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Photo: Eyob Teferi



Patriarch appeals for long-lasting peace, unity

•Faithfull colorfully celebrated Demera festival

BY TSEGAYE TILAHUN

ADDIS ABABA - The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church urged the faithful and other fellow Ethiopians to contribute their

share in the efforts of maintaining unity and ensuring long-lasting peace in Ethiopia.

Yesterday, Ethiopia celebrated the *Meskel Demera* (bonfire) festival; the Finding of the True Cross colorfully across the country with the various religious and traditional

events in the presence of President Sahle-Work Zewde, archbishops, Ambassadors, senior officials and other dignitaries at *Meskel* square.

Speaking at the occasion, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church Patriarch his holiness

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Premier hails Meskel as Ethiopia's beacon of unity, perseverance

BY HAILE DEMEKE

ADDIS ABABA- Meskel is a testament to Ethiopia's multinational unity, where festivities like this showcase the harmony and shared narrative of the country, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) said.

In a social media message marking the *Meskel* celebration, the Prime Minister noted that the discovery of the True Cross, carried and celebrated by communities nationwide, reflects

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Mark Blood



Photo: Eyob Teferi

Chris Casabant



Photo: Dagne Abera

Marika Griehsel

Foreign tourists marvel at Ethiopia's Meskel festivity

•Call for greater global recognition

BY MISGANAW ASNAKE

ADDIS ABABA- Foreign tourists who attended the Meskel Demera celebration yesterday expressed admiration for Ethiopia's cultural richness, emphasizing the country's untapped potential and limited recognition in the Western world.

Tourists from various nationalities gathered at Meskel Square to witness the iconic event. Among them was Mark Blood, who

traveled from New Zealand with his family. Speaking to *The Ethiopian Herald*, Mark shared that they had also visited Gondar, Lalibela, and the Afar State. "Our stay in Ethiopia has been impressive. The diversity of Ethiopian culture, its history, religion, and natural beauty are breathtaking. The Meskel festivity is spectacular, bringing people together in good weather to celebrate," he said.

Mark emphasized Ethiopia's immense potential and expressed surprise at how

under recognized it is in the West. "Meskel is a huge celebration with so many people. It is new to us, but we are learning and pleased to be here. I urge others to come without hesitation-people here are friendly, and safety is not an issue," he added.

Chris Casabant, another foreigner attending the festival from the U.S., echoed similar sentiments. "The Meskel festivity is wonderful. We have spent a lot of time learning about the

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Ethiopia expresses concerns over post-ATMIS arrangement

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA -Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs Minister Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie stressed that any post-ATMIS arrangement should be carefully deliberated, concerning mandate, size, financing, and coordination.

The Foreign Minister met with Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary General for Peace Operations, on Wednesday in New York on the margins of the 79th UNGA session.

The two sides discussed key issues

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Provocative interference from any alien force intolerable

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Don't get lost in Addis; the jungle of mysteries

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Ethio-coders initiative: Nationwide campaign to develop youth digital skills

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FM Taye holds talks with Greece, Sierra Leone counterparts

BY STAFF REPORTER

ADDIS ABABA - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia Taye Atske Selassie met with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Giorgos Gerapetritis, on the margins of the 79th UNGA in New York.

In the course of their discussion, Foreign Minister Taye congratulated the Minister on the election of Greece to the UN Security Council.

Taye also briefed him on current affairs in the Horn of Africa (HoA) and Ethiopia's continued commitment in fighting against terrorism in Somalia.

Similarly, Foreign Minister Taye conferred with Timothy Kabba, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone and discussed the peace and security issues in the HoA.

In their discussion on Somalia, FM Taye noted that it is quite critical to maintain



the security gains from the sacrifice of countries of the region and investments of the international community.

He further stressed that the post-ATMIS mission should be decided after taking the necessary time to deliberate on all aspects of the mission, including

its mandate, size, financing and coordination.

Sierra Leone is currently a member of the A3+ group in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), alongside Algeria, Guyana, and Mozambique, it was learned.



Endashaw Tasew



Ahmedin Muhammad (PhD)



Muhammad Hussein

States encourage youth to join' Five Million Coders' initiative

BY YESUF ENDRIS

ADDIS ABABA- Regional states are calling on young people to participate in the Five Million Coders initiative, a digital training program launched in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As mobilization efforts expand, more youth are expected to take part in this transformative opportunity.

Accordingly, the Central Ethiopia State Chief Administrator Endashaw Tasew announced that focal persons have been assigned to facilitate the registration of participants following the program's launch. High school students, civil servants, and others are already engaged in coding lessons. He emphasized that the initiative is a critical step for Ethiopia,

as the country works to accelerate technological transformation and build a robust digital economy.

"This initiative goes beyond coding; it enhances our IT applications in key sectors like security, education, health, and other social services. Offering such educational opportunities to a vast number of trainees will transform work culture and create new job opportunities. Moreover, participants will become more competitive in global job markets," Endashaw explained.

He added that technical and vocational school graduates, as well as university students, are benefiting from the training, but urged even more citizens to take advantage of the program.

The Amhara State's Urban Infrastructural Development Bureau Head Ahmedin

Muhammad (PhD) noted that the state government is actively mobilizing youth across 14 zones and 8 town administrations to participate. "The youth are the ultimate beneficiaries. They will develop innovative skills through practical courses on digital technology," he said.

The Somali State's Innovation and Technology Bureau Deputy Head Muhammad Hussein called on local youth to join the training online. He stressed that courses in data science and artificial intelligence are key components of the program that participants should prioritize.

The Five Million Coders initiative, backed by the UAE, is being implemented in partnership with Ethiopia's federal government.

Tigray to supply 800 kg gold amid mining sector revamp

BY MISGANAW ASNAKE

ADDIS ABABA – The Tigray State Land and Mine Bureau has announced plans to supply 800 kilograms of gold to the National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) in the current fiscal year.

The State's Communication Director Fiseha Girmay told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) that efforts are also underway to bring 60 kilograms of sapphire ore to the market this year. However, Fiseha pointed out that security challenges in the state have hindered the revenue potential from mining activities.

"To ensure that mining operations are carried out legally, laws and procedures have been implemented," he added.

The bureau has set a target to collect 35 million Birr in revenue from the mining sector. This income will be directed toward the development of construction materials, as well as industrial and decorative minerals. Following the Pretoria Peace Agreement, the bureau is also working to empower ex-militants by integrating them into the mining sector, offering them opportunities to contribute and benefit from the industry.

Fiseha further emphasized efforts to revitalize the country's economy by addressing the shortcomings in the mining sector and improving the supervision and support provided to mining operations. To encourage productive investments, the bureau has introduced new regulations for investors seeking mining licenses, aimed at ensuring better returns.

With plans to increase income from the mining sector this fiscal year, the director highlighted the importance of tapping into the sector's potential to create job opportunities for the youth, all while ensuring compliance with the law. He added that the mining industry plays a significant role in driving social and economic change in Tigray, offering hope to many young people and helping to support their families.

Tigray State is known for its rich mineral resources, particularly gold. Historically, it was one of the largest gold producers in the country, contributing significantly to the national economy.

News



Dessalegn Ambaw (PhD)

EDIF raises 6.51 bln Birr from financial institutions

•Aiming for 7.3 bln Birr premium

BY ASHENAFI ANIMUT

ADDIS ABABA – The Ethiopian Deposit Insurance Fund (EDIF) announced that it collected approximately 6.51 billion Birr from member financial institutions during the past fiscal year.

Speaking at a media briefing yesterday, EDIF CEO Dessalegn Ambaw (PhD) stated that the fund had originally planned to collect 6 billion Birr in premiums but exceeded the target by amassing 6.51 billion Birr. He indicated that the organization is utilizing modern facilities to enhance service efficiency, build trust among depositors, and contribute to financial stability.

