

Ethiopia

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The Newsletter of the Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington, D.C.



Photo Credit--BBC News

Congratulations to Ethiopian Kenenisa Bekele, who made history in March at the world cross-country championships in Dublin by becoming the first athlete to win both the senior men's long- and short-course titles at the event. He was also the youngest winner in the event's history.

Somalia: UN Debates Reconciliation; Visiting U.S. General Says Terrorist Cells are a "Serious Concern"

The UN Security Council held a debate on the situation in Somalia in March, with over 20 countries discussing ways of "promoting the national reconciliation process," according to a UN report. US Ambassador Richard S. Williamson called on the Somali parties to attend the upcoming April reconciliation conference in Nairobi, sponsored by IGAD, "without reservations and preconditions". Ethiopia, a member of IGAD, is working alongside Djibouti and Kenya as well as the IGAD Secretariat to bring about national reconciliation (*continued, page 2*)

Border Ruling Set for Mid-April; UN Mission Extended

The UN ruling on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border demarcation has been postponed until Saturday, April 13, according to the International Boundary Commission. This is the second postponement of the ruling, which was originally scheduled for the end of February. In related news, the UN Security Council voted to extend the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) until September 15, 2002.

American Builds "Bridges to Prosperity"

Mr. Kenneth Frantz, American engineer and founder of Bridges to Prosperity, recently returned from Ethiopia having completed the repair of a the 2nd Portuguese Bridge or *Sebara Dildiy* ("broken bridge") spanning the Blue Nile, which was intentionally destroyed in the 1930s to halt Italian invaders. Mr.

Frantz became interested in launching the project after reading about the broken bridge in *National Geographic*. Before the repair, area inhabitants used to cross the bridge linking the Gonder and Gojjam regions by rope, in order to avoid the 150-kilometer round trip required to utilize the next closest bridge in the area. Concerned by the loss of lives and property that occurred while attempting the dangerous crossing, Mr. Frantz (*continued, page 2*)



The finished product



Mr. Frantz with Banchamlak, who received necessary medical care after safely crossing the newly repaired bridge for the first time, and her older brother.

Fossils Found in Ethiopia Yield Significant Scientific Discovery

A team of Ethiopian and American scientists working in the Afar region discovered million-year-old fossils that indicate a single species of human ancestor, *Homo erectus*, ranged from Europe to Africa to Asia during the Pleistocene era. The finding, published in the March 21 issue of the scientific journal *Nature*, confirms the theory that *Homo erectus*, the ancestor of *Homo sapiens*, was unified across the globe rather than split into two species. The fossils, found in the village of Bouri in the Middle Awash study area, also complete an evolutionary sequence in Africa between 1.8 and 0.6 million years ago. According to lead author of the published study, Dr. Berhane Asfaw, the latest Ethiopian discovery represented one more link in a series of fossils that clearly show human origins and evolution over the last six million years. The most important of the new fossils is a calvaria (skull lacking the lower face and teeth) found by UC Berkeley PhD candidate Henry Gilbert on December 27, 1997, in 110-degree weather. The skull was then transported to the National Museum of Ethiopia, where researchers working with dental tools spent two years removing the skullcap from sediment that had held it for a million years.

EMBASSY NEWS

Ambassador-Designate Kassahun Presents Credentials to Secretary of State Colin Powell

His Excellency Ambassador Kassahun Ayele, Ambassador-Designate of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United States, presented a copy of his credentials to Secretary of State Colin Powell on March 26, 2002. At the presentation, Ambassador-Designate Kassahun presented his Letter of Credence from President Girma Wolde-Giorgis as well as the Letter of Recall for his predecessor, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos, while sharing his official remarks on the occasion.

