



# The Ethiopian Herald

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## Ethiopia, Switzerland seek to lift ties to new stage

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA-Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Demeke Mekonnen held yesterday discussion with Foreign Affairs of Switzerland Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis.

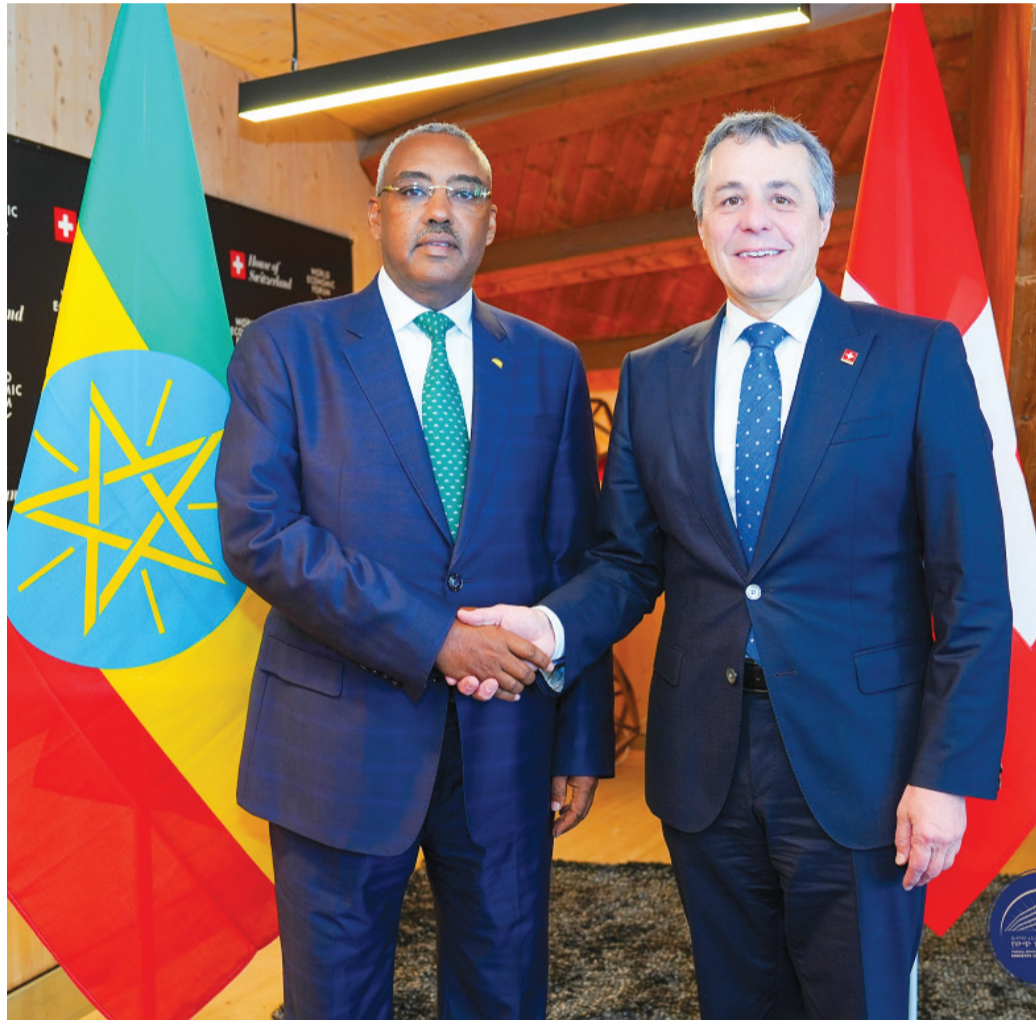
On the occasion, Demeke stressed that it is high time to strengthen the bilateral ties between the two countries in terms of economic and political fields.

The deputy prime minister and foreign minister briefed the councillor how the adoption of the Homegrown Economic Policy of Ethiopia created enormous prospects for foreign investors, citing Switzerland as one of Ethiopia's coffee export markets.

As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Switzerland has been essential in the multilateral arena, according to Demeke who expressed Ethiopia's expectations that Switzerland would maintain its impartial stance on international issues brought before the council.

Federal Councillor for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis announced that

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### Military attachés receive recognition for peace contribution

• Ministry explains Ethiopia's diplomatic move to sea access

BY MESERET BEHAILU

ADDIS ABABA-The Ministry of Defense (MoD) held a recognition and thanksgiving program for Addis-based military attachés that it is said to contribute share for the country's peace and stability.

MoD Foreign Relations Department also briefed the military attachés on Ethiopia's current development and the role of the international community for the country's peace.

Speaking at the occasion, Defense Foreign Relations and Military Cooperation Director General MG Teshome Gemechu said that the main aim of the program is acknowledging partners for their

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Photo: Berihun Tadele

### MoFA denounces Arab League's statement on Ethio-Somaliland accord

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## Wonchi- Dendi Project comes with immense blessings for local community

BY DARGIE KAHSAY

WELISO-The newly-inaugurated Wonchi-Dendi Eco-Tourism Village and Lodge Project has brought significant benefits to the local community in terms of infrastructural connectivity, revenue generation, and job creation, the zonal administration said.

South West Shoa Zone Administration Office Head Tolesa Terefe told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) that the project is instrumental in generating sizable revenue from tourists and helping to change the livelihoods of the local community.

Accordingly, the lodge has generated from 200,000 to 500,000 Birr from entrance fees

*See Wonchi-Dendi ... page 3*



Photo: Dagne Abera

Enhancing agriculture products export volume

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Timket's electrifying vibe

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Smart Court System for efficient judicial services

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**EZEMA****advocates gov't diplomatic move to sea access**

BY BILAL DERSO

**ADDIS ABABA-** The Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) has expressed its support to the government's bold diplomatic move to have access to the sea that the party said is a matter of national security and survival.

In a press statement issued recently, EZEMA stated that Ethiopia's landlocked status of the past thirty years and plus has brought enormous social, political and economic challenges. The provisional government's ill-fated decision that was inattentive to Ethiopia's long-term strategic matters has profoundly impacted its economy and security.

In the statement, EZEMA also expressed its advocacy for robust economic and political cooperation with neighboring states. It is crucial to align this cooperation with international laws and respect for national sovereignty.

"EZEMA recognizes the necessity of equitable access to maritime gateways. For landlocked countries like Ethiopia, this is not only an economic imperative but also a matter of national security and survival."

Article 125 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides landlocked States the right of access to and from the sea and to exercise rights relating to the freedom of the high seas and the common heritage of mankind. Section two of the convention stipulates, "The terms and modalities for exercising freedom of transit shall be agreed between the landlocked and transit states."

Consistent with this international convention, the Ethiopian government has sought, by diplomatic and peaceful means, to advance the country's access to the sea. "A notable development in this regard is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland," the statement elaborated.

According to EZEMA, objection to the MoU are being raised from expected quarters because of Somaliland's status of an entity not officially recognized as a sovereign state by members of the United Nations. "While such diplomatic recognition is lacking, the international community remains engaged with the state due to its strategic significance and political stability. The MoU leverages this global reality in the interest of Ethiopia and the people of Somaliland."

Ethiopia, along with several other nations, has established a diplomatic presence in Somaliland for a long time but has stopped short of formal recognition of the latter's sovereignty, the statement remarked.

Several competing political parties expressed support to the MoU signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland that enables the former to attain its long-held aspiration for sea port peacefully, diplomatically and legally.

## Ministries join forces for university-based peace forum

BY BETELHEM BEDLU

**ADDIS ABABA-** The ministries of peace and education have officially begun a peace forum which is expected to take place at universities across the country from January 18 to February 29.

During the joint press briefing the two ministries held yesterday, Peace State Minister Kehredin Tezera stated that the peace forum would be carried out under the theme 'Adwa for strong nation building' with various programs. National identity, national values and national interest would be the major issues that would be discussed during the forum and all topics have a direct link with the Adwa Victory.

The Victory of Adwa is the sum contribution of every Ethiopians who fought for their freedom while putting aside ideological differences. Universities, on the one hand, are considered as 'little Ethiopia'. Thus, the forum would allow standing on a common foundation on major issues, the state minister elaborated.