Dessalegn further said that the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, private banks, and all microfinance institutions are members of the fund. The insurance scheme provides coverage of up to 100,000 Birr per depositor at each member financial institution.

He explained that member institutions contribute around 0.3% of their total average deposits annually. EDIF is aiming to generate a 7.3 billion Birr premium in the current fiscal year.

“Ethiopia ranks 148th globally in establishing a deposit insurance fund,” Dessalegn remarked, noting that there are currently 86 member financial institutions, including 31 commercial banks and 55 microfinance entities.

Fund Operations Director MergaWakwoya stressed that EDIF is committed to expanding insurance coverage based on research and international best practices, with a focus on protecting financial institutions and maintaining depositor confidence.

Merga also pointed out that 97% of Ethiopian citizens with deposits below 100,000 Birr are covered by the insurance. Additionally, the fund is conducting research to further enhance deposit coverage, with 98.93% of the premiums collected from banks and 1.07% from microfinance institutions.

The EDIF is a government-backed organization established to protect depositors in the Ethiopian financial system. It acts as a safety net, ensuring that depositors receive compensation in the event of a member financial institution's failure.

Patriarch appeals...

Abune Mathias I urged faithful to promote coexistence and tolerance with a view to maintaining unity and upholding sustainable peace across the country.

“Currently, the world has been witnessing various challenges such as humanitarian crises, conflicts, various threats, tensions and others.” He called on faithful to ensure peaceful co-existence, ensure unity and maintain long-lasting peace across the country overcoming existing crises.

“Relentless efforts are need to practice forgiveness and to spread love in order

to overcome the ongoing devastating challenges in the country.”

As to him, the *Meskel* brings salvation and an occasion where peace, love and unity are always preached. The teachings of the cross and observe the Meskel holiday an exemplification of love in harmony and solidarity. Living in peace, love, understanding, unity and forgiveness are the symbols of the Holy Cross.

The faithful across Ethiopia yesterday celebrated the *Meskel Demera*, the eve of *Meskel* with various religious and cultural festivities nationwide

performing various religious rituals and other events commemorating the finding of the True Cross.

According to the teaching of the church, *Demera* bonfire lighting signifies the efforts made by Empress Helena to find the cross, which had been buried for many years under dirt and earth.

Similar *Demera* celebrations are conducted by the church throughout the country.

Meskel has been registered as world intangible heritage by UNESCO in December 2013, it was learnt.

Premier hails...

the power of collective effort.

Abiy also underlined that the Meskel festivity is more than a religious observance-it symbolizes national unity and the synergy of Ethiopia's diverse cultures. “The transition from woods to torches and bonfires represents the energy generated through cultural collaboration, showing the strength that different traditions bring to our society.”

Twigs are bundled together to build a large *Demera* (large conical bonfire that commemorates the finding of the True Holy Cross of Christ) signifying the power

of togetherness and synergy. Moreover, the celebration of Meskel in various ways by the different peoples of Ethiopia shows the age-long binding fabric within the Ethiopian society, and the shared narrative of the people, he remarked.

The Premier recounted the story of Queen Helena, who faced overwhelming challenges but remained undeterred in her quest to retrieve the True Cross. Her courage and perseverance, he said, are a powerful reminder that with determination, even the most ambitious dreams can be achieved. “Her discovery of the True Cross marked a turning point

in history and serves as a testament to human resilience.”

As Ethiopians gather with families and communities to celebrate, PM Abiy urged everyone to embrace their shared heritage and work toward a prosperous future, inspired by the resilience symbolized by the True Cross. “Our cultural richness is what makes Ethiopia great, prosperous, and respectable,” he declared.

Recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible World Heritage, *Meskel* continues to be a powerful representation of Ethiopia's unity and determination.

Ethiopia expresses...

related to peacekeeping, according to Foreign Affairs Ministry.

On the occasion, Lacroix praised the contributions of Ethiopian peacekeeping troops and the strong relationship Ethiopia maintains with the UN and the Department of Peace Operations.

On preparations for a post ATMIS mission, the Minister reiterated Ethiopia's commitment to combating terrorism, stressing that any post-ATMIS arrangement should be carefully deliberated, concerning mandate, size, financing, and coordination.

The Foreign Minister expressed concerns about external weapons supplies worsening the security situation and potentially ending in the hands of terrorist groups.



Foreign tourists marvel...

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and what stood out to me was the lovely chanting during the celebration,” she noted. Chris encouraged others to visit Ethiopia to learn more about its people, adding, “Everyone here is welcoming and friendly.”

Marika Griehsel, from Sweden, attended Meskel with 14 guests and expressed her excitement at being part of such a unique event. “It is beautiful to be here. We came specifically to experience

Meskel. This tradition is new to us, and we feel honored to witness it. There is no celebration like this in our country, and we are happy to be part of it,” she said. As a tour guide, Marika added, “I have visited Ethiopia several times, and I will continue to bring more guests here to experience this wonderful celebration and learn from Ethiopia's rich culture.”

The Meskel festivity, marking the discovery of the True Holy Cross, left a lasting impression on the visitors.

Marika concluded by expressing her hope for peace and prosperity for Ethiopia, saying, “This festivity truly celebrates humanity. We are happy to be here, and I will encourage others to join and experience Ethiopia with us.”

Recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible World Heritage, Meskel remains a powerful reflection of Ethiopia's ancient traditions, drawing international tourists eager to explore the nation's cultural treasures.

Editorial

A festival of synergy, hope

Ethiopia is home to rich cultural and religious significance. Outdoor festivals like *Meskel* highlight the country's diverse cultural heritage, showcasing a mosaic of traditions that vary across regions yet echo a common theme of celebration, resilience and hope. *Meskel*, which is an annual celebration commemorating the finding of the True Cross, is not merely an event on the calendar; it is a powerful reminder of the strength that lies in unity and the shared heritage of the Ethiopian people. It transcends mere tradition; it is a profound manifestation of the synergy between Ethiopia's diverse cultures, their shared faith, and the unity that binds its people together.

At its core, *Meskel* is a celebration of light and hope. The festival revolves around the grand ritual of the *Demera*, a towering bonfire symbolizing the Holy Cross discovered by Queen Helena. Ethiopia's vibrant outdoor religious festival, *Meskel/Demera*, was recognized as an Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO in December 2013.

The heart of *Meskel* lies in the ritualistic bonfire of the *Demera* where large piles of wood are arranged and set ablaze. This fire symbolizes the light of Christ and becomes a focal point around which communities gather.

Furthermore, the religious significance of *Meskel* transcends mere observance; it fosters a deep spiritual connection among believers. The act of lighting the *Demera* is seen as a tangible expression of faith, symbolizing the triumph of light over darkness. This profound symbolism resonates deeply within the hearts of participants, reinforcing their spiritual beliefs and communal bonds. In this sense, *Meskel* is not just a festival; it is a sacred experience that rejuvenates the soul and nurtures the spirit.

Meskel embodies the deep ties that bind communities together. The festival is a time when families, friends, and even strangers congregate, transcending geographical, ethnic, and social divides. In an era marked by polarization and individualism, *Meskel* serves as a beacon of togetherness, a living demonstration of the beauty that arises when people share their joy, faith and traditions.

In a message to the nation in relation to the celebration, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (Ph.D.) emphasized the importance of unity and the rich cultural heritage embodied in the celebration of the *Meskel/Demera* Holiday.

Speaking about the significance of the *Meskel* festival, PM Abiy highlighted its origins tied to Queen Helena's dream that led to the discovery of the Holy Cross amidst challenges and darkness. "The Feast of the Finding of the True Cross is the feast of the power of dreams, he noted, reflecting on the perseverance and faith that drove Queen Helena to uncover the cross."

