For the benefit of both the present and the future generation, Ethiopia can guarantee the long-term resilience and safety of its forests in the southern areas, particularly Bench Sheko, by putting a high priority on sustainable forest management and conservation.

In order to register this dense forest with UNESCO, he further disclosed that the zonal authorities are engaged in various activities to get these natural forests under UNESCO's list of world heritage in collaboration with Mizan Tepi University and the state administration.

According to him, the overall balance of the natural environment is preserved by this dense forest, which also reduces the effects of climate change and the deterioration of the water and soil. In addition, the hot springs, waterfalls, and more caves inside can boost the tourism industry and provide income and jobs for the surrounding community.

Moreover, research institutions and organizations are conducting studies and monitoring programs to better understand the ecological processes, biodiversity, and ecosystem services provided by the forests of Bench Sheko. This research helps inform conservation strategies, improve forest management practices, and guide policy decisions related to forestry and environmental protection.

Ethiopia is striving to preserve and use its forests in a way that balances the requirements of the environment, society, and the economy by embracing an integrated approach to forestry that combines conservation, sustainable management, and community involvement. Bench Sheko's forests are still valuable resources that benefit the local residents, economy, and ecology of the area in many ways.