According to Kehredin, having played a crucial role in nurturing citizens, higher education institutions have a huge role in the peace building process. "Adwa would be commemorated in its virtue to repulse the challenge that was posed on nation building and create a country that sets itself on a strong foundation."



Each issue is expected to contribute to foster National Dialogue and unity as well as to keep national values, he remarked.

By the same token, Education State Minister Kora Tushune emphasized the public's contribution in peace building. Universities bring about opportunities to explore Ethiopia in a way that strengthens social correlation and they enable the country to create a generation that values and promotes peace in spite of differences.

The state minister also highlighted that Ethiopians Victory in the Battle of Adwa is the testimony for their ability to withstand any challenge when they stand together for a common agenda. "Our forefathers and mothers conquered those invaders not

because they were on the same page on all national issues but they were able to see the bigger picture. To this end, we have to put aside differences and follow their footsteps,"

Though the Victory of Adwa is being marked once in a year, the great values and examples should be imprinted in the society's daily lives and it is important to develop the culture of dialogue and resolving differences through negotiation and other peaceful means including peace forums, Koranoted.

On February 29, a final forum would be held in the presence of university presidents, leaders of various religious institutions, patriots, public institutions, and other stakeholders, it was learned.

## State plans to supply over 7,000 tons tea product

BY MENGESHA AMARE

**ADDIS ABABA—**South West Ethiopia Coffee, Tea and Spices Authority stated that it has planned to deliver over 7,000 tons of tea product to central market this budget year.

Authority Director General Astra Mekuria told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) that some 7,026 tons of tea products has been incorporated in the plan to be supplied to central market. Of the planned amount, so far, some 3,100 has already been delivered to the central market.

As to him, a lot has been carried out on tea and other potential crops with which the local and international markets to make the state in particular and the country in general beneficiary out of such rewarding agricultural products.

"The state has well focused on tea product and Kaffa and Sheka Zones are known for their wide tea farms. East African and Ethio-Agriseft (Wushwush tea, more focus) are widely developing tea in Sheka and Kaffa zones respectively," Asrat added.

According to him, the farming community in these two zones have organized themselves and started supplying the organization with tea products.



He said: "The farmers organizing themselves in contractual bases and provided the organizations with products are 502 in number, and some 446 hectare plots of land have been covered with tea cultivation."

Since the farmers' access to market opportunities, which would potentially help promote the market horizon, is limited, they are expected to accept the offer

organizations have given to them, he added.

He further said that though the state is endowed with a variety of tea species, Wushwush tea is widely produced for the time being.

He urged the state structure ranging from the kebele to zone to move in unison and run activities in a well organized manner to help the state be advantageous out of the Coffee, Tea and Spices resources.

## MoFA denounces Arab League's statement on Ethio-Somaliland accord

BY YESUF ENDRIS

**ADDIS ABABA** –The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) announced that Arab League's statement against the Ethio-Somaliland MoU holds noting useful but contempt to African solutions to African problems.

Briefing journalists yesterday, MoFA Spokesperson Ambassador Meles Alem (PhD) said that the press statement by the Arab League undermines not only Ethiopia's role in the region, but also the old-aged Ethio-Arab diplomatic relationship.

"The Arab League statement is unacceptable. It is actually known that which country is pressuring the organization. I was attending the webinar session [of the meeting]. The statement released following the session contempt Africans clearly. Africans have the

full potential to resolve their own problems. So, the statement by League undermines the notion of "African solutions to African Problems", he said.

Ethiopia and the Arab world have long standing diplomatic relationship which stood the test of time in the face of various regime changes. Contrary to this, the Arab League has released a statement which ignores the Ethio-Arab diplomacy, Amb. Meles noted.

"Egypt and the Arab League are the two sides of a coin. It needs to be told honestly. The statement by the Foreign Minister of Egypt is not useful too. It does not match with the relationship of the two countries. Ethiopians and Egyptians are the peoples of the Abbay River. Accordingly, Ethiopia has firm stance not to aggravate issues," he stated.

He also said that such destructive statements, especially by the Egyptian side, are not new. "They were disseminating same contents over the Abbay dam in the past years. Ethiopia has no plan to negotiate issues using media reports."

According to Amb. Meles, countries which are very distant from the region, including Egypt, have military bases. Ethiopia, having no port and access to sea is being pressured and they answer no to the reason, according to the Spokesperson.

To him, the fortune of this generation is dependent on access to sea which can be justified as a matter of equity and justice.

Speaking about the current diplomatic situation between Ethiopia and Somalia, Amb. Meles said that his country opts a peaceful diplomatic approach as the only available solution.

## ECCSA backs businesses to bolster Nat'l economy

BY MISGANAW ASNAKE

**ADDIS ABABA** – Several activities are being done to capacitate businesses to contribute for national development, so said Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce Sectoral Associations (ECCSA).

ECCSA Secretary General Wubie Mengestu said that the Association has trained 110, 000 businesses in the past months on how to start a business, creating vision and business plan preparation, marketing and financial management.

"We will extend our support to regional chambers, associations, targeted unions, and other business member organizations in conducting public-private dialogues," he said.

The association is also jointly working with partners to ensure overall economic development of the nation through promoting Small and Medium Enterprises, he noted.

He stated that ECCSA is organizing trade fairs that help the enterprises to showcase their products on an international platform which promotes various products and facilitates business connections.

Wubie said promoting value chain, implementing proper policies, prioritizing sustainable practices can amplify the economic impact on local businesses and their products.

Through partnerships between the public, private sectors, as well as international organizations like GIZ can improve systems, providing valuable training opportunities to enterprises and entrepreneurs thereby ensure more robust and sustainable economic landscape for Ethiopia, he noted.

The private sector has been implementing various initiatives to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the agro-processing sector to empower actors in the area, increase productivity and market access, according to the Secretary General.

## Military attachés...

cooperation on the country's security issues.

MG Tehsome further noted that the MoD held three consultative meetings with the military attachés in last year that have resulted in consolidating the existing partnership and seeking new ones. "Our main task is keeping peace, security, and maintaining constructive partnership. I promised you that Ethiopia is committed to advance the partnership with you for better outcomes in the security sector.

National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Redwan Hussein (Amb.) said for his part that the day after the Pretoria Peace Agreement, extensive activities have been carried out to restore the damaged infrastructure in Tigray State and get the facilities back to operation.

Accordingly, agricultural, health, education, and other institutions have been returned to operation and roads and bridges have also been repaired. Besides, banks and utility providers including Ethio-telecom and Ethiopian Electric Utility go back to business. Also, the humanitarian response is being intensified since the peace accord that was signed by the Federal Government and the TPLF leaders.

Noting the existence of sporadic unrest in



parts of the country, Redwan indicated that the government has been working to address the matter with a close partnership with the Ethiopia National Dialogue Commission (ENDC.)

The advisor also briefed the military attachés about the diplomatic steps the Ethiopian government has taken to ensure a sovereign access to the sea through a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland. "Ethiopia with a population about 115 million people, has faced enormous social, political and economic challenges due to its landlocked status of the past thirty years and plus."

Due to its increasing economic prowess and large population, Ethiopia's reliance on Djibouti ports is problematic and even its port deal with Somaliland is not sufficient for the former's status. Hence, Ethiopia's quest for alternate sea outlets in this regard is justifiable, Ambassador Redwan emphasized.

The Eastern Africa Standby Force, AU Commission, International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency and the EU-Ethiopia are among institutions that the MoD conferred the recognition.

## Ethiopia,...

he would visit Ethiopia in the middle of March 2024.

He said the visit would be a unique opportunity to advance the diplomatic relations between the countries.

Cassis has also pledged to scale up the relationship on bilateral and international levels, according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It is to be recalled that Foreign Minister Demeke has been holding meetings with various countries' representatives on the sidelines of the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos since Wednesday

in daily operation during weekends and has provided 1,943 jobs for the local youth in just six months. Tourists' inflow dramatically increased even before the inauguration of the project and it has resulted in new economic benefits for the people living along the natural splendor for long.