The Ambassador-Designate noted that he wishes to strengthen the already strong bilateral relations between Ethiopia and the United States, as the interests of both countries remain aligned in the pursuit of freedom, democracy and rule of law. Furthermore, he noted that Ethiopia remains committed to playing a constructive role in the Horn of Africa to ensure peace and stability and to combat poverty, and the support of the Bush Administration is critical to this mission. The importance of private sector development and increased trade and investment to Ethiopia was also discussed, with the Ambassador-Designate expressing his wish to expand upon his previous efforts as Minister of Trade and Industry in Ethiopia. Finally, he asserted that his country stands in sympathy with and support of the United States after the horrific attacks of September 11, noting Ethiopia's own struggles with international terrorism throughout the 1990s. (*continued, page 3*)

ADF III and OAU Session in Addis Underscore Need for Regional Integration

Addis Ababa and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) recently hosted the Third African Development Forum (ADF), which focused on regional economic integration in Africa in the context of the recent commitment by African Heads of State in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to create the African Union (AU). The event, which took place March 3-8, focused on the following themes: Economic Policies for Accelerating Regional Integration; Physical Integration through Infrastructure Development; Regional Approaches to Regional Issues; Institutional Arrangements and Capacity; and Peace and Security Architecture. Over 1,000 participants attended the event, including Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who noted that regional integration was the "premier political and economic challenge facing Africa today," and underscored Ethiopia's dedication to creating unity on the African continent. The conclusions of the Forum will be conveyed, through the OAU, to the Summit of Heads of State and Government, which is due to be held in Pretoria, South Africa in July.

In related news, Prime Minister Meles also spoke at the 75th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the OAU on March 13 about the need for an African economic revival to counteract the poor image of the continent in the political arena. He added that the full liberation of the African people and laying the strong foundation for the fulfillment of the ideals of Pan-Africanism still awaits the economic revival of Africa. Mr. Amara Essy, Secretary General of the OAU, and Mr. K.Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary of UNECA, also addressed the Session, reiterating the belief that African union represents the best interests of the African people. The event took place in Addis Ababa at the United Nations Conference Center.

Afar: Eight primary schools constructed by the Ethiopian Islamic Relief Association recently became operational in the Amibara region of Afar. The schools were built at a cost of 600,000 birr, and 540 children of the pastoralist society in the area have been enrolled. In the past, the Association has offered training to 16 teachers and eight education executives in order to upgrade the quality of education in the State.

Amhara: The Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation has provided satellite telephone service to six towns in Amhara state, with facilities constructed at a cost of over 2.5 million birr. The office plans to extend similar services to five more towns in the State soon.

Benishangul-Gumuz: The Supreme Court of the state has earmarked 7 million birr to enhance the capacity of courts, thanks to the financial support of the Government of Canada. The funds are being used to provide computer networking and a central database to provide enhanced efficiency to the state's court system.

Gambela: The State Culture, Tourism and Information Bureau disclosed that it has finalized preparations to publish dictionaries in the Nuwer and Agnuwak languages. The bureau has collected 3,200 Angnuwak and 1,500 Nuwer words for the first editions.

Harari: The Educational Mass Media Enterprise launched construction of radio broadcasting facilities in Harari, as well as six other states and the Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa administrations, with 30 million birr worth of equipment donated from the government of Japan.

Oromia: The Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) celebrates its 12th founding anniversary March 21-April 1 under the slogan of "Renewal Week". The anniversary will focus on the implementation of the Rural Development policy currently underway.

SNNPS: State President Haile Mariam Dessalegn said in March that despite the occasional conflicts of interests in the State, the model of unity in diversity remains intact. The President also expressed his conviction that the unity in the South would remain intact as long as conflicts in the State are addressed in a democratic manner.

Somali: A study on development and resettlement strategy in the State was finalized in March, incorporating opinions of clan leaders, settled farmers, pastoralists and civil servants. The study included plans on expanding educational, health and irrigation projects. In related news, two refugee camps in the State will be closed following agreements with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It was disclosed that when the 20,000 Somali refugees now in the two camps are repatriated, there will only be 44,000 refugees left in Ethiopia. 175,000 Somali Refugees have so far been repatriated from the country.

Tigray: The Regional Tourism Commission says 3,300 foreign and 7,331 domestic tourists visited various sites in Tigray in the past six months, showing a two-fold increase over the same period last year. The rise in tourism has been attributed to the end of the war with Eritrea.

