

A Week in the Horn 20.03.2020

News in Brief

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Africa and the African Union

Jack Ma, China's richest man, has pledged to donate 20,000 testing kits, 100,000 masks and 1,000 medical use protective suits and face shields to each one of the 54 African nations to help the fight against coronavirus. In a statement issued on Monday (March 16), Ma said his Foundation will also start working with medical institutions in Africa to provide online training materials for coronavirus clinical treatment. In total, 1.1 million testing kits, 6 million masks, and 60,000 protective suits and face shields will be delivered to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has agreed to take the lead in managing the logistics and distribution of these supplies to other African countries.

Africa should "prepare for the worst" as the coronavirus begins to spread locally, the World Health Organization's Director-General said on Wednesday (March 18). "I think Africa should wake up. My continent should wake up," said WHO chief, Tedros Adhanom. The number of coronavirus cases worldwide has now passed 200,000, according to the latest figures.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) last week on Friday warned the unfolding coronavirus crisis could seriously dent Africa's already stagnant growth with oil-exporting nations losing up to \$65 billion in revenues as crude oil prices continue to tumble. (**See article**)

The African Union Commission on Tuesday (March 17) announced that the African Union Commission and the European Union Delegation to the Africa Union signed the fourth EU Support Programme for the implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (EU APSA IV). The signing took place on the margins of the AU – EU Commission to Commission meeting that was held in Addis Ababa on 28 February 2020. The EU has committed 40.5 million Euro support to APSA-IV intends to, over the next four years, further strengthen the capacity and coordination of APSA components to adapt to emerging security challenges in Africa.

The newly elected Secretary-General of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, H.E. Wamkele Mene was sworn into office on Thursday (March 19) as the first-ever Secretary-General (SG). The ceremony took place at the African Union Commission headquarters in the presence of H.E. Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the Commission and H.E. Edward Xolisa Makaya, the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the African Union and Chairperson of the Permanent Representative Committee (PRC).

Ethiopia

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia on Saturday (March 14) has released the number of electoral districts (constituencies) for the upcoming general election. According to the announcement made by the board during a consultative forum held with leaders of political parties and civil society organizations (CSOs), there will be a total of 547 constituencies. Accordingly, Tigray will have 38 constituencies, Afar 8, Amhara 138, Oromia 178, Somali 23, Benishangul-Gumuz 9, SNNP 123, Gambella 3, Harari 2, Dire Dawa 2 and Addis Ababa 23.

The Ethio-Kenya Electricity Highway Project is expected to be ready for testing and commissioning at the end of this Ethiopian year, according to Ethiopian Electric Power (EEP). Ethiopian Electric Power (EEP) Communication Director, Moges Mekonnen on Saturday (March 14) said the convertor sub-stations are almost fully completed, and they are at testing and commissioning stages. The 433km Ethio-Kenya power transmission line has reached over 86 percent, he added. Upon completion, the project will promote power, trade, and regional integration, and contribute to the Eastern Africa Power Pool (EAPP) countries' social and economic development.

The Federal Supreme Court on Wednesday (March 18) has announced that federal courts will be in partial closure for the next 15 days due to coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. However, cases that require urgent action from courts will be entertained, according to a statement issued by the Supreme Court. Other cases will be re-adjudged and new files will not be accepted for the coming two weeks, the statement added.

Ethiopia refuses to be pressured by the United States into signing a deal with Egypt and Sudan over its dam on the Nile River, says Ethiopia's foreign minister. In an interview with The Associated Press last week, Gedu Andargachew said the three countries need to resolve their differences without outside pressure. "In the talks held in Washington, D.C., around mid-February, we were pressured to quickly reach an agreement and sign a deal before resolving outstanding issues," Gedu said, adding that his delegation told U.S. officials at the time that Ethiopia would not sign an accord under such duress. "Then U.S. officials drafted and sent us an agreement, which we also opposed because the U.S. only has an observer status," he said. "We are of the opinion that an agreement reached under pressure is not in the best interest of anyone party to the talks."