"Now with the execution of the first phase of the project, we are expecting more tourists to come and visit the splendor site," Tolesa noted, adding that the ecotourism village ensures the benefits of the local community and is well-connected by the necessary

## Wonchi- Dendi ...

infrastructure.

The government pays due attention to address the longstanding road problem in the area and to complete the project that will connect the Wonchi Project with Woliso town.

Zone's Culture and Tourism Office Head Fekansa Gemechu for his part expressed the commitment to utilize the newly inaugurated project's potential for the betterment of the local community.

Fekansa further stated that the zone has

identified 78 tourist attraction sites whereby over 23,000 local and foreign tourists visited the area during the past six months. "Over 5.5 million Birr was collected from those tourists in the reported period."

It is to be recalled that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) accompanied by senior government officials and members of the diplomatic community inaugurated the Wonchi-Dendi Eco-Tourism Village and Lodge Project, which is part of the Dine for Ethiopia's Initiative on January 13, 2024.

# Opinion

## Promoting Ethiopia's interest for sea out-let

BY LAKACHEW ATINAFU

The ultra-nationalistic and greedy interest no doubt denied Africans from their natural and sovereign rights under the guise of democracy and post-colonial agreements in terms of utilization of Trans Boundary Rivers and limitation of access to the sea while nature had been generous endowed with enormity of blessings. One of the manifestations for this is the map of the horn region which deliberately marginalized Ethiopia from the sea.

As one turns the page of history and sees other manuscripts, starting from the ancient civilization for the most known human history to the fourth revolution of digitization, the injustice committed to Ethiopia should be an issue of concern to be revised by the concerned authorities although they set rules that could be nullified by fundamental changes of circumstances.

Starting from the port town of Massawa down south to Assab and then Djibouti and encircling Ethiopia by Somalia is set like dress embroidery to fully arrest Ethiopia with more than 100 million people to restrict from the sea access.

Ethiopia was cut off from the coast after Eritrea broke away from Addis Ababa and formally declared independence in 1993 following a three-decade war.

Now time has come that Ethiopia's ambition to get access to sea outlet justifiable by many through the means of a win-win game.

"This has been now agreed with our Somaliland brothers and MoU [memorandum of understanding] has been signed today," recently said Abiy at the signing ceremony with Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

The PM office described the deal as "historic", adding that it "shall pave the way to realize the aspiration of Ethiopia to secure access to the sea and diversify its access to seaport".

"It also strengthens their security, economic and political partnership," the prime minister's office wrote in a post on X.

The deal comes months after Abiy said the country should assert its right to access the Sea out let, raising various reflections on the matter.

The agreement paves the way to allow Ethiopia to have commercial marine operations in the region by giving it access to a leased sea port on the Gulf of Aden, the Prime Minister's national security adviser, Redwan Hussien, said

Somaliland would also receive a stake in state-owned Ethiopian Airlines, Hussein said, without providing details.

Ethiopia is a landlocked country, and historically, it has had access to the sea through the ports of Assab and Massawa, which were part of the Ethiopian Empire before being occupied by Italy in the last quarter of the 19th century.

After the end of World War II Eritrea became federated with Ethiopia in 1955,

and the two ports became part of Ethiopia until Eritrea gained independence in 1993.

Eight years after Eritrea's independence, a border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea arose, leading to the Eritrean-Ethiopian War of 1998-2000. The conflict was eventually resolved through a peace agreement in 2000, known as the Algiers Agreement in which the two countries agreed to cease hostility but they did not demarcate and delimit their border which posed the conflict and let the region to be volatile. Based on the Alger's agreement the United Nations had deployed peace keeping forces in the created buffer zone on the disputed areas but sooner unconditionally the peace keeping force left the region and still remains controversial.

The two countries have various shared values and have similar cultural linguistic, religious identities and historical experiences. Particularly, before the creation of Eritrea by the Italian colonialists in 1891, the region was under the Ethiopian imperial government. Even before the outbreak of War in 1998 many Eritreans were residing in Ethiopia and engaged in various business activities and employed in the government offices, there are also still sizable portion of Eritreans residing in the capital and other towns.

The strategic importance of access to ports and rejuvenating Ethiopia's influence in the Red Sea geopolitics and the Gulf of Aden must be revitalized. Ports serve as crucial gateways for international trade, facilitating the movement of goods, fostering economic growth, and connecting landlocked countries like Ethiopia to global markets. Regaining access to ports would have significant implications for Ethiopia's development and regional influence.

The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are vital maritime trade routes, linking Europe, Asia, and Africa. Controlling or having secure access to ports along these routes allows countries to exert influence over trade flows and regional dynamics. It enables them to participate actively in international trade, attract investments, and enhance their geopolitical significance.

For Ethiopia, regaining access to the ports along the cost of red sea or securing alternative port arrangements would bring numerous benefits. It would reduce dependency on neighboring countries for import and export routes, providing Ethiopia with more control over its trade logistics. This increased maritime access would enhance the country's economic competitiveness, attract foreign investments, and stimulate industrial growth.

Moreover, having a presence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden would grant Ethiopia a stronger foothold in regional geopolitics. It would allow the country to actively engage in discussions, negotiations, and collaborations on matters concerning security, trade, and regional development. Ethiopia's influence could extend beyond its landlocked status, enabling it to contribute to stability and cooperation in the region.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopian government and the leaders of Somaliland, a self-declared

*For a landlocked country like Ethiopia, gaining or revitalizing access to the sea would provide significant opportunities for the development of its blue economy*

sustainability. Access to the sea is a fundamental component of leveraging the blue economy potential. For a landlocked country like Ethiopia, gaining or revitalizing access to the sea would provide significant opportunities for the development of its blue economy.

By having access to the sea, Ethiopia could tap into a wide range of marine resources such as fisheries, aquaculture, offshore energy, seabed minerals, and maritime tourism. These resources have the potential to contribute to economic diversification, job creation, and increased revenue for the country. Moreover, the sustainable exploitation of these resources would support long-term environmental conservation and promote the well-being of coastal communities.

Rejuvenating the naval force and maritime capabilities of Ethiopia would be a natural outcome of gaining access to the sea. It would involve strengthening the country's naval infrastructure, maritime surveillance, and security measures to safeguard its maritime interests.

A capable naval force would not only protect water roots but also contribute to regional maritime security efforts, such as combating piracy, illegal fishing, and other maritime crimes.

Enhancing Ethiopia's naval capabilities would also enable it to actively participate in regional and international maritime affairs. This could involve collaboration with neighboring countries, joint patrols, information sharing, and participation in initiatives aimed at promoting maritime safety, security, and cooperation. Ethiopia's engagement in these efforts would contribute to regional stability and strengthen its diplomatic ties with littoral states and international partners.

Additionally, a strong naval force presence could support disaster response and search-and-rescue operations in the maritime domain. With access to the sea, Ethiopia would be better equipped to address maritime accidents and humanitarian crises that may occur in neighboring waters.

It is worth noting that the realization of the blue economy potential require substantial investments, infrastructure development, and capacity building. Furthermore, collaboration with regional and international partners would be vital to ensure the sustainable and responsible utilization of marine resources and the effective management of maritime challenges.

Overall, access to the sea and the rejuvenation of Ethiopia's water sea outlet ambition would bring numerous opportunities for economic growth, regional cooperation, and enhanced maritime security. However, it is important to approach these endeavors with a long-term vision, sustainable practices, and consideration for environmental preservation to maximize the benefits for Ethiopia and the broader region.

autonomous region within Somalia, reflects an effort to strengthen collaboration and explore potential port arrangements. If successfully implemented, this agreement could provide Ethiopia with alternative access to the port of Berbera, opening up new possibilities for trade and regional integration.

However, it is important to note that geopolitical dynamics, historical factors, and complex regional relationships can influence the realization of such agreements. The interests and positions of various stakeholders must be carefully considered, and negotiations should be conducted in a transparent and mutually beneficial manner to ensure long-term stability and cooperation.