The Prime Minister noted that the rituals extending from the transition from woods to torches and ultimately to bonfires symbolizes the energy generated through cultural synergy. This demonstrates how much power and energy the addition of different cultures brings to our society.

Abiy Ahmed underscored *Meskel* not just as a religious observance, but also as a celebration of Ethiopia's multinational unity. "Such festivals are manifestations of our harmony, common narrative and unity," he remarked.

As Ethiopians gather with families and communities to partake in the *Meskel Demera* festivities, the Prime Minister urged everyone to keep Ethiopia's values, traditions, and languages at the forefront of their celebrations. "Let us remember that together, our cultural richness makes Ethiopia great, prosperous and respectable.

Meskel celebration is a reminder that the country's collective identity is forged through unity, respect for each other's cultures and shared faith. The powerful synergy that emerges during this time speaks to the heart of what it means to be Ethiopian: a rich, diverse, and resilient community capable of facing challenges together while celebrating the beauty of differences.

Opinion

Meskel: Ethiopia's UNESCO inscribed intangible world heritage

BY SOLOMON DIBABA

Various religious and cultural celebrations punctuate the onset of the Ethiopian New Year. *Meskel* which is marked indoors among families and outdoors with the entire public in mammoth paraphernalia. *Meskel*, the holiday celebrated in commemoration of the discovery of the True Cross happens to be one of those holidays marked at outdoor venues, mostly open fields.

This year *Meskel* is celebrated in Ethiopia under the backdrop of economic and political events which among other included the fifth filling on GERD which is near completion now, Ethiopia's further diplomatic successes at BRICS, further successes on National Green Legacy Initiative in which more than 40 billion tree seedlings have been planted and 7% GDP growth in the country. Regrettably, the escalation of triangulated conspiracies on Ethiopia at the pretext of the nation's legal right for access to ports and proxy wars by internal armed groups have been witnessed.

Meskel, meaning the Cross in Amharic is an annual religious Ethiopian holiday among Orthodox Christian believers and the first outdoor feast in the Church calendar. *Meskel* takes place on the 27th of September, or 28th during a leap year in Gregorian calendar. *Meskel* demonstrates the unity of the people of Ethiopia and their joint desire for more socio-economic progress. It is one of the UNESCO registered outdoor festival which is celebrated at national level at the onset of Ethiopia spring.

In addition to its religious values, *Meskel* coincides with the end of the main rainy season (June to September) and the onset of Ethiopian spring in which fields and meadows in the country are carpeted with mesmerizing endemic daisies, locally known as *Adey Abeba*, with their captivating yellow colors which majestically envelop the Ethiopian fields. The daisies prevail for only two months and disappear over the next ten months to reappear at the same period the next year.

Meskel is also a time when many urbanites return home to villages. Neighborhoods and villages celebrate *Demera* in thousands of local celebrations.

The feast of *Meskel* started on the 26th of September with the celebration of the *Demera*, a ceremonial burning of a large bonfire. It is a special event that is conducted on the eve of *Meskel* to recall the smoke that supposedly led Empress Helena to the site of the True Cross.

The True Cross, on which Jesus Christ had been crucified upon it, was thrown in a ditch or well, and then covered with stones and earth, until Empress Helena, mother of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor of Rome, discovered the place where three

crosses that were believed to be used at the crucifixion of Jesus and of two thieves, executed with him were found.

Empress Helena known by her Ethiopian name Nigist Eleni had a revelation in a dream to make a bonfire and that the smoke would show her where the true cross was buried. So she ordered the people of Jerusalem to bring wood and make a huge pile. After adding frankincense to it the bonfire was lit and the smoke raised high up to the sky and returned to the ground, exactly to the spot where the True Cross had been buried.

The national feast of *Demera* is held at Meskel Square, a huge square in Addis Ababa, on September 26, the eve of *Meskel*, the official day of the Feast of the Finding of the True Cross.

That morning, the *Demera*, a tall pyramid of branches, decorated with *Adey Abeba*, daisy-like flowers, prepared at the *Meskel* Square and in public squares or at intersections.

At the *Meskel* Square, in the afternoon, dozens of Sunday school students and members of the clergy move through the square singing spiritual songs that last for hours. As darkness begins to set in, the *Demera* is set ablaze.

The following day, the official day of the feast of the finding of the True Cross, Ethiopians attend liturgy and a feast and celebrate with family and friends. Many use the ashes from the *Demera* to mark their foreheads with a shape of a cross.

According to official chronicles, the *Demera* festival of the *Meskel* holiday celebration dates back to 1600 years has been registered as world intangible heritage by UNESCO in December 2013, as the first intangible Ethiopian heritage.

During *Meskel* festival, a special species of birds known as 'YeMeskel Wof -Meskel's Bird' also appears. Generally, the word 'YeMeskel Wof' is used to call the four bird species, namely the northern red bishops, indigo-birds, whydah and widow birds, and yet it has more than ten species under it. These birds are also enjoyed by bird watchers during *Meskel*.

These birds are endemic to Ethiopia, and do not migrate from one place to another as other birds do. As September, Ethiopia's first month, is their reproduction season, the colors of their feathers gets changed in order to attract opposite sexes. Due to this change, it looks that they are new birds that appear only at this time of the year.

Meskel also marks a tourist season in Ethiopia. Thousands of tourists from many countries converge on Ethiopia to enjoy the ceremonies during the *Meskel* celebrations. They particularly enjoy celebrating *Meskel* in Addis Ababa at Meskel Square and in tourist attraction areas in the northern part of the country known as the

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



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Opinion

Provocative interference from any alien force intolerable

BY GETACHEW MINAS

Provocative interference in the internal affairs of countries of the Horn of Africa is not to be tolerated. The people and governments of the Horn countries have been committed to peaceful coexistence that promotes economic and social development. They are focused on raising the living standards of their people who had suffered from the yolk of colonial and post-colonial exploitation except Ethiopia of their natural resources.

Being the major source of the Nile River, Ethiopia, has been cooperating with all countries in the sub-region, including Egypt, in the development of the basin. Egypt, however, has been claiming all the waters of the Nile River unilaterally for its own economic development. As a major source of the river, Ethiopia deserves to have access proportionate to the needs of its population, which is the second largest in Africa. But, Egypt turns a blind eye and deaf ear to this fact and to the obvious natural endowment of Ethiopia.

In its thousands of years of independence, Ethiopia had been facing numerous external challenges, which it had been able to defend itself from. Just to mention a few, it had repeatedly defeated the colonial occupation forces and the alien intruders. Egypt falls in the second category of intruders which it had ventured with a wrong calculation. Emperor Yohannes IV, who was a strong, progressive Emperor of Ethiopia, had successfully repelled threats from Egypt repeatedly.

Of course, the Egyptian feeble attempt had been externally pushed just to end in failure and shame. These events had been referred to in history as the victory of the Ethiopian people and government over alien proxies and surrogates. The Ethiopian people have proven themselves heroic, gallant and courageous when it comes to facing an arrogant and infantile aggressor. This is proven in several battle fronts within Africa and elsewhere, including the Korean war.

Recently, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia has warned that anyone intending to invade his country should think about it seriously before doing so. The reason for that has been any attack would be repelled without any hesitation. His warning came at a time of rising tensions with neighboring Somalia and Egypt. Somalia has considered the MoU on maritime signed between the Ethiopian government and Somaliland in January, 2024 as an act of "aggression." It has responded by creating military ties with Egypt. It is on record that Somaliland broke away from Somalia more than three decades ago. But, Somalia considers it as a part of its territory.