Uganda and Ethiopia strengthened their bilateral ties and agreements for the Nile Basin region last week on Friday, during a visit to Uganda by Ethiopian President Sahle-work Zewde. President Sahlework Zewde and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni met at the State House in Entebbe (center), where they discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. According to a joint statement released Friday (March 13), the two heads of State welcomed Uganda's ratification of the Nile Basin Co-operative Framework Agreement. Zewde said that with Uganda's ratification, two additional ratifications would facilitate the entry into force of the Agreement, and informed Museveni about the negotiations on the Renaissance Dam, Africa's most powerful electricity generator. **(See article)**

President Sahle-Work Zewde on Monday (March 16) met with Rwandan President Paul Kagame in Kigali to discuss bilateral issues. The tour was also part of Ethiopia's move to create an understanding and support on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) to Nile riparian countries and international partners at large. **(See article)**

A high-level delegation led by former president Dr. Mulatu Teshome last week has concluded its mission to deliver the message of Prime Minister Abiy

Ahmed to the leadership of the EU Council and Commission as well as to French president Emmanuel Macron. (**See article**)

Ethiopia has announced the suspension of schools, sporting events and large gatherings for at least fifteen days, subject to further assessments. The suspension starts from Monday (March 16) according to the office of the Prime Minister. But students of higher education institutions will remain in their campuses and dormitories receiving course content online. Religious institutions and places of worship were also urged to limit gatherings.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed has held discussions with federal and regional communication heads and regional health communicators on Tuesday (March 17). The discussion focused on coronaviruses (COVID-19) awareness and knowledge raising efforts, said the Prime Minister in a twitter post. “It is critical for communicators to play a positive role in equipping citizens at all levels with factual and timely information to maintain calm,” he said.

The National Defense Forces of Ethiopia on Wednesday (March 18) said it is working to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). General Adem Mohammed, Chief of Staff of the National Defense Forces, said a task force has been set up at all levels to prevent the disease. Following the outbreak of the disease, there will be no recruitment of new soldiers, he added.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Thursday (March 19) urged citizens not to discriminate against certain nationalities as virus cases rise, after reports of anti-foreigner sentiment in the country. Ethiopia has recorded nine cases of the novel coronavirus over the past seven days, and the United States embassy on Wednesday said there were a number of reports of verbal and physical harassment of foreigners deemed to be bringing in the virus. “As COVID-19 awareness efforts continue nationally, it is important to note that the virus is not related to any country or nationality,” Abiy said in a statement. “Everyone is equally at risk... Prevention efforts need not be a barrier to our humanity and disposition for compassion. As a global community, we are each other’s keepers. Let us not let fear rob us of our humanity.”

Ethiopia and Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) have signed a grant agreement amounting to \$18 million. The agreement was signed on Wednesday (March 18) in Addis Ababa between Admasu Nebebe, Ethiopia’s State Minister of Finance and Khalifa Bin Jassim Al Kuwari, Director-General of Qatar Fund. The fund will be used for the construction and furnishing of a specialized kidney hospital in Addis Ababa, which will provide services to

patients with conditions that may lead to kidney failure and those with kidney failure. The hospital will have a 6-floor building with a total built-up area of 6337 sq. meter.

Dr. Catherine Hamlin, the co-founder of Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation, has passed away peacefully at her home in Addis Ababa on Wednesday (March 18) aged 96. Dr. Hamlin, together with her husband the late Dr. Reg Hamlin, established a treatment center for women suffering from the debilitating effects of obstetric fistula. Over the past 61 years, more than 60,000 Ethiopian women have received the life-changing reconstructive surgery for obstetric fistula. Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed expressed his deep grief over the death of Hamlin.

Eritrea

Eritrean Ministry of Information on Sunday (March 15) disclosed that Desert locust swarm invasion that came cross border and that appeared at the Dahlak Islands has been put in control by the Ministry of Agriculture in cooperation with members of the Eritrean Naval Force and others before it inflicted damage on agricultural activities and grazing area.

Djibouti

The two-year-old Djibouti National Shipping Company has acquired its second container ship through an investment of seven million dollars. The company, which was formed under the Djibouti Ports & Free Zone Authority (DPFZA) with seven million dollars in capital, acquired the vessel from Greece. Named African Sun, the 14-year-old vessel has the capacity to transport 1,118 containers. African Sun will be the company's second vessel, which previously procured an oil tanker. "We would like to play a complementary role with the Ethiopian Shipping & Logistics Services Enterprise," said Aboubaker O. Hadi, chairperson of Djibouti Ports & Free Zone Authority, which manages the Port of Djibouti and oversees the management of the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone.

Kenya

Three people were on Sunday (March 15) killed when an ambulance they were riding in ran over an Improvised Explosive Devise on the Sangailu-Hulugho road, Garissa County. Among those killed were a critically ill woman and the ambulance driver. She was being driven to the Garissa Provincial Hospital

when the incident happened. After attacking the ambulance at Koran-Hindi, Galmagala area of Hulugho in Lower Garissa at the border with Somalia, the terrorists followed with a gun attack. North Eastern regional Commissioner Nicodemus Ndalana said the gunmen escaped soon after.