In summary, securing access to ports and revitalizing Ethiopia's influence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden would have far-reaching implications. It would bolster Ethiopia's economic growth, enhance its regional standing, and contribute to the stability and development of the broader region.

The concept of the blue economy refers to the sustainable use and management of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and environmental

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

# Editorial

## *Timket*: A festival for co-existence, harmony

Ethiopia is home to peculiar outdoor cultural and religious festivals. The festivals have unique features and a special place among the people. Inscribed as one of the intangible heritages by UNESCO, the *Timket-Ketera* Festival (Ethiopian Epiphany) marks the baptism of Jesus Christ in the River Jordan by John the Baptist.

*Ketera* Festival, the eve of the *Timket* is one of the outdoor festivities celebrated among Christians annually. The festival has multitude of significance for Ethiopians for it is considered as a time of renewal purification and rejoicing that brings the multitude into one spot. The festival is so special that every faithful Ethiopians will dress in costumes that reflect the culture of Ethiopia. The feast of *Ketera* signifies purification and sanctification from all sinful acts and resentment. The religious festivity celebrated throughout Ethiopia colorfully attracts enormous numbers of foreign visitors. The outdoor festivity is attended by followers of other religions who like to witness the peculiar religious and cultural features.

Apart from its religious and cultural importance, *Timket* is a festival of unity and togetherness, and an occasion that promotes the spirit of unity in diversity; peaceful coexistence and understanding among different nations and nationalities and gets together millions irrespective of cultures, religions, and other denominations.

*Timket* is a solid instance of the longstanding religious co-existence in the country where followers of other religions clean streets where the celebration takes place and hand over dry food and bottled waters to their Christians neighbors in a show of solidarity and brotherhood.

The festival preaches love, unity, and fraternity among human beings. *Timket* preaches humanity to the people of the world to live in peace and harmony. It is a symbol of peace, unity, and integrity as Jesus Christ preached peace and harmony among human beings. The celebration promotes love, coexistence and tolerance among humans rather than animosity between people of the world.

Because it commemorates the baptism of Jesus Christ it is the festival of love and peace and teaches us humbleness and respect of one another. It enhances unity and fraternity among Ethiopians. Respecting one another, tolerance, and coexistence among others are values we could learn from the celebration of *Timket*, noting that division, racism, and animosity are against the values of the festival.

This is a unique public baptism in which all the participants of the occasion make sure that they are baptized on an open field. As one of the most important religious occasions, the festival sets the opportunity for friends and family members to meet and make festivities that fit the occasion.

Because the event is observed with reverence and involves aiding one another, it fosters love and solidarity among Ethiopians. In addition to its spiritual significance, the Ethiopian Epiphany is a festival of human solidarity and togetherness that encourages tolerance, love, and harmony among people rather than hostility. It's the celebration of peace and love. Jesus' baptism encourages being modest and respectful of one another. The *Timket* Festival promotes Ethiopian unity and brotherhood. The celebration depicts the ideals of *Timket*, which include tolerance, coexistence, and respect for one another.

In short, the celebration of *Timket* essentially demonstrates the prudent values that embedded in Ethiopian culture; its glamorous celebration attracts visitors who would like to enjoy wonderfully memorable experiences.

# Opinion

## Ethiopia's comprehensive approach to addressing refugee crisis

BY ADDISALEM MULAT

Ethiopia's extraordinary efforts and approach towards addressing the challenges faced by refugees have been nothing short of exemplary. The country has exemplified a steadfast commitment towards ensuring the safety and well-being of those fleeing their homelands transcending geographical boundaries to extend a helping hand. Ethiopia's response to the refugee crisis is unique in its unparalleled dedication and the significant strides made in managing the intricate dynamics involved.

In recent years, Ethiopia has emerged as a significant force providing vital support and resources to a large number of individuals who have been forcibly displaced or compelled to seek refuge due to a multitude of reasons. This extraordinary humanitarian effort undertaken by Ethiopia has garnered recognition as one of the most extensive and influential initiatives across the entire African continent.

The country has taken proactive measures to address the complex and multifaceted nature of human migration demonstrating a steadfast commitment to tackling the diverse challenges faced by those who have been uprooted from their homes.

The government has gone to great lengths to ensure that all inquiries from refugees are handled promptly and with utmost care recognizing the significance of being attentive to their needs. Due to this action, Ethiopia aims to prevent any unnecessary difficulties or hardships that refugees may encounter as they search for safety and stability. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government has implemented a series of policies and decisions that prioritize the treatment of refugees with the highest level of care and respect guaranteeing them all essential human rights.

The country has set up well-organized refugee camps, providing shelter, food, and healthcare to thousands of displaced individuals. Furthermore, Ethiopia has implemented inclusive policies that grant refugees access to education, employment, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. As a result of doing this, the country has demonstrated that compassion and empathy can go above borders and make a profound difference in the lives of those affected by the refugee crisis.

It is vital for international and continental organizations specializing in refugee and migration affairs to step up and offer their support to Ethiopia leaving no one behind. By joining forces with Ethiopia, these organizations can contribute significantly to finding sustainable solutions and ensuring the well-being of refugees.

Through decisive actions, the government has strived to create environments that alleviate the hardships faced by refugees ensuring

that their needs are met and minimizing any inconveniences that may arise. The dedication of Ethiopia to addressing the concerns and queries of refugees has been truly exemplary.

The refugee crisis stands as an undeniable global issue that has far-reaching implications, particularly for Africa and Europe. Its profound impact on societies has the potential to shake their foundations and disrupt the fabric of their existence. The remarkable actions taken by Ethiopia truly deserve recognition and unwavering support from the international community.

The government's efforts prioritize the well-being and rights of refugees emphasizing the importance of creating a safe and secure environment where their needs are met and their dignity is preserved. Ethiopia's dedication to this cause is a testament to its unwavering belief in the power of collective action and its determination to shape a more inclusive and compassionate world.

It is essential to recognize the significance of providing assistance to Ethiopia in addressing the refugee crisis. International and continental organizations have a crucial role to play in supporting Ethiopia and ensuring that no one is left behind.

It is beyond dispute that Ethiopia has consistently demonstrated its commitment to upholding laws and agreements that have been established at different periods of time. In light of this unwavering dedication, the government of Ethiopia has made continuous efforts to assist and support refugees providing them with a safe haven.

These measures play a pivotal role in cultivating an environment where refugees can experience a sense of belonging, comfort, and security. Ethiopia's proactive approach in extending such blessings to refugees stands as a powerful testament to the government's unwavering commitment to upholding humanitarian values.

Ethiopia's steadfast adherence to laws and agreements coupled with its proactive measures to support refugees underscores the country's unwavering dedication to creating a welcoming and hospitable environment. By addressing the unique needs of refugees and treating them with genuine respect and compassion, the country sets an exemplary standard for other nations to follow. This serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of upholding human rights and prioritizing the well-being of those who seek refuge from adversity.

Their approach serves not only as an inspiration but also as a tangible example of what can be achieved when nations prioritize the well-being and dignity of refugees. In a world where the refugee crisis continues to unfold with devastating consequences, Ethiopia's commitment to empathy and humanity should serve as a guiding light for others to emulate and replicate.

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The Ethiopian Herald

# Business & Economy

## Enhancing agriculture products export volume

BY TEWODROS KASSA

Currently, Ethiopia receives 76% of its export earnings from its agricultural product such as Coffee, Oilseeds, Chat, Pulses, Cut Flowers, Fruits, Vegetables, Dairy and meat are among others. The first five commodities cover 28.7%, 14.5%, 11.4%, 10.2% and 9.6% of the volume exported in 2022/23 respectively. Major export destinations in the mentioned budget year included Asia (41.6%), Europe (25.4%), and Africa (20.8%).

The export trend of the country shows that high-value markets are not significantly targeted as exporters target destination countries where import regulations are smooth. This is not always by choice but with the existing functionality of many agricultural value chains exporters that are not producing themselves have no or little control over the quality of the products they export. Buyers that have strict regulations or demand on such parameters are difficult to access. High-value markets, like the EU or Scandinavia, have stringent requirements where they have little room for tolerance.