Just to add fuel to the fire, Egypt has been delivering military equipments to Somalia. With such adventurous move, it has tried to hide its long-term interest of controlling

the Nile River by engaging and weakening Ethiopia in a fight of attrition with its neighbors. It is very obvious that diverting Ethiopia's developmental effort would benefit no other country in the region.

It is on historic record that Egypt has been involved in a long-running contention of its own with Ethiopia's decision to construct the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile. To make proper identification of the river, the Nile River comprises of the Blue Nile and the White Nile, the former contributing 85% and fully originating from Ethiopia. The White Nile which originates from other riparian African countries contributes a small share. The two tributaries of the Nile River join in Sudan.

The Blue Nile is vital to the livelihood of Egypt and Sudan, as it supplies most of the water. This has created conflict between Ethiopia and the two countries that are located downriver. They depend on the flow of water from the Blue Nile. Every aspect of life in these countries, particularly in Egypt, depended on the river. The Nile provided food and resources, land for agriculture, a means of travel. It is also critical in the transportation of materials for industrial projects and other large-scale undertakings. It is a critical lifeline that literally brought life to the desert. This contribution of the Nile to Egyptian economic development has been fully appreciated and supported by Ethiopia.

Following the recent MoU entered by Ethiopia and Somaliland, Egypt has reacted negatively. It has delivered a shipment of military aid to the Somali army in Mogadishu, said Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement last Monday. Earlier to this, the Ethiopian PM said that the East African nation had no intention of creating conflict. He also said, "Those who are afar and nearby" should know that "we usually embarrass and repel those who dare to invade us". He added, "Anyone intending to invade Ethiopia should think not just once but ten times because one great thing we Ethiopians know is [how] to defend ourselves."

Earlier, Somalia has been angered by landlocked Ethiopia's decision to reach a deal with Somaliland to give it access to sea. In this situation, Egypt has sided with Somalia and supplied it with military weapons and equipments. Ethiopia reacted to this by warning that it must stop meddling in the Horn of Africa and that it must abandon its "aggressive approach" towards the hydroelectric dam on Abbay River, which is at the heart of the conflict between the two countries for years.

Egypt took the issue to the UN as it filed a complaint against the dam construction, GERD, by Ethiopia. In response to this complaint, Ethiopia has rejected what it calls "a litany of unfounded allegations"

from Egypt. It is on record that the litigation between the two countries started in 2011 when Ethiopia begun the construction of GERD on Abbay, within its boundary. But Egypt refused to appreciate the dam project that contributes to its development by holding and preserving excess water for agricultural development in the riparian states.

Ethiopia sees the GERD as a project for prosperity, while Egypt considers that it will imperil its economy. Belittling AU's effort to resolve the disputes over GERD, Egypt took the matter to the UN Security Council which stated that the issue should be resolved at the regional level.

Tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt have worsened as the latter was forging closer ties with Somalia. Egypt has declared a new security pact with Somalia, which will let Egyptian troops station in Somalia and operate directly with their Somali counterparts. The stated objective is to strengthen regional security in line with the AU stabilization force in Somalia. This deal takes place when tension and instability heightened in the Horn region. This deal has also been strongly objected by Ethiopia, claiming that interested actors are operating to destabilize the region.

Ethiopia's objection has been made immediately after the bilateral meeting between the leaders of Egypt and Somalia. The major bone of contention between Ethiopia and Egypt is rooted in the Nile water. In 1959, Egypt and the newly independent Sudan signed the Nile Waters Agreement, seeking to govern and control the water flowing through the Nile River. Ethiopia, which is the major source of the water was not, however, present at the meeting that led to the signing of the deal.

It is on record that with the Nile River's flow on the territory of Sudan secured by treaty, Egypt could develop its Aswan High Dam in 1960. According to experts in the field, the dam was a developmental factor for Egypt. It could unlock the agricultural potential of the country, generating hydroelectric power.

Similarly, Ethiopia looked for the same type of developmental project with its GERD, a mega-project on the Blue Nile. Like any other dams, the GERD retains a certain amount of water to fill its reservoirs and turn its turbines. The dam is designed based on the amount of water available to downstream countries at a rate roughly equal to the volume of the reservoir. Thus, experts in the field have confirmed that the completion of the dam and filling of its reservoir does not cause any disaster for Egypt. The dam allows the Ethiopian government to use the Nile water only according to its own developmental interests.

Experts reveal that the geographic scope of Ethiopian and Egyptian competition may be expanding as their conflict on water becomes widespread. After Ethiopia signed the MoU with Somaliland, Egypt expressed

its open support for Somalia, as it is a fellow Arab country.

By cooperating with Somalia, Egypt tries to increase pressure on Ethiopia. Another national support for the dam originates from the Ethiopian Somalis who are interested in the economic development of their region. In this situation, experts are of the opinion that regardless of rising Ethiopian-Egyptian tensions, a full-blown war is unlikely to break out. The two countries are separated by the Sudanese territory that stretches over 800 kilometers. This makes a land incursion through war-torn Sudan and the Sahara Desert impossible. It is known that Ethiopia has no direct sea access, lacking naval advantages with which to intimidate Egypt.

Aerial attack is the only feasible and practical military option for Ethiopia. Large air attacks would have to cross airspace of neighboring countries, which is currently unpractical option. On the other end, Somalia is surrounded by an Islamist insurgency by Al-Shabaab and its supporters. Also, the mountainous central region of Ethiopia serves to limit the level of intrusion and control by its local and external enemies.

Generally speaking, geographic location limits the types of responses that every country has at its disposal. However, this situation may lead to the conduct of proxy war or limited conflict, which is more likely than a full-scale war. In this situation, experts think that Ethiopia would only have Somalia as a significant potential proxy. It is revealed that the Somali government has depended on local militias.

It is noted that Egypt endeavors to encourage sectarian tensions in Ethiopia. This may lead to the fulfillment of its ultimate goal of destabilizing the oldest independent country in Africa. However, the Ethiopian government would definitely take severe measures on any externally instigated chaos and unrest. It does not tolerate the slightest provocation that affects its sovereignty. In this situation, an Egyptian incursion into Ethiopia from Somalia should remain at bay.

The attempt by Egypt to station its military equipments and troops in Somalia under a recent deal is provocative and confrontational to the Horn countries. These countries, including Ethiopia and Somalia have the ultimate goal of enhancing economic development and raising the living standards of their people. They need only external economic support that precludes weapons of destruction. However, Ethiopia is determined to defend its interests and that of its close neighboring countries for maintaining peace, law and order in the region. In so doing, it prevents provocative interference in the region from any country.

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

Art & Culture

Don't get lost in Addis; the jungle of mysteries

BY NAOL GIRMA

Ethiopia is celebrating one of its oldest intangible cultural heritages, Meskel, a holiday which harks back 1600 years. More colorful outdoor celebrations, such as the Irrecha, Fiche Chambalala, Timket etc. are on their way. Meskel festival holds a significant place in the hearts of Orthodox Christians of Ethiopia. The celebration begins in every 26th September night with the day of Demera, as Orthodox Christians from all walks of life go to Meskel Square and other sites where different religious and cultural ceremonies take place to commemorate the finding of the true cross. The ancient history indicates that Queen Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, by the guidance of her dream found the true cross, which Jesus Christ was crucified on. She and her followers lit bonfires and the smoke led them, to where the cross was buried.

This significant day is celebrated every annually throughout Ethiopia and the festival, Meskel, was registered by the UNESCO on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013. Addis Ababa the capital of Ethiopia commemorates the day each year colourfully at Meskel square.

Addis Ababa, has also been going through lots of developmental changes over the past six years. Genet Solomon has been on the traditional jewelries and wearables business on Churchill Street. "The developments have added greater values to the City's major tourist sites. I have been in this business for five years. The wearables that I'm selling are beautiful and tells the history of Ethiopian people. I have many cultures in my shop. The corridor development added beauty and space to my business and many tourists are coming," she says.