Somalia

Somali health authorities have quarantined four people over Coronavirus fears as the Horn of Africa nation tries to prevent the entry of the deadly disease into a country with a collapsed health services. Somali Health Minister Fowsiyu Abikar Nur announced that the authorities quarantined four people who have arrived from Coronavirus-hit countries. One of the four who came from China via Ethiopia was quarantined on 10th March, while the other three were quarantined on Friday (March 13).

Somalia's government on Saturday (March 14) has announced that it will not allow entry for passengers originating from the Islamic Republic of Iran, China, Republic of Korea and Italy in its country. The ban also affects travelers who transited one of the affected countries for the last 14 days. The move follows several measures taken by the Ministry of Health to prevent the possible spread of the coronavirus in the country. Meanwhile, Turkish Airlines on Monday (March 16) suspended its flights from Istanbul to Somalia after the Horn of African country confirmed its first case of coronavirus and took a similar suspension. The flag carrier has suspended all flights to the capital Mogadishu for two weeks, said a statement by Turkey's Embassy in Mogadishu.

Somalia has sought assistance from the global anti-piracy forces to help it capture 43 boats from Pakistan and Iran that are conducting illegal fishing operations in the Horn of African nation's waters. The Somali Federal Government has accused the two countries of continuing illegal fishing in Somalia waters, warning the boats will be pursued and will be liable to pay heavy fines upon their capture. Somalia's Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources on Saturday (March 14) said the 43 fishing boats mainly conduct their illegal activities in Puntland and Galmudug regions.

A total of 198 newly recruited Somali police personnel have graduated and are expected to boost ongoing efforts to maintain law and order in Hirshabelle State. Trained by police instructors from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the police personnel including 21 women, last week on Thursday

passed out at the Jowhar Police Academy. This is the third batch of Hirshabelle police recruits trained by AMISOM at the academy.

The European Union on Saturday (March 14) has asked Kenya and Ethiopia to organize a security summit on cross-border cooperation following tensions on the Kenya-Somalia border. Mandera County in Kenya, which is near the border, has been tense for more than a week now following clashes between Jubbaland forces and those loyal to the Federal Government of Somalia. The fighting began after Somalia accused Nairobi of harboring fugitive Jubbaland Security Minister Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur.

A summit between Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Somalia counterpart, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo in Nairobi has been postponed indefinitely. President Farmajo was scheduled to travel to Nairobi on Saturday to hold talks with Kenyatta on Monday (March 16). Kenyatta recently invited Farmajo for a meeting in Nairobi in order to de-escalate tensions between the two countries after Mogadishu accused Nairobi of protecting fugitive Jubbaland security minister, Abdirashid Janan, whose forces clashed with federal government troops in the border town of Bula Hawo. It is not clear what prompted the postponement of the meeting but the announcement came after Kenya registered its first officially confirmed Coronavirus case.

AMISOM troops in a joint military offensive with Somali National Army, SNA, on Monday, (March 16) liberated the bridge town of Jannale, a stronghold of Al-Shabaab, in Somalia. The AMISOM Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Tigabu Yilma Wondimhunegn, described the operation as successful as several Al-Shabaab terrorists were killed and scores wounded. He commended the SNA, AMISOM, and partners for the joint planning efforts and execution and wished injured troops speedy recovery.

The northeastern Puntland state has on Tuesday (March 17) wrapped up a 3-day consultative forum in the regional capital, Garowe with a final communiqué. The statement has called for a national-level conference that will bring together all the stakeholders [Federal Government, Federal States, and political parties] in Garowe town. Puntland says it will host the meeting to seek a lasting way out for the current differences between the stakeholders over the 2020-2021 parliamentary and presidential elections.

South Sudan

South Sudanese President Salva Kiir has finally announced last week on Thursday the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGONU) including the appointment of a female defense minister for the first time in the country. There are eight women in the national unity cabinet, two with the important portfolios of the foreign affairs and the defense. Meanwhile UN Chief, Guterres “commends the spirit of compromise and collaboration displayed by the parties which led to this important development,” said Stephane Dujarric the UN Spokesman in a statement on Friday. “He encourages the South Sudanese parties and their leaders to make additional efforts to meet the 35 percent quota for the representation of women throughout the peace process,” he further added.