Therefore, implementing an effective quality control system is fundamental to improve Ethiopia's agricultural export volume and income.

Experts emphasize that with agricultural export countries getting more competitive for a better position in the international market, addressing internal hurdles observed in the export sector to improve the quality control system of the country would encourage competitive spirits of the private sector along with ensuring higher value for exports. It is high time to implement timely and proper policy measures to improve the agriculture sector export earnings. Having effective policy implementations immensely contributes to augment Ethiopia's agricultural export earnings.

According to a research by Precise Consult International PLC, the agriculture sector faces different quality related problems including contamination, poor post-harvest handling, adulteration, differing produce size and color, lack of traceability, lack of standards for certain products, and lack or incomplete market information among others. The main reason for this is the lack of a comprehensive quality regulatory framework which posed several challenges for businesses and ultimately on the country export earnings. One of the challenges discouraging the private sector is misinterpretations of mandates among lead public institutions which creates inconvenience for the private sector in receiving efficient services. This associated with lack of coordination between offices, gaps in implementation of rules, and capacity gap in agricultural marketing among staffs makes doing business much challenging.

Agri-business Consultant at Precise Consult International PLC Helen Getaw told *The Ethiopian Herald* that private investor's participation in the agriculture sector is fundamental to boost production and productivity. And ensuring quality is the major factor to generate more from the agriculture sector export earnings.

The absence of agricultural finance policy



and strategy promoting the supply and utilization of agricultural finance products was among the identified policy gaps and challenges in the agriculture sector. This was reflected in the lack/shortage of credits, agriculture insurance services, and saving mobilization.

Currently, most of the Ethiopian agricultural product is harvested in the organic form which gives more impetus to be competitive in the global market. Horticulture, coffee, soybeans, oilseeds, grains, among others expected to dominate the Ethiopian agricultural products export volume in the future, according to her.

Having international certificates for healthy and quality agricultural products enhances the country's efforts to attract the market and increase export volume. The ongoing quality policy preparation by the Ministry of Trade and Regional Integration also facilitates the market channel and ease of reaching international agricultural traders.

Promoting financial accessibility, lease financing, agriculture insurance, among others contributes to farmer's and private sector practitioner's engagement in the supply of quality agricultural products to the global market. Agricultural extension experts in the Ministry of Agriculture are expected to build their capacity to enable farmers and other agricultural producers to promote quality harvesting. Thus, the government is expected to work hand in hand with pertinent stakeholders, deliver agricultural inputs on time, and introduce new technologies to boost production and productivity, she recommended.

Mihiret Teamir Precise Consult International PLC Agriculture sub-sector Project Coordinator said that setting innovative policy paves the way to improve the agriculture sector performance. Availing enough financial supply and subsidizing the agriculture sector is crucial to address the sector gaps.

To ensure Agricultural growth, structural transformation, and economic development in the country, "accelerated agricultural financing" is the recommended policy direction.

Accordingly, tasks that are required to enhance financial accessibility to the agriculture sector in general, and smallholder

farmers in particular, include the following. Formulation of comprehensive and practical policies on agricultural finance and development of regulatory frameworks, Establishment of financial institutions, such as farmers' cooperatives and unions to full-fledged banks, drastic improvements of smallholders' financial services utilization through financial literacy.

Moreover, setting up institutions providing services such as financial literacy to including the smallholder farmers and pastoralists, business development support, credit appraisal services, and follow-up and evaluation of credit utilization is important.

In addition, reorganizing an independent body promoting focused and knowledge-based, and accessible insurance services for agriculture are helpful to tap the agriculture sector potentials.

The experts recommended various policy options to enhance the country's agriculture sector's competitiveness in the global market. Setting up quality control mechanism at primary markets with improved quality control infrastructure to enable corrective measures for the poor quality as well as avoiding aggregation of poor and good quality together. Incorporating quality standard awareness in the extension package as well as contract farming setups is also fundamental to increase quality orientation in production. Having a system to timely add/adopt testing parameters of commodities based on international market trends enables to stay competitive.

A decade and a half ago the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange Market public owned institution was established and the main purpose of the establishment of the institution is providing essential market information to the small holder farmers who produce commercialized products. In addition it provides information about the price of the agricultural products. The other objective of the establishment of the institute was to shorten the value chain by avoiding unnecessary brokers who do not pay tax to the government in appropriate manner.

As it is understood most agricultural export products are produced by subsistence farmers with utilizing small amount of agricultural inputs, lack proper and modern

where house and farm sites are also located far away from main roads. Therefore in such a way supplying products with protected quality is very challenging.

The absence of modern warehouses exposed products for insect infection and spoil due to wet temperature. In the rural part transporting products from place to place is conducted on animal or human labor this again compromise the quality of the products. During extreme weather condition posed by climate change and global warming products will be taken away by flood which again affects the supply of goods to the market. Drought and hotness also ignites the outbreak of diseases which bring a blowing effect on the product hence, addressing the mentioned problems must be a priority agenda to all stake holders involved in the agricultural trade value chain.

The other institution engaged in modernizing agricultural sector is the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency. It supplied inputs such as selected seeds and farming techniques to farmers, clustering of small scale farms, provide extension services and capacity building. The institute also identified suitable agro-ecological zones which can serve for cultivation of exportable products and so far, encouraging results has been registered.

To the country such as Ethiopia in which its economy is heavily dependent on import needs hard currency. Currently it faces macro-economic imbalance manifested by Trade deficit (the nation earns from export about three billion Dollars while it imports up to 18 billion of Dollars), unemployment, foreign currency crunch, debt service, inflation, illegal trade, (up to 10 thousand cattle illegally crossed the Ethiopian border and sold in the neighboring countries market), budget deficit.

Therefore, to reverse the situation enhancing the nation foreign currency earning capacity is essential. Since the nation joined the international market for the last more than hundreds years agriculture plays pivotal role in earning foreign currency and still continued as mentioned above. Therefore, by tackling the sector shortcomings increasing its role in garnering foreign currency is vital.

# Art & Culture



(Short Story)

BY ALEM HAILU G/KRISTOS

I remember the day to the minute detail as if it were yesterday. It took place on eve of *Timket* (Ethiopian Epiphany) in the setting from *Kazanchis Meneharia* to *Sidist Kilo*.

Early in the afternoon, bells from churches in our vicinity began rhythmically ringing in a heart-palpating manner by way of summoning the faithful 'it is high time to see off the replicas of the Ark of the Covenant,' carried out by priests due to start procession to the holy water sprinkling pool found in Jan Meda, which literary means a gigantic field.

Mother called my siblings and I and said,

"Hurry up, lets go to Saint Gabriel church and join the ever-snowballing congregation that is tagging and flanking the arks as well as paving the way ahead with ululation and songs in tune with the drum and harp beats, trumpet blows and Sistrum rattling and rustling."

As was everybody else, we were attired in our Sunday best true to the saying 'Let a cloth not meant for wearing on Timket get in tatters.'

Earlier, mother had warned us "Do not let a speck of dust alight on the clothes you put on soon after taking a shower." Though we went out to gamboling fields to play with our peers who were dressed in a similar manner, it was strictly we observed mother's instruction. Every year she liked hammering home "Kids listen to me 'Timket symbolizes the act of cleansing from sin or the task of ablation.'" Because of this behest the message encapsulated in the festival had long sunk in.

Locking the main gate of our house located at the foot of a hill, picking pace, upward we rushed to Saint Gabriel church situated at the top of the road.

The circular church built in the old style, including the fences, has seven concentric circles mirroring the seven heavenly skies.

Both women and men were dressed to kill with snow-white linen cotton dresses not forgetting taking their children made to dress in an analogous fashion. Women were adorned by jewelries and hairdos.

Soon, we got swallowed by the white flood of people dragged towards the congregation. The fantastic designs of the attention-grabbing costumes were telling loud our designers' superb talent as well as the taste of purchasers, who meticulously selected the clothes aiming to stick out from the crowd. All well dressed with clothes and putting on caps befitting the occasion.