Churchill Street is one of Addis Ababa's best places to be, where tourists can find traditional jewelries and wearable. The block has gained a new image by the corridor development project and it's still giving the City the international standards that it deserves. Rising businesswomen like Genet are having the test of its beauty and the better market opportunity. "Tourists are also enjoying the new image of the City as well as our service. Meskel is one of the festivals that draw many tourists to our city. The cultural vibe and the outdoor festival with many colors are significant for our tourism. In this case, everyone has a responsibility to keep everything colorful and maintaining peace is what we need to commit to," said Genet.

"Addis Ababa is a city of mysteries. It seems dreary here and very sleepy somewhere else but one could understand its vibrant past, present, and future by deep observation, according to Meaza Samuel, a young entrepreneur who dreams of spreading Ethiopian fabrics to the world. She prefers her business to be eco-friendly and original. Original cultural heritages like Meskel are the events, which Meaza and many young people shine with.

Meaza has been to several countries and her international experiences given her potential clues to come up with her ambitious dreams of spreading Ethiopian origin fabrics by keeping the eco-friendly business responsibility intact. Meanwhile, she has also deep affiliation and knowledge of her home City, Addis Ababa.

When she talks of the residences of Addis Ababa, such as Bole, Arat killo and Sidist Killo, one can see the deep attachment, with some old memories and the present image of these parts of the City, she has. She says, if a tourist wants to enjoy the modern lifestyles of the City, he or she can go to Bole. "Of course, several parts of the City are changing rapidly these days. There's a lot of construction going. But I love to go to Bole because it's a place where I can find culture, art, civility and delicacy from people with different nationalities."

Bole could be a place as Meaza described it but if a tourist wants to buy original Ethiopian traditional clothes, he or she has to pass through Piasa, Arat Killo and Sidist killo and arrive at Shiro Meda. This is the residence, where several colorful Ethiopian traditional fabrics are found and one should not be worried about what to dress for the upcoming outdoor festivals of Irrecha, Fiche Chambalala or Timket (Ethiopian Epiphany).

Kasanchis is another old residence of the City, where many luxury hotels are found. Luxury hotels and apartments may be found elsewhere in the City but the best thing about Kasanchis is that it is located at the heart of Addis Ababa. The same is true for Mexico, where head offices of governmental and private banks resided.

As Meaza stated it earlier, several parts of the City are changing rapidly, as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration, launched and executed different development projects over the past six years. The Prime Minister, with his vision of making Addis Ababa flower as its name depicts, introduced initiatives that changed the faces of the City despite the Criticisms coming from few skeptical communities of the



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diaspora. Of course, the Premier has made it clear, when announcing the corridor development project to the parliament that noises and criticisms were expected and going boldly towards the achievement of the project was mandatory.

The commitments of the Premier and the task force, which is mainly comprised of officials from the City Administration, have dramatically changed the image of the City and made it attractive to tourists. The *Entoto*, Friendship and Unity parks are parts of the City development projects that

can testify the commitments and their achievements. Such developmental ambitions could not only change poor images of an old city but also give tourism a chance to show its real identity of it. Outdoor festivals and cultural heritages would also shine and tell more stories about the historical City Addis Ababa. What has been done in the City is also expected to expand in many other towns of the Country.

However, if cultural values must flourish, the values of peace are also expected to be considered by citizens, and keeping unity is mandatory.

Science & Technology

Ethio-coders initiative: Nationwide campaign to develop youth digital skills

BY DARGIE KAHSA

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) officially launched the 5 million Ethiopian coders' initiative, a national initiative implemented by the Ethiopian government in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government aiming at providing online coding training for Ethiopian citizens on 23 July 2024. The five million coders' initiative aims to train up to five million Ethiopian citizens within three years. Minister of Innovation and Technology, Belete Molla (PhD) recently stated that Ethiopia is targeting to extend the initiative to train up to seven million Ethiopians during the coming three years.

The training provides fully-funded courses to equip trainees with essential digital skills necessary to establish a promising career in the ever-growing technology industry, the digital sector. Programming fundamentals, Data Science Fundamentals, Android Kotlin Developer Fundamentals are among the main courses provided to learners. The courses are provided six to seven weeks and following the completion of the training successfully, learners are awarded with skill-based certifications, according to Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MINT) of Ethiopia.

Providing the online coding training was immediately started following the launching of the program. And following the announcement of the program, Ethiopian youths started registrations and taking the online trainings. Two weeks ago, MINT Minister, Belete Molla (PhD) stated that "so far, some 157,000 Ethiopians are taking the coding training and the number is raising daily." Everyone across the country with internet access can take the training easily, Belete said calling the youth to use this opportunity.

According to Belete, Ethiopia takes the issue seriously and the performance is evaluated weekly. Regional states and federal institutions are working closely to sensitize citizens and to evaluate the performances. The continued campaign helps to aware the

youth generation to take the online training. As the opportunity is still open for everyone, regional states are calling citizens to join the online coding training to develop their digital literacy and skills in sector.

Melese Mengesha is among the youths who take the Ethio Coders training. Melese took the coding training parallel with his job. As to Melese, the training helped him to develop his skills he got from his formal education. Following the training, Melese realized that the skills he developed from the training are important skills to fulfill job tasks effectively and timely. Endris Ali, a youth from Assosa City who is taking the coding training told ENA that the training is a timely training to develop digital skills. As to Ali, the youth has to develop technological skills to go parallel with the technological developments of the time.

Dagmawi Kelbecha, from Addis Ababa also takes the online training. Dagmawi said that the training is an open opportunity for the youth generation to develop digital technology skills. These youths joins the training early immediately after they hear about the program as they believe it will be helpful to exploit the digital technology to create businesses and to find better job opportunities. The youths who joined the training are calling others to join the training as it is crucial to develop their skills and their digital literacy as the influence of digitalization is growing its impacts in the day-to-day life of the current world.

Federal institutions and regional states are continued calling the youth to use the open opportunity. In this regard, MINT is working with federal and regional institutions to create awareness for the youth and regional governments are establishing task forces to mobilize the youth generation to join the training.

This week, Harari Regional State President, Ordin Bedri calls youths of the regional state to take the opportunity to equip themselves digital skills. According to Ordin, the Ethio Coders program is a national initiative which aims empowering the youth, to promote

innovations and to exploit the development capacity of digitalization shows Ethiopian government's commitment. Ordin added that a task force is already established to coordinate the training in Harari regional state.

"In addition to equipping the youth generation to own digital skills, The Ethio-Coders initiative will help to create competitive and job creator citizens," Ordin stated. Hence, Ordin calls youths of Harari regional state to become skilled and competitive in the digital sector by taking the Ethio-coders training.

For his part, Amhara National Regional State Skills and Training Bureau and Science and Technology Commission of the regional state jointly call youths of Amhara regional state to join the online coding training. During a joint statement by the two bureaus of the regional state stated that the national Ethio-Coders program aims to develop technological skills of the youth generation which will help youths to exploit the job opportunities of the digital sector.

Deputy Commissioner of Amhara Science and Technology Commission, Yechale Yigzaw stated that Amhara Regional State takes the initiative of training more than 760,000 youths in the coders training in the region as part of the national 5 million Ethiopians. "The Ethio-Coders initiative is a national initiative aiming at equipping five million Ethiopian youths to make them internationally competitive in the sector," Yechale said.

The courses being provided in the training like the Android development, data science and programming and AI are timely courses to develop digital skills of youths. According to Yechale, the regional state has already established structures in the region to achieve the initiative and the structure is stretched from regional level up to the lower government structure, at district levels. As to him, so far some 20,000 youths of the regional state are registered to take the training.