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in the country. Additionally, the foreign minister of Somalia's Transitional National Government (TNG) addressed a closed Security Council session on Monday, expressing disappointment over a recent report issued by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that recommended against the establishment of a peace-building mission in Somalia because the security situation in Mogadishu was too uncertain for a long-term UN presence. In related news, while visiting Ethiopia, U.S. General Tommy Franks reportedly told the BBC that he has evidence that al Qaeda terrorist cells are present in Somalia, and it is of "serious concern" to U.S. authorities. He went on to say that he could not rule out the possibility of U.S. military intervention in the country.

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decided to repair the bridge, raising funds for the project to supplement his personal financial contribution to the effort. After a preliminary survey trip last June, Mr. Frantz and his team returned to Ethiopia early this year and completed the construction of the bridge in 10 days. The impact of the event was immeasurable, not only to the inhabitants, who could now cross the bridge freely and without risk, but also to Mr. Frantz. During the course of construction, Mr. Frantz and his team were touched by the lives they were able to help immediately, including those who were able to cross the bridge safely to reach medical facilities for treatment of illnesses, some quite serious. "The experience was much more than anyone could have ever hoped or dreamed of. Take the most powerful event ever experienced in our lives, and then multiply this times ten."

Ministry of Health on High Alert to Prevent Meningitis Epidemic

In response to the disease that has killed 121 people in Ethiopia in the last six months, the Ministry of Health announced that it has an adequate supply of drugs to control a meningitis outbreak before it reaches epidemic proportions. Already, the European Union, the US Agency for International Development and the World Health Organization have donated a total of over \$1.2 million in support of Ethiopia's intensive campaign against the disease. As part of the effort, anti-meningitis vaccination campaigns are underway in all localities affected by the disease, with over one million people in Sidama zone alone having received the vaccinations since November.

CBE Cuts Interest Rates

The Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) lowered the interest rate on loans from 10.5 to 7.5 percent effective March 4. It is believed that reducing the interest rate should help raise the financial capacity of borrowers to repay loans and promote trade and investment in the country, as well as encourage production and consumption of commodities.

Upcoming Border Demarcation: Government Says Development Can Only Occur With a Sustainable Peace

The Ethiopian Government issued an announcement on March 25 that Ethiopia would benefit from the forthcoming ruling on the Ethio-Eritrean border demarcation ruling of the Boundary Commission in the Hague, noting that a sustainable peace in the region was the bedrock for the realization of Ethiopia's Execution Capacity Building Program. The sustainable conclusion of the issue would create a more conducive environment for the realization of the government's development and democracy-building programs, according to the Ministry of Information, which also noted that avoiding another outbreak of war would enable the Ethiopian people to redirect their attention and available resources to development. Subsequently, the Ministry acknowledged that the prevalence of peace has enabled the country to travel a long way in producing skilled manpower, which plays a key role in reducing poverty and backwardness.

Ethiopian Airlines Experiences Delay in Launching Paris Flight

In early March, Ethiopian Airlines (EAL) announced new flights to Paris, but the launch was indefinitely postponed later in the month when EAL officials announced that the terminal assigned to the airline at Charles De Gaulle airport was not of adequate quality for the services the airline was hoping to provide its customers. Currently, Ethiopia's national carrier offers direct flights to London, Frankfurt, Rome, Copenhagen and Amsterdam in Europe, and has 47 international routes worldwide, in addition to 40 domestic routes.

SRRC To Attend Upcoming Reconciliation Conference on Somalia in April

At the conclusion of a three-day meeting on March 1, the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC) reaffirmed its commitment to participate in the upcoming IGAD national reconciliation conference for Somalia to be held in Nairobi in April. The leadership also called upon all parties in Somalia, including the Arta group, to participate in the conference to establish an all-inclusive, broad-based government for Somalia. A high-level Ethiopian delegation has briefed the SRRC leadership extensively on the outcome of the February IGAD Council of Ministers meeting, in which the terms for the upcoming conference were set.