The newly appointed Deputy Interior Minister Mabior Garang de Mabior said he would quit the government within eight months if the security arguments are not fully implemented. Mabior who is a leading member of the SPLM-IO released a statement on Sunday (March 15) full of skepticism about the seriousness of President Kiir to achieve democratic reforms during the three-year transitional period. “I was going to turn down the portfolio but after many Comrades pleaded with me, I decided to take up the post. My position remains the same despite accepting to participate in the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGONU),” he said. The eldest son of late John Garang de Mabior, founder of the historical SPLM said that it was difficult to “fathom” that how after the pre-transitional period and the two extensions the security arrangements are implemented.

“The SPLA (IO), Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration, Lt. General James Koang Chuol Ranley and the Deputy Director of National Security Services (NSS) Maj. Gen. James Wang Chany, with their negotiating team has left and deserted the movement and officially joined the government (...),” said the SPLA-IO military spokesman in a statement released on Tuesday (March 17) evening. The statement added that the “SPLA-IO leadership is unaware (...) of what makes them deserting the movement”. The three senior military commanders had been part of the group’s negotiating team.

Sudan

Talks on the security arrangements between the Sudanese government and armed groups in Darfur begin on Wednesday (March 18), said the South Sudanese mediation spokesman Dhieu Matouk. The government and the armed groups agreed to conclude negotiations with the security arrangements as saying it would become a technical issue after political accords. Last month

the two sides extended the peace talks until 9 April. “Negotiations on the security arrangements will begin on Wednesday evening after the arrival of the negotiating team from the government side in Juba today,” Matouk told reporters on Tuesday evening.

Sudan has confirmed its first case of the coronavirus, the federal ministry of health said last week on Friday. The over-fifty man who is from Khartoum has died on Thursday, March 12, according to a statement released on Friday. He was in the United Arab Emirates during the first week of March. In a tweet he wrote after the announcement of the first case of Coronavirus, Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok called on the Sudanese to be cautious and to follow the directives released by the federal health ministry. Meanwhile, the Government of Sudan on Saturday (March 14) has ordered the closure of schools and universities for a month and restricted mass gatherings and on Monday (March 16) declared a public health state of emergency to address coronavirus and decided to shut its ports and airports to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The transitional government and the SPLM-N led by Malik Agar on Saturday (March 14) initialled the Political Document on issues of governance, powers and powers in the Blue Nile and the South Kordofan states. The text was endorsed by Hassan Nasrallah, member of the government delegation, Abdallah Eisa Zayed for the SPLM-N Agar and Dhieu Matouk for the mediation. The agreement included the system of government in the Two Areas, boundaries of the states of Blue Nile, South and West Kordofan, Nuba Mountains area, wealth and power-sharing, phases of security arrangements, identity, and representation of women. The SPLM-N Agar called for a large regional autonomy during the peace negotiations saying it will join the other democratic forces during the constitutional conference to establish a secular state in Sudan.

The Sudanese government and Darfur armed groups have agreed on a set of mechanisms establishing transparency in the management of funds allocated to the implementation of the peace agreement, recovery and development programs. The parties finalized, on Wednesday (March 18), discussions on the wealth distribution as they are now negotiating the security arrangements. The framework of wealth sharing addresses issues related to the management and distribution of resources and mechanisms to manage the development and reconstruction of the war-devastated region.

ECA: Coronavirus crisis could seriously dent Africa's already stagnant growth

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) last week on Friday warned the unfolding coronavirus crisis could seriously dent Africa's already stagnant growth with oil-exporting nations losing up to US\$ \$65 billion in revenues as crude oil prices continue to tumble. Speaking at a Press Conference in Addis Ababa, ECA Executive Secretary, Vera Songwe, said having already strongly hit Africa's major trading partner, China, COVID-19 was inevitably impacting Africa's trade.

She said although a few COVID-19 cases have been reported in some 15 countries far, by the time the Press Conference was held, the crisis was set to deal with African economies a severe blow. "Africa may lose half of its GDP with growth falling from 3.2% to about 2 % due to a number of reasons which include the disruption of global supply chains," said Ms, Songwe, adding the Continent's interconnectedness to affected economies of the European Union, China and the United States was causing ripple effects. She said the continent would need up to US\$ 10.6 billion in unanticipated increases in health spending to curtail the virus from spreading, while on the other hand revenue losses could lead to unsustainable debt. COVID-19, Ms. Songwe said, could reduce Nigeria's total exports of crude oil in 2020 by between US\$ 14 billion and US\$ 19 billion.

The ECA estimates COVID-19 could lead to Africa's export revenues from fuels falling at around US\$ 101 billion in 2020. Remittances and tourism are also being affected as the virus continues to spread worldwide, resulting in a decline in FDI flows; capital flight; domestic financial market tightening; and a slow-down in investments – hence job losses. Pharmaceuticals, imported largely from Europe and other COVID-19 affected partners from outside the continent, could see their prices increasing and availability reduced for Africans. With nearly two-thirds of African countries being net importers of basic food, shortages are feared to severely impact food availability and food security. Furthermore, negative consequences are expected to worsen, if COVID-19 develops into an outbreak in Africa. In addition, a decline in commodity prices could lead to fiscal pressures for Africa's economic power houses such as South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt, and Angola.

Speaking at the same Press Conference, Stephen Karingi, Director of the ECA's Regional Integration and Trade Division, said there, however, was an opportunity the Continent could take advantage of as trading within

the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is set to commence this July. “The intra-African market could help mitigate some of the negative effects of COVID-19 through limiting dependence on external partners, especially in pharmaceuticals and basic food,” said Mr. Karingi, adding diversifying economies away from fuel-driven was vital beyond COVID-19. He emphasized the need for the continent to urgently implement the AfCFTA as he urged African countries who export drugs to prioritize selling on the African market.

The ECA, in a presentation on the economic effects of the COVID-19 on Africa, suggests African governments could review and revise their budgets to reprioritize spending towards mitigating expected negative impacts from COVID-19 on their economies. As a safety net, the think tank is urging governments to provide incentives for food importers to quickly forward purchases to ensure sufficient food reserves in key basic foods items. Mr. Karingi said fiscal stimulus packages are also crucial if the continent is to weather the COVID-19 storm which has now claimed over 5,000 lives globally and infected 139,637 people.

President Museveni calls for urgently convening a Summit of the Nile Basin Commission

At the invitation of President of the Republic of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Sahle-Work Zewde, paid a one-day working visit to the Republic of Uganda on 13 March 2020. According to a statement issued by the presidents, the two Heads of State held official talks at State House, Entebbe in a warm and cordial atmosphere. The two leaders exchanged views on a wide range of bilateral, regional and international matters of mutual interest.

On the Nile Basin, President Sahle-Work Zewde welcomed Uganda’s ratification of the Cooperative Framework Agreement. She noted that with Uganda’s ratification, an additional two ratifications would facilitate the entry into force of the Agreement. President Sahle-Work Zewde briefed President Museveni on the negotiations regarding the GERD. President Museveni reiterated the importance of ensuring the equitable and sustainable use of the River Nile waters. The two leaders recognized the strategic importance of the Nile for all the Riparian Countries and the livelihood of their peoples and the need to solve any issues among the countries within the framework of African

solutions to African Problems. President Museveni emphasized the need to urgently convene a Summit of the Nile Basin Commission so that the Heads of State have a frank discussion on the issues of the Nile.

On Bilateral matters, the two Heads of State noted with satisfaction the cordial relations that exist between the two countries. They noted the existing cooperation in various fields including transport, trade, tourism, defense, and security, and pledged to continue closely working together for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

On Regional issues, the two Head of States exchanged views on the state of peace and security in the IGAD region and Africa at large. They welcomed the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan, pointing out that it is a key milestone in the South Sudan Peace Process. They urged all the Parties to commit to the restoration of peace and stability in South Sudan. On the situation in The Sudan, they noted the ongoing Juba Peace Process on Sudan and encouraged all the Parties to negotiate in good faith for the good of the country. They condemned the recent attempted assassination of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. They emphasized the need for the AMISOM to continue supporting the Federal Government of Somalia to strengthen its capacity to maintain peace and stability ahead of the upcoming elections. They reiterated the need for AMISOM to maintain a strong presence in Somalia and to avoid the premature demands for a troop drawdown, which would affect the gains made so far.

President Sahle-Work Zewde expressed her appreciation to President Museveni, the government and the people of the Republic of Uganda for the warm hospitality extended to her and her delegation.

... and President Sahle-work visits Rwanda

President Sahle-Work exchanged views with the president of Rwanda, President Paul Kagame on Monday (March 16) in Kigali, on recent developments about the GERD talks.

In his remarks, President Paul Kagame underscored that cooperation among the Nile Basin countries should take into account the scientific analysis provided by