According to Yechale, the regional state is campaigning to aware the youth in the region to take the training and sets a target to register 192,000 youths of the region at the end of

this fiscal year. In addition to working on awareness creation, Amhara Regional State Science and Technology Commission has prepared a center to register and train the youths, according to him.

Somali Regional State Government also calls youths of the region to join the 5 million Ethio-Coders training. During an awareness creation program organized in Jigjiga by Somali Regional State Innovation and technology Bureau, Deputy Head of the bureau Mohammed Husen calls youths to use the Ethio-coders opportunity to develop their digital skills as it helps the youth to compute at international level.

Capacity Building and Training Director at Addis Ababa City Innovation and Technology development Bureau, Amaha Sisay for his part said that Addis Ababa City sets a target to train 300 thousand youths in the 5 million Ethiopian Coders' Program. According to Amaha the goal of the metropolis for this budget year is to help 75,000 youths of the city to take the training, calling for all youths of Addis Ababa residents to register for the training.

Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Science and Technology Information Communication Agency, Technology Transfer and Development Director, Shambel Bezabih for his part told ENA that nearly 700 youths of the regional state are already started taking the training so far. The Director stated that due to limitation access to network and technology, there is a limited number of trainees in the region adding efforts are underway to prepare training centers in collaboration with Assosa University and other institutions in the regional state. Shambel calls the youth generation to take the training by all possible means as it helps to realize Ethiopia's digital transformation.

Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MINT) is calling citizens to register at <https://ethiocoders.et/> to take the training and following successful completion of the training, an internationally recognized certificate will be provided for the trainees.

Meskel: Ethiopia's...

historical route among tourists and travel agencies catering to tourism in the country. Ethiopia has now developed three world class eco-tourism projects in Gorgora, Koisha and Wonchi in Amhara, South Ethiopia and Oromia.

Meskel is celebrated as a grand religious occasion among the Ethiopian Orthodox believers because it is believed that a part of the True Cross has been brought to Ethiopia. It is said to be kept at Amba Gishen, which itself has a shape a cross.

The cross has a special meaning for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Christians of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church dangle the symbol of the cross on their neck.

Priests carry various types of cross with their ceremonial staff in conducting mass and other forms of prayers including a ceremonial blessings and sanctification of holy waters meant for healing the sick and casting out evil spirits from persons suspected of being possessed by demons.

Mario De Salvo says that "There is no country in the world that matches Ethiopia in the number of forms and types of its crosses. Ever

since Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity, the cross has appeared almost universally, not only as a liturgical instrument in churches and monasteries, but also in common devotion and in daily life."

From the cross stamped on the Aksumite coins, depicted in architecture and illustrated in the ancient illuminated codices to the astylar, manual or pectoral crosses made and forged respectively for liturgical functions, the author notes that "there is no country in the world that matches Ethiopia in the number of forms and types of its crosses." (Mario Da Silva, Crosses of Ethiopia, 2006)

Ethiopia boasts various types of crosses that are used on various religious and cultural occasions. The most popular ones are the crosses of Lalibela, Axum and Gondar. Tourists from various countries visiting Ethiopia make sure that they purchase various types of Ethiopian crosses that are made from silver and bronze, as well as carved from wood and marble.

This year's Meskel celebration also coincides with World Tourism Day is marked Thousands of tourists from all over the world are expected

to arrive in Addis Ababa and regional towns to mark the event. Meskel is a season of reunion of families who were separated during the rainy season due to torrential rains and over flooded rivers.

Despite the ordeals the nation had faced over the last two years, Ethiopia is marking Meskel and World Tourism Day with full optimism for promising economic self-reliance expected through import substitution of commodities like wheat through a bumper harvest in agriculture. Ethiopia has become a pace setter in National Green Legacy Initiative by planting more than 20 billion trees across the country.

Ethiopia seems to endure a lot of challenges in and out of the country but the nation is discharging its responsibilities both in the global and regional levels in terms of promoting pan Africanism and African economic integration.

Meskel is a season of peace and unity as the cross also symbolizes love. Ethiopians can in no way afford to hate each other and live in conflict as this does not tally with the culture of the people and their history of coexistence. The conflicts that have flared up in the country

over the last several decades have destroyed human and material resources of the country. All this could have been avoided over time so that the country can embark on peaceful socio-economic development.

The situation in the Horn of Africa itself is quite complex with volatile and fragile political, social and economic disparities coupled with the devastating effects of climate change. Ethiopia is making a positive contribution both in climate diplomacy and unity and cooperation among the African countries. This has to be further developed for the benefit of not only African countries but for the benefit of human kind across the globe.

The author of this article hopes that peace and tranquility will prevail across the country as the nation gets ready for the conduct of the National Dialogue which is expected to take place in the New Year. In addition, the writer hopes that the economic challenges that the country is facing due to higher inflationary rate will be reduced and more export revenue generated.

Although the road appears to be torturous, a bright future is on the horizon for the nation.

Society



Happy *Meskel* festival!

BY STAFF REPORTER

Meskel Festival, the discovery of the True Cross upon which Jesus was crucified, is one of the major Ethiopian Orthodox festivals celebrated warmly and colorfully by Orthodox Christians.

According to religious accounts, the word “*Meskel*” means cross in Ge’ez language to mean “cross.” So, the festival is a celebration of the cross.

The Origin of *Meskel* goes back to Queen Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, who discovered not only the Cross on which Jesus was crucified but also the three nails used for the crucifixion.

According to an inscription on the stained-glass window of Duomo of Milan, the largest gothic cathedral in Milan, regarding Saint Helena and the Discovery of the Cross, Queen Helena had a dream guiding her to find the lost cross of Jesus Christ. Then, along with her followers, she went to Jerusalem: a pilgrimage which according to tradition was the scene of the discovery of an important relic. By interviewing many locals and with the assistance of St. Macarius, the Bishop of Jerusalem, and burning incense to identify the exact burial spot, she discovered the True Cross. The smoke of the incense led them to dig the site and found out the True Cross which had been previously hidden by the Jews.

In her exploration, Emperor Helena did not only find the cross but also the three nails used for the crucifixion. The miracle of the finding of the Cross was fulfilled.

In fact other religious chronicles indicated that during the excavation carried out to hunt the True Cross, three crosses were found one after the other—but they were uncertain as to which of them was the True Cross. Thus, to find out which was the cross Jesus was crucified on, the Emperor brought a very sick woman in and touched her with all of them. The cross that healed her was declared to be

the True Cross and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built on the site.

Ethiopian Christians also celebrate the Demera and *Meskel* festivals every year in commemoration of the discovery of the True Cross upon which Jesus was crucified. The Demera festival is also marked by the burning of *chibo*, a large bonfire, as a symbol of incense Queen Helena used to discover the True Cross.

The festivals of Demera and *Meskel*, in addition to their religious values, have social and cultural significance for Ethiopians - they symbolize love, unity, cooperation, and solidarity among peoples.

In his best wishes to the Christian faithful on the celebration of the Demera and *Meskel* festivals, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that the feast of the True Cross is the celebration of unity in which dreams can be realized through perseverance and determination.

The discovery of the True Cross symbolizes Ethiopia’s national unity both in representing the power of collective effort, as the cross is carried and celebrated by communities across Ethiopia.

According to the Premier, the Demera and *Meskel* festivals demonstrate the true sense of diversity within our unity, as different cultures and traditions come together to honor this sacred day.

“This festival is not merely a religious observance; it is a celebration of our shared heritage and a reminder of the strength we possess as a united people,” he underlined.

“As we gather with our families and communities to light the Demera, let us reflect on the values, cultures, and traditions that make Ethiopia unique”, he further said.