Hilton Interested in Taking Over Hotels on Historic Route

Klaus Schack, General Manager of the Addis Ababa Hilton, said that the Hilton chain plans to take over operations of existing government hotels in the northern area of the Historic Route in partnership with private business interests, dependent upon the mode of privatization to be undertaken. Hilton is interested in modernizing the existing hotels on the route, using Addis Ababa as a base for engineering work and human resources.

UN: No Child Soldiers in Ethiopia

At a recent press briefing in New York, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Olara Otunnu said that he saw no systematic use of child soldiers and found no evidence of child abuse in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and that "no other conflict zone he had visited recently had been free of the problem." During his visit to Ethiopia, Mr. Otunnu visited the war affected Tigray state and held discussions with government officials and representatives of civil society and NGOs working on children's issues. He also addressed the press in Addis Ababa, where he urged IGAD member states to incorporate protection of children in war affected areas into their national planning activities.

According to Mr. Schack, the potential for the hotel business in Ethiopia is currently good, but the hotels on the historic route needed to be upgraded. Mr. Schack also noted that the Hilton had enjoyed a huge business increase over the last three months that was unprecedented in the last three years.

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In turn, Secretary Powell acknowledged the longstanding relations between the two countries and recognized the supportive role of Ethiopia in the global coalition against terrorism. He welcomed the newly appointed Ambassador and wished him well, reassuring him the support of the U.S. Government in discharging his diplomatic duties as Ambassador to the United States.

This official presentation precedes the Ambassador-Designate's presentation of credentials to President George Bush, which is expected to take place in the coming weeks.

In its 35th regular session in March, the Council of Ministers decided to refer a bill establishing a cooperative's commission to the House of People's Representatives for ratification. The bill enables rural citizens to organize themselves in cooperatives to address their basic social and economic needs.

The Ethiopian government focused on capacity building efforts in conjunction with the World Bank and local NGOs in March. In consultations between the government and the World Bank, it was agreed that the country's capacity building program would be implemented. In related news, the government has urged all parties in civil society to take part in the formulation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which is in its final stages.

At the 5th regular conference of the National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Council, President Girma said that efforts to import life-prolonging antiretroviral drugs at reasonable prices were being implemented, noting that directives on the imports and supply of the drugs have been prepared. He added that Ethiopia has formally requested that the UN include the country on its list of beneficiaries for an international fund that was established as part of a UN resolution on fighting HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Stephen Lewis, the UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa met with religious leaders while in Ethiopia in March as part of an eight nation tour. At a press conference, Mr. Lewis acknowledged the tremendous contribution of the country's religious leaders in removing the stigma attached to the disease, and acknowledged that he was very encouraged to see solidarity among various religious institutions in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The World Bank's lead economist Jee-Peng Tan presented a report on education in Ethiopia, saying that significant progress has been made in the education sector over the past six to seven years. Specific gains were made in regard to primary education, with student enrollment in primary schools showing significant growth recently. Ms. Tan noted, however, that the country must strive to shift its education from selective to mass education. Education Minister Genet Zewdie expressed her satisfaction with the report.

The African Development Bank and Ethiopia signed a \$46.7 million agreement to finance Ethiopia's Rural Electrification Program, with the aim of extending the national electricity grid and contributing to the development of the private sector through the introduction and expansion of small and medium enterprises. In related news, the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation signed an agreement with U.S.-based Cal Tech International for the generation of hydroelectric power in Amhara state.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry announced that appropriate measures are being implemented to help coordinate and facilitate the export of textile products under the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This response came days after the Textile, Leather and Garment Federation called for the government's support in improving the production capacity of the textile sector in order to take advantage of the Act.

In March, a thirty-member Ethiopian delegation attended Berlin's International Tourism Fair, the biggest tourism trade event in the world. In conjunction with the trade fair, the Ethiopian Tourism Commission held an event at the Ethiopian Embassy in Berlin that was attended by tour agencies, journalists, German officials, NGOs and Ethiopians residing in Berlin.

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