A young beautiful girl in our neighborhood approaching us from behind greeted us, soon,

to volunteer to carry my baby sister by way of helping out mother. "Eden how polite you are! What a nice parental guidance you have passed through. Wow you got the costume in a dress and trouser form. It draws a special attention," mother casted an appreciative glance towards her.

"Thank you mom! Yours, with a flower embroidery neck downward and bearing a cross at the bottom, too is dazzling," Eden reciprocated with appreciation-packed looks.

"Mine helps to preserve the old culture, while yours to modernize it," mother affirmative nodded her head.

"You are right Mom. We need both. Yours for holidays, while mine for working days are preferable," Eden smiled expressing assent.

"Given your beauty accentuated by your attire and your comely manner, a lucky pious man will stand a chance to woo you for marriage," mother saw her with beaming face. The girl blushed flattered by the comment.

Mother continued "it was on Timket day my husband singled me out and beseeched me to be friends gently hurling a lemon towards me as per the traditional way of declaring love. He was a choir in Sunday school. He got me registered there. As he was a God-fearing, fine-looking and dashing chap, I did not put much resistance when he asked my parent's permission for marriage."

When we entered into the church on time, on the podium, Levitical priests were carrying gold-embroidered umbrellas for the Arks. Taking a break during preaching, attired in motely and eye-catching ecclesiastical robes and arrayed in to two columns, the rest were staging religious songs in front of the platform. "The heavenly was baptized by the hands of the earthly..." they were kicking the floor with their prayer sticks rhythmically which was matched by the clapping of the crowd.

The bishop was reminding the laity "as clearly put on Joshua 3:3 'when you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD Your God and the priests the Levites bearing it then you shall remove from your place and go after it.'" He continued "let us share the blessing this opportune moment presented to us by ululating, singing and, in a religious way, dancing emulating King David who did the same before the Ark of God that smashed the idol Dagon before retuning back to its right place."

After a reverberating ululation from the women folk and clapping by men the bishop continued.

"As Jesus Christ headed from Bethlehem to Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist, we take out the Arks and head to nearby rivers as is the case in the province or pools as is the case in towns. The processions from different corners of the Addis make confluences here and there up to Jan Meda. They make a white ocean there.

In the procession the Arks make blessings. That is why they choose different roads in

their return trip.

He continued after the Arks stayed there nightlong, tomorrow in a similar manner we shall escort them back as Jesus returned from River Jordan to Bethlehem to officially start his Miracle in Cana of Galilee true to the intercession of Saint Mary.

"Now let us start our march to the pool where the water will be blessed tomorrow for sprinkling the laity with," he added.

When the laity began pouring out into the street, all and sundry, mixed with the crowd began heading to Jan Meda. Some were carrying a long stick painted different colors for hovering high.

Vendors were calling out "Do you need chewing gums, sugarcanes, green chickpea fruit sand the like?" Grownups were buying the items especially for children who were expected to inherit the religious, cultural and historical event, in turn, to bequeath it to their off springs in the timeline.

When the Ark from Saint Trinity Cathedral joined the one from our abode, as she did previously, mother decided to return back via the back gate of the Cathedral with younger siblings.

When I saw father around the parliament telling mother "I saw dad," I ran towards him as the road was blocked for traffic movement. Waving her hands mother greeted father from a distance.

"Thank you Eden for your good gesture of helping me out," mother received the baby. Then stretching an umbrella she readied herself to hit the road backhome. "You are welcome," Eden bowed from her chest.

Mother usually saw off the Arks upto there and quickly returned back home to handle heavy domestic chores for the holiday such as baking huge traditional bread and preparing Ethiopians' favorite dish, a chicken soup of mainly red pepper and butter ingredients. On the morrow, on the same spot she often welcomed and escorted the Arks back to church.

"Dad have you been in the Ministry of Education?" I pointed to the organization where he worked then.

"I have been in my office finishing the task I started,"

"You arrived just in time,"

"Yes last year you were a bit late."

"You remember things well."

"Mother has washed your traditional cloth twice. It will be dry by now given the hot sun. Will you put it on tomorrow?"

"Why not? When else should I put it on if not for Timeket, a day symbolizing humankind's redemption from their sins? It is also a day of reconciliation between man and God that were put asunder owing to devil's divisive wedge. It is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin," he explained to me things with the help of his hands.

Mixing with the ever-increasing number of celebrants Father and I started heading to Jan Meda.

## Timket's electrifying vibe

"Dad, as the celebration will be a mammoth one tomorrow as usual will you afford me a piggy shoulder for a better view?" "I eyed dad.

"Why not?" he said snaking his arm around my neck.

A bit up hill, the laity accompanying Arks from Saint Mary church and Saint Mark church joined the river of people. They turned the dark asphalt, which extended from Arat kilo to Sadist Killo, to one that seemed greased with yogurt.

When we entered into the fenced field packed by an ocean of people, I noticed in a special corner by the pool pitches were erected for the Arks and priests.

"Will the priests spend the night here?" I saw dad. "Tomorrow the Archbishop will bless the water. Deacons and priests will sprinkle the holy water towards the eager crowd. Prayers will be conducted nightlong."

In the extreme corners some boys, making circles here and there, were peacefully playing harmonicas and inviting interested girls to dance either in the traditional or modern ways, while others were engaged in a circus like games to the delight of kids and merry-making youngsters.

"Dad, as compared to last year, an increasing-number of white men and Africans are seen. What are they doing here?"

"They are tourists who came to Ethiopia hearing about the time-old magnificent cultural-historic and religious celebration that has no match worldwide."

"Who told them about the celebration? They might have watched documentaries or read newspaper articles or even heard from friends and relatives who saw things firsthand."

"Yes last year I heard a white lady with a golden hair, an interviewee on TV, saying 'I never saw so many people at a given place. The vibe resulting from the religious and cultural mix is electrifying. I saw unity in diversity.'"

"What an interesting thing. You attend TV shows with pelted eyes all ears. Keep up the good Job," dad tapped me on the back.

On our trip from afar I saw Eden with one of the Arat Killo university students who were sat on the fence of the compound. According to dad, the students were sat on the horn of a dilemma torn between joining the river of people or going back to the library to study hard for upcoming first semester exam.

On the morrow, the archbishop preached "Epiphany is a day the 3-in-1 mystery is revealed—our Heavenly father in the sky, the Holy Spirit in a form of a bird and Jesus in Jordan River. As John the Apostle in 11:9 put it, we are experiencing a similar feeling."

Soaked with a fair share of the holy water, dad and I returned back escorting the Arks back to their respective churches.

Preceded by ethnic groups paving the way by way of staging respective traditional dances and songs, Sunday school students, deacons, in turn, were preparing the way for the Arks, to which young boys were rolling out carpets nonstop.

# Science & Technology

## Smart Court System for efficient judicial services

BY DARGIE KAHSAY

The Federal Supreme Court has just launched Smart Court System aiming at transforming the service delivery in the judicial system using technology. Developed by Artificial Intelligence Institute, the modern technology-assisted smart court system, targets at modernizing and transforming the judicial services in Ethiopia. By introducing technology-assisted smart court system, the Federal Supreme Court's goal is to provide effective, transparent, inclusive and easily accessible, and quality judicial service delivery.

The newly introduced technology-assisted smart court system enables to promote access to justice, to fasten dispute resolution, to save time and cost in judicial process. The locally developed artificial intelligence supported smart system application was developed by Ethiopian professionals' plans to develop the traditional way of managing judicial process through technology and helps to develop the manual systems into digital system. Using the new technology, court rooms are believed to develop in to smart court rooms that are supported by smart technologies.

The litigations of the disputing parties in the courts and the testimony of the witnesses, so far, are recorded manually. The newly inaugurated smart court would solve this problem of good governance and play a great role in enabling consumers to get services without harassment.

During the launching ceremony of the Smart Court System at the Federal Supreme Court here in Addis Ababa recently, Artificial Intelligence Institute Director-General, Engineer Worku Gachena said that the new technology based smart court system will modernize the service delivery in the judicial system. As to him, technology is helping institutions to modernize services and to provide efficient and effective services. As technology helps the whole process and easing service provision, it saves time and resources.

According to Worku the digital smart court system enables to integrate courts' work. Through the technology-assisted judicial



system, as to him, will help courts to act effectively as it reduces time wastage, where judges make decisions online without being physically present, and allows for witness blackmail. In addition, the new system also includes online testimony and natural language processing (audio-to-text) technology which speeds up the trial process.

As the system includes natural language processing or audio-to-text transcriber, it helps the trial system by easily transcribing voices in to written format during the judicial process immediately and provided to the judges immediately.

Secondly, the system has a Chat Bot service system, Worku reiterated. The chat bot system is a robot service system that helps customers to easily access information about their case in the court through their smart phones or computers. "This system is an alternative for customers to find necessary information about their cases in courts without the need to present in the courts physically," the Director-General reiterated. In addition, according to Worku, the chat bot system helps customers to submit complaints to the courts online and follow the process.

Hence, Worku stated that, the implementation of the smart court system can facilitate and ease services in the judicial system and can solve administrative and good governance



problems in the sector. The technology-assisted smart system in the judicial sector can help in solving the problems in the field through providing appropriate data and information.

House of Peoples Representatives (HPR) Speaker, Tagesse Chafo, for his part stated that the newly applied smart court system will help to provide efficient, accessible, inclusive, transparent, quality evaluated and honest judicial services for all citizens. "As Ethiopia is striving to realize Digital Ethiopia 2023 Strategy, the implementation of smart technology in the judicial system is a step to realize Ethiopia's strategy in all sectors," Tagesse said.

According to the house speaker, the new application and models in the court rooms and in the court system in general is a new chapter in modernizing Ethiopia's judicial system. As this is a critical step in the field, efforts should continue to apply the system in all courts. He recommended implementing the smart court system in regional states, as well. According to the speaker, the system would help the customers to get quality services without being subjected to unnecessary expenses.

President of the Federal Supreme Court, Tewodros Mehret for his part said that the court is taking various reform measures to provide efficient and effective services for customers. As part of the efforts, it

introduced the smart court system to assist the judicial procedures assisted by modern technology.

According to the president, justice has a great value for the economic, social and political stability and creating a stable society of a country. "If there is no justice, there will be no peace and development," the President said. Hence, providing inclusive, effective, transparent and quality judicial service is essential in creating a just society. To realize that, modernizing the services is critical so as to make the process accessible and transparent for all and the new smart court system will help in realizing it, he added.

The new smart court, technology-assisted system that has been put into operation is a part of this effort and stated that the modern system will make the judicial service more effective. The smart court has components such as audio transcription, smart chat bot/ AI based interactive Chabot, information desk and others, he reiterated.

Currently, various technological innovations, including artificial intelligence, are expected to solve various problems providing appropriate judicial services to the community. The new AI application will help courts to apply vertical judgments and hearing of voices of witnesses. The new technological system is expected to facilitate the service delivery in the judiciary system.

## Intensifying digital diplomacy

BY DARGIE KAHSAY

The development of technology especially the cyber technology is changing or diversifying the way that traditional activities and systems are practicing. The advancement of technologies and new innovations is transforming activities in every sector. In this regard, the development of digital technology is easing worldwide interactions and communications. The diplomacy sector is one of the sectors

In a recent panel discussion organized at Diplomatic Week and Expo organized by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia here in Addis Ababa at the Science Museum, Ethiopian Artificial Intelligence Institute Director-General, Engineer Worku Gachena said that the diplomacy sector in today's world demands acting beyond the traditional way of diplomacy. He said that "we are in



Engineer Worku Gachena, Artificial Intelligence Institute Director-General presenting a paper

an era of diplomacy that demands Digital Diplomacy."

Presenting a paper entitled "Ethiopia's current diplomacy and future trends of international relations visa-a-vis Artificial

Intelligence," Eng. Worku said that digital diplomacy is becoming important field in countries interaction with the rest of the world unlike the traditional way of diplomacy that demands sending envoys for each and every activity. As to him, understanding the development role of the digital sector in the field of diplomacy, it is vital to give due focus for the development of digital diplomacy.

"To become successful in digital diplomacy, it is vital to give due attention for the development of social media considering its role in today's world. From the world population, 5.1 billion people uses internet and 4.8 billion uses social media," Worku added. He also stated that from the 193 member states of the United Nations, 189 of the members are twitter (X) users and for countries it is important to consider this opportunity in interacting with the world.

"According to a survey conducted on 52 Ethiopia's Embassies and Missions abroad, 50 of them have Facebook and 47 of them have twitter (X) and delivering different information using the platforms," he stated. But, majority of the social media accounts of these institutions are unverified which needs an attention, according to him. The digital sector is an important platform to communicate and interact with the world and it is high time for Embassies, missions and other institutions that focus on the diplomacy sector to properly apply digital diplomacy to protect the country's national interest.

As to him, Ethiopia's digital diplomacy is in good beginning. But, it needs further efforts to properly exploit the digital sector in diplomacy. He recommends implementing digital diplomacy considering the cyber security issues in mind.



# Society

## *Ketera, Timket:* A symbol of peace, unity and integrity

BY LEULSEGED WORKU

*Ketera* festival, which is celebrated on the eve of Timket festival, (Epiphany), among the adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic churches, is one of the outdoor religious festivals marked across Ethiopia with various impressive religious processions and cultural rituals.

According to documents, the term '*Ketera*' is taken from the Amharic word 'Ketere' to mean stopping the flow of water. In this regard, during *Ketera* festival, it is usual to block the flow of water in the rivers or pools, or create artificial reservoir to sprinkle the assembled congregation with the holy water on the actual day of *Timket*, in commemoration of the Baptism of Jesus Christ at the River Jordan in the hands of John the Baptist.

Days before the real day of the *Ketera* festival, followers of the religion, especially young people, make every preparation to celebrate the day in a more colorful and impressive way. They clean and set up public spaces where members of the church choirs chant hymn and celebrants gather, the roads that the *tabots*, (the replicas of the Ark of the Covenant) are heading, the places where the *tabots* will spend the whole night, (*Timkete-Bahir*), and build temporary tents where the *tabots* rest.

They also create a dam to restrict the flow of water or fill pools with water where there are not enough rivers in the surrounding areas for the ceremony of Timket, and undertake similar spiritual activities.

On the day of *Ketera* that is on the eve of Timket believers adorned with their cultural attire come out of their houses in the afternoon usually after 2:00 PM and get together at their nearby churches to escort the *tabots*. The *tabots*, taken out from all churches and carried by priests, will move to a communal place arranged for them to spend a night or two accompanied by the clergies, Sunday School students and the laities.

This process, according to documents, signifies Jesus Christ's journey to the River Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist.

And today, January 19, and tomorrow January 20, 2024, Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic Christians are ready to celebrate the *Ketera* festival which will be marked colorfully this afternoon.

As part of this and to make the celebrations more enticing thereby show solidarity, yesterday religious leaders in the Orthodox and Catholic churches, religious leaders of various religions, officials from the Addis Ababa City Administration, including, General Manager of Addis Ababa City Administration in the rank of Deputy Mayor Hikma Hayredin, and residents of the capital engaged in cleaning sites at Kirkos Sub City where the *tabots* will pass through and spend the night.

Speaking on the occasion, Hikma said that Timket festival (Ethiopian Epiphany) is one of Ethiopia's intangible world heritages inscribed by UNESCO.



While the festival predominantly resonates with Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, she eloquently expressed that the significance of this celebration extends to encompass all Ethiopians.

Furthermore, she implored the entire populace of the capital to actively contribute to the successful celebration of the *Ketera* and *Timket* festival by upholding its religious and cultural values, FBC reported

In the same way, the Addis Ababa City Administration and religious institutions announced that preparations are finalized to celebrate *Ketera* and *Timket* celebrations in a more peaceful way and in a manner preserving the religious value of the festivals.

This was revealed following the discussion held between Mayor Adanech Abebe, senior officials of the Addis Ababa City Administration and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and the Addis Ababa Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Addis Ababa Diocese Office in relation to the celebration of Timket festival.

At the discussion, religious fathers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church stated that they are making the necessary preparations to celebrate the festivals peacefully in a manner align with the values of the religion and in away refraining from speeches and actions that are contrary to the canon of the religion. They also make clear to followers that any speeches and actions that do not represent the church are acts that would be condemned.

The religious fathers also urged the city administration to provide the usual support for the celebration of the festivals.

Mayor Adanech Abebe and senior officials of the city administration also called on the religious leaders to fulfill their responsibilities so that the celebration of the

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**It is a festival that preaches tolerance, understanding and to live in peace and harmony**

the collaborative efforts of the two cities in various areas. Mentioning the various activities carried out targeting on peace and highlighting that several holidays and events have been held without any security challenges, she said that this year's Timket festival would also be marked in more organized manner than before.

“The coordinated efforts of Addis Ababa and Sheger Cities in the past have resulted in successful and peaceful celebrations of religious, cultural, and street festivals. The valuable lessons drawn from the previous years and the considerable attention given to peace and security issues will enable to celebrate *Ketera* and *Timket* festivals without any security threats.”

The consultative forum of the two cities administrations, according to her, is part of the efforts exerted to enable the celebration of UNESCO inscribed open air festival more peacefully.

Peace and Security Deputy Head with the Addis Ababa City Administration Getahun Abera on his part said that the festival is a platform that showcases Ethiopians' cultural and religious values, their peaceful coexistence, and togetherness to the world. Thus, he stressed the need for peaceful celebration. The Addis Ababa City Peace and Security Administration will work closely with religious leaders, elders, youth, and the general public to ensure the peaceful celebration of *Ketera* and *Timket*.

True, Timket is a festival that promotes peace, fraternity and humanity to the people of the world. It is a festival that preaches tolerance, understanding and to live in peace and harmony. Thus celebrating the festivity in line with its religious and cultural values is a must and a matter that needs the commitment of every one.

*Timket* festival, which is a national heritage and one among the most important intangible cultural heritages inscribed in the UNESCO, celebrated peacefully and in a way preserving its religious values.

Singing the same tune, security structures and leaders of the Addis Ababa and Sheger City expressed readiness to mark the two festivals peacefully, without any security problems.

This was revealed following the consultative forum held between the security structures and leaders of the two cities regarding the celebration of *Ketera* and *Timket* festivals.

Speaking at the forum, Peace and Security Management Office Head with Addis Ababa City Administration Lidya Girma highlighted



# This is Ethiopia

## Timket, its unique ceremonial process

BY TEWODROS KASSA

*Timket*, also known as the Ethiopian Epiphany, is a vibrant and revered festival celebrated in Ethiopia. It holds profound significance in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido and Catholic Christian faiths and is considered as one of the most important religious and cultural events in the country. *Timket* commemorates the Baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River and is characterized by elaborate ceremonies, processions, and rituals.

*Timket* (Commemoration of Jesus's Baptism) is a must-see ritual festival in Ethiopia, explain tourists who have a chance to attend the event in Addis Ababa, Gondar and other parts of the country. The ceremonial occasion is undertaken with appealing Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) Sunday school students' songs, priests sanctify, various religious benediction, different cultural songs, cultural dancing, among others. The day gives an opportunity for local participants and tourists to discover most of the cultural dressings found in Ethiopia.

Not only this, one will be satisfied while observing the colorful dressing of peoples added with smiley faces without age limitations. That means kids to elders are seen chanting, thanking God and walking peacefully with the crowded gathering without being tired. The religious leaders sanctify the youths for their day in day out strives that longs at least for a week to make the celebration colorful and real.

*Timket*, the colorful celebration of the Ethiopian Epiphany, was inscribed as the intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. The organization inscribed *Timket* (Ethiopian Epiphany) as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Its registration under the prestigious heritage list gives impetus to easily marketing the country's tourism sector. In addition, *Timket* itself will gain an opportunity to attract more tourists worldwide.

Recently, the Amhara State Culture and Tourism Bureau announced regarding the *Timket* festivals, which will be colorfully celebrated in the State. The Bureau Public Relations Head Abebe Himbale told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) that Amhara State is among the predominant areas where Ethiopian Christmas and Epiphany festivals are celebrated in the country. Therefore, the *Timket* festival will be celebrated with the intention to revive the stagnant tourism sector in the State.

As to him, more than a million people attended each of the two festivals last year and steps have been taken to celebrate the festivals in a similar condition this year. As



to the Head, the Bureau has been working in collaboration with Ethiopian Airlines, tour guide associations, hotels and other institutions as the Ethiopian Airlines has allowed direct flight from Bahir Dar to Lalibela and Gondar to Lalibela for the visitors coming to attend the festivals in consideration of Christmas and Baptism.

*Timket* is among the leading festivals that are attended by prominent personalities from the international diplomatic community. Most diplomats based in Addis Ababa also attend *Ketera* (*Timket* eve) and *Timket* annually. There are also other street ceremonial occasions held in the country like; the *Meskel* (Founding of the true cross) festival held in September annually.

Addis Ababa City Administration Culture and Tourism Senior Heritage Intangible Heritages Senior Expert Memhir Mekibib Gebremariam told The Ethiopian Herald that *Timket* is solely celebrated colorfully with the gathering of more than tens of thousands of people in Ethiopia in places like in Jan-Meda in Addis Ababa. It is also marked colorfully with a huge gathering in Gondar City.

As *Timket* is registered in the UNESCO's heritage list, it becomes exclusively Ethiopia's unique intangible heritage. And no other country celebrates *Timket* in a manner it is marked in Ethiopia.

The public is enthusiastic to mark the day with joy being invincible to the cold weather at night (while sleeping inside a pavilion or simply on the sky free ground counting stars) or warm temperature during the noon.

He elaborated that the country is home to a variety of tangible and intangible heritages in Africa in which twelve [nine tangible and three intangible] heritages have already been registered by UNESCO, however, the figure might not be sufficient enough since the country has surplus tangible and intangible heritages waiting to be registered, he said.

According to him, *Timket* is not only a religious holiday but also a cause to preserve and pass down the unique cultural heritage to the future generations. It also plays an indispensable role to promote, introduce and preserve each nation, nationalities and people's forefather's culture.

"*Timket* is one of the foremost celebrations to show Ethiopia and its nation, nationalities, and peoples to the rest of the world at no cost without for promotions."

*Timket* is playing the lion's share in preserving the country's diversified religious and cultural assets. During *Timket*, elders move to escort the arks of the covenant (*Tabots*) accompanying it and thanking God, catching their fly whisk, as well as a small stick, sparkled with the colors of the Ethiopian flag. Youths on the other side freely and joyously chant and dance before the arks.

Although, it is not possible to say that globalization is not posing challenges on the cultural celebration of *Timket* currently, the youths have become steady to overcome the impact properly. It is possible to witness that the youths are mindful of how to preserve their culture and the value of the untapped

intangible cultural heritage of the country.

The youth mostly show commitment towards keeping their own cultural assets through wearing cultural clothes, giving attention to local music and dancing.

In sum, the *Timket* is a colorful festival celebrated all over Ethiopia to commemorate the Baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. The commemoration starts on the eve of the main festival on 19 January. The eve is known as *Ketera*, which means blocking the flow of water for the blessing of the celebrants. On the eve of *Timket*, people escort their parish church *Tabot* (replicas of the Ark of the Covenant) to *Timkete-Bahir* (a pool, river or artificial reservoir), transported by a priest of the parish and accompanied by a great ceremony.

The people spend the night attending night-long prayers and hymn services. Hundreds of thousands participate in the actual festival on the following day – 20 January. The celebration starts early in the morning with pre-sunrise rituals. These are followed by the sprinkling of the blessed water on the congregation, as well as other ceremonies.

At around 10 a.m., each *Tabot* begins its procession back to its respective church, involving an even more colorful ceremony with various traditional and religious songs. The viability of the element is ensured through its continued practice, with Orthodox clergy playing a pivotal role: they sing the praises dedicated to the rituals and hymns, carry the Ark, and preach relevant texts.