Explaining the genesis of finding the True Cross, the Prime Minister said Queen Helena, faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles, refused to abandon her dream of retrieving the cross from its burial place.

“Despite darkness, closed roads, and widespread doubt, she pressed forward, fueled by her firm belief and through her courage and resilience. Queen Helena accomplished the extraordinary, indicating that even the most challenging goals can be achieved with faith and effort,” he underscored.

The PM further stated that Helena’s indomitable spirit and firm determination propelled her towards her dreams, braving the challenges and uncertainties of her journey.

For him, the queen persevered through adversity and ultimately achieved the extraordinary.

“Her discovery of the True Cross marked a turning point in history, which serves as a testament to the power of human resilience and the belief that with dedication and courage, even the most ambitious dreams can be realized,” he revealed.

Prime Minister Abiy added that Queen Helena’s story has inspired Ethiopians to never give up on their dreams, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be.

He also expressed his strong belief that together, Ethiopians can create a prosperous and respected nation.

“Let us embrace our diversity and work towards a future where Ethiopia is known for its strength, resilience, and firm spirit,” the Premier urged.

According to the head of the administrative department of the Patriarchate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Akalewold Tesema, *Meskel*, the Finding of the True Cross upon which Jesus was crucified, is marked as a powerful symbol of unity, cooperation, and solidarity among Ethiopians.

As the Head told ENA, the event transcends religious teachings, fostering a sense of togetherness and hope across the country describing the holiday as a significant religious observance.

The word “Demera” means “gathering,” and the festival is characterized by

devotees lighting torches to express their faith. The event embodies values such as unity, love, forgiveness, and gratitude.

According to Akalewold, the festival reinforces the values of unity and solidarity, serving as a platform for practical expressions of peace and togetherness.

“Preaching unity is a tangible manifestation of harmony. The holidays are marked by sermons promoting peace and unity, and the cross embodies the greatest value of uniting diverse elements, finding what is lost, and drawing those distant from God closer,” he stressed.

Religious festivals play a crucial role in fostering unity and solidarity among people, extending beyond religious doctrines.

“The church’s core teaching is unity and harmony,” he explained. “When we celebrate such spiritual holidays, we prioritize unity and, especially when we celebrate togetherness, we are united through sacrifice.”

Akalewold also noted that the festival attracts numerous visitors to the country, contributing to tourism development.

He called for the continuation of the interdependence and unity demonstrated during the holidays as a regular practice, urging all citizens to actively participate in preserving the festival’s religious significance and celebrating it peacefully.

“The festival’s recognition as an Intangible World Heritage Site by UNESCO is due to its promotion of peace,” he stated. “It is highly regarded not only by Orthodox Christians but also by others.”

By celebrating this festival with a spiritual ceremony, Ethiopia has provided a platform to peacefully commemorate its country as an intangible heritage on the world stage.

This opportunity has attracted a significant number of tourists, underscoring the festival’s broader cultural significance, he underscored.

Business & Economy

Meskel festival: Melting pot of diverse communities, attraction of tourists

BY ADDISALEM MULAT

It is worth mentioning that Ethiopia is recognized for a diverse range of religious ceremonies celebrated in attention-grabbing way in various regions of the country. The celebration of Meskel (The finding of the True Cross) is one of the ceremonies celebrated annually by the various Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia on a national scale.

Meskel, which literally means Cross, is a UNESCO registered intangible heritage. The celebration wins the hearts and minds of every Tom, Dick, and Harry at the stroke of a pen. The festivity is out of this world and beyond compare. In the course of Meskel festival most of the congregations adorn themselves head to foot with attention-grabbing traditional attires.

It is noteworthy that the festivity is a colorful juncture that attracts large congregation of devotees and quite a lot of guests decorating themselves in robes and traditional garments. To cut a long story short, the bonfire lighting in black and white indicates efforts made by St. Helena to find the cross while the Meskel celebration observes the finding of the cross.

The bonfire lighting is celebrated across Ethiopia on 26 September to commemorate the unearthing of the True Holy Cross of Christ. Celebrations begin with the building of the Damera bonfire in Meskel Square in Addis Ababa – a conical pyre of poles surrounded by bundles of branches and torches, decorated with green grass and Abyssinian daisies symbolizing the New Year, according to sources.

Hundreds of thousands of people from diverse communities flock to the square as colorfully dressed priests chant hymns and prayers and perform their unique rhythmic dance in front of the pyre. At the climax, the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church lights the bonfire. Meskel is celebrated nationwide regardless of age, gender, language or ethnicity. Participants are believed to receive spiritual rewards from the celebration and blessings from the Holy Cross, the sources went on to say.

Local churches play a key role in coordinating communities. The festival is also a time when families get together and migrant workers return home – reunions that result in the inflow of money, information and new ideas from urban centers to rural areas. Prior to the celebration, personal quarrels and social disagreements must be resolved. In this way, Meskel is an occasion for Ethiopians to promote their spiritual life through reconciliation, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

Ethiopian Orthodox Church followers celebrate Demera, an annual bonfire lighting ceremony on the eve of the Meskel festival—the finding of the True Cross, up on which Jesus was crucified. In a similar vein, it is a vibrant festivity celebrated by huge gathering dressed in robes, religious and traditional clothes chanting spiritual songs and showcasing various messages that give a picture of the event.

During the festival, tourists from various parts of the world come to Ethiopia to attend



Bonfire lighting (Demera); a colorful celebration held at the eve of Meskel Festival

the ceremony on the grounds that the festivity attracts the attention of the wider international community at the push of a button and become the talk everyone residing at home and abroad. In addition to its cultural and social value, the festival highly contributes for the country's economic progress via earning foreign currency from the tourists that attend the event.

It is obvious that Meskel festival is a religious event celebrated in the presence of high government officials, Ethiopian Orthodox Church archbishops, public figures, Sunday school students and other things of a similar kind with electrifying vive.

For the sake of truth, Ethiopia possesses several festivals colorfully in various parts of the country. These holidays are also celebrated with a single national theme. Beyond their local and national aspects, many of them have been registered as World Heritages by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Since most of these religious and cultural festivals are public holidays, they are characterized by high levels of social interaction, mutual respect and solidarity. During the festivity, countless number of Ethiopian Orthodox Church religion followers flock straight to Meskel Square situated in Addis Ababa with the intention of celebrating Demera, a yearly bonfire lighting ceremony.

In point of fact, in the month of September, religious and cultural festivals are celebrated, including the New Year's Day, *Meskel*, *Irrecha*, *Gifata* and others. These festivals are mainly public festivals celebrated outdoor by bringing people together.

The Gurage Zone Culture and Tourism Department has announced its readiness to welcome approximately 800,000 tourists for the *Meskel* Holiday, accompanied by a vibrant cultural festival from September 19 to 22, 2024. In an interview with the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), the Gurage Zone Culture and Tourism Department Head, Meseret Amerga, shared that extensive preparations had been made to accommodate both local and international tourists for the holiday.

She noted that *Meskel* has been celebrated in the zone for six consecutive years, retaining

its religious and historical significance while also incorporating new programs to pass cultural traditions on to future generations. "We are committed to celebrating the festival for the seventh time with similar dedication," she added.

The preparations include a state-level celebration of *Meskel* through a cultural festival in the 'Enor' district. Furthermore, an exhibition and bazaar in Wolkite town would feature local handicrafts, cultural materials, traditional foods, and art aimed at stimulating the local economy.

The festival also includes a fashion show, language and cultural symposium, and panel discussions, offering a platform to highlight previously unrecognized cultural practices. "These diverse programs play a crucial role in unveiling different cultural heritages," Meseret emphasized.

The head noted that the *Meskel* holiday remains the most celebrated and tourist-attracting event in the Gurage Zone, promising an unforgettable cultural experience for all attendees.

The unique features of the holiday have been promoted by pertinent bodies with the intention of making acquainted the wider international community with the inside out of the festivity. Every year, tourists come from various parts of the world with a focus on attending the ceremony.

As the celebration of the finding of the True Cross is one of the tourist attractions worldwide, concerned bodies residing in various parts of the world should attempt to familiarize the wider international community with the nitty-gritties of *Meskel* festivity.

In view of the fact that the *Meskel* Festival is one of the outdoor holidays, worshippers should preserve its unique values during the festivity more than ever before. The festival is an asset of the world heritage community and it is beyond religious celebration.

Meskel festival is one of the intangible heritages recognized by the UNESCO which needs the preservation of all Ethiopians as well as the international community.

Meskel Festival is one of cultural heritages that demonstrate the socio-cultural integration among Ethiopians. In spite of their linguistic and cultural differences, they have shared-

knowledge and values. It is celebrated in different parts of the country within various cultural and traditional contexts in a very mesmerizing way.

The Gurage Zone Culture and Tourism Department has organized the Meskel Festival aimed at stimulating the tourism sector and driving economic growth.

The Department's Head Meseret Amerga told the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) that the festival aims to attract both foreign and domestic tourists. This year's celebration is themed "Our *Meskel* Festival for Our Tourism Resources."

According to Meseret, the festival's arrangements highlight Meskel as a major economic driver for tourism, displaying the zone's rich cultural and culinary heritage.

"This year's *Meskel* Festival is being held in Garad Kebele, Anor District, about 50 kilometers from Gunchire town. The celebration takes place in Jefore, a cultural village that showcases the zone's tourism resources," she added.

The festival includes traditional events such as cabbage *kitfo* preparation, the *Demera* (bonfire lighting), livestock slaughter ceremonies, and other cultural activities. Elders inaugurate the festival, which strengthens social bonds among participants, regardless of religion or ethnicity.

As long as *Meskel* festivity plays a great role in attracting tourists from all over the world and generating incomes, the federal government should make use of all the possible means to acquaint the international community with the nuts and bolts of the *Meskel* festivity.

As the holiday is celebrated in the length and breadth of the country, Ethiopian Diasporas, tourists who had been here, journalists, travel agents and others must do promotional works in order to multiply over attendees of this peculiar event.

This celebration, if well managed, can go a long way in promoting the smokeless industry which is believed to garner the much needed hard currency in the shortest possible time. More to the point, people from all walks of life should stand in unison with the Ethiopian government in popularizing the *Meskel* festivity making use of a wide spectrum of effective means.



This is Ethiopia



Meskel festival to boost tourism, stimulate dev't

BY TEWODROS KASSA

Ethiopia is home to numerous cultural and spiritual heritages. It is the leading country in Africa through registering more than 10 heritages in UNESCO's prestigious world heritages list. And this means a lot to the country to attract a huge number of tourists to the continent. UNESCO inscribed *Meskel* in 2013 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The festival of *Meskel* is celebrated across Ethiopia colorfully on 27 September to commemorate the unearthing of the True Holy Cross of Christ. Celebrations begin with the building of the *Demera* bonfire in *Meskel* Square in Addis Ababa, a conical pyre of poles surrounded by *chibos*—bundles of sticks that tie together to be set on fire, and decorated with green grass and Abyssinian daisies (*Adey Abeba*) symbolizing the New Year.

Hundreds of thousands of people from diverse communities flock to *Meskel* Square as colorfully dressed priests chant hymns and prayers and perform their unique rhythmic dance in front of the pyre. At the climax, the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church lights the bonfire.

Meskel which literally means cross has been celebrated in Ethiopia for more than 1,600 years as an outdoor religious festival. It is a religious and cultural event celebrated on the advent of the discovery of the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified and the finding of this Cross dates back to A.D 326. Legend states that Queen Helena, mother of Constantine the Great also known as Queen Eleni in Ethiopia, went on a search for the True Cross and

found the location of the Cross in a dream after which made a bonfire whose smoke provided her with the direct location of the place where the Cross was buried.

Speaking to the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), Tourism State Minister Sileshi Girma said that massive preparations are underway aimed at creating an enabling environment for tourists who are going to visit Ethiopia to attend the cultural and religious festivals as well as the tourism sites of the country.

"September, November, and January see a lot of celebrations, like the *Meskel* and *Irreecha*, the annual Oromo people Thanksgiving Day, among others. These events are very beneficial to the development of tourism in the country and provide an opportunity to build the nation's image because many visitors come to enjoy them. In this regard, we will exert efforts to enhance visitors' satisfaction so that they can stay longer in the country."

According to him, such festivals celebrations, and World Tourism Day are expected to draw large numbers of tourists this month. Tailored packages will give tourists the flexibility to attend these celebrations while exploring other attractions, with states prepared to offer hospitality services.

"For instance, tourists traveling to Southern Ethiopia for New Year celebrations can also visit the Nech-Sar National Park, near Chamo Lake," Sileshi noted. He added that UNE-SCO-registered heritage sites and the newly inaugurated tourism infrastructure are included in the offerings.

As to him, the government expects substantial revenue growth from the tourism sector, especially during the peak

season from September onward. The second-generation Diasporas are also anticipated to contribute significantly to the tourism industry.

Meskel also marks a tourist season in Ethiopia. Thousands of tourists from many countries converge on Ethiopia to enjoy the ceremonies during the *Meskel* celebrations. They particularly enjoy celebrating *Meskel* in Addis Ababa at *Meskel* Square which is now built anew.

The cross has a special meaning for the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. They dangle the symbol of the cross on their neck to show that they are Christians and many people both in the urban and rural areas make a gesture of the cross before the food they have readied to eat as a quick gesture of thanksgiving for the food they are ready to eat. The faithful have deeper hearty affection for the cross.

Priests carry various types of cross with their ceremonial staff in conducting mass and other forms of prayers including ceremonial blessings and sanctification of holy waters meant for healing the sick and casting out evil spirits from persons suspected of being possessed by demons.

As an important tourist luring season into the country, *Meskel* should be an occasion in which thousands of tourists not only from Europe, the USA, and Asia but also from African countries converge into Ethiopia.

What is more, the *Meskel* Festival could offer a unique cultural experience for visitors to Ethiopia, allowing them to witness age-old traditions and customs that have been preserved for centuries. Tourists can immerse themselves in the colorful celebrations, enjoy traditional Ethiopian cuisine, and learn about the history and

significance of the festival from local guides.

Meskel is celebrated nationwide regardless of age, gender, language or ethnicity. Participants are believed to receive spiritual rewards from the celebration and blessings from the Holy Cross. Local churches play a key role in coordinating communities and safeguarding the element.

Moreover, individuals set a *Demera* consisting of a tree and a collection of bundles of dry sticks at their doorstep to lighten up it in the evening with their neighbors on the day. Every Ethiopian gives a special consideration to the cross.

The festival is also a time when families get together and migrant workers return to their birthplace. Reunions result in the inflow of money, information, and new ideas from urban centers to rural areas. Before the celebration, personal quarrels and social disagreements must be resolved. In this way, *Meskel* is an occasion for Ethiopians to promote their spiritual life through reconciliation, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence.

In sum, the *Meskel* festival holds great potential to boost tourism in Ethiopia, attracting visitors from around the world to experience its vibrant celebrations, rich traditions, and cultural significance. By promoting the festival as a major tourist attraction, Ethiopia can showcase its unique cultural heritage and generate economic benefits for local communities. With strategic marketing efforts and a commitment to sustainable tourism development, the *Meskel* Festival can play a key role in enhancing Ethiopia's reputation as one of the best travel destinations not only in Africa; but also at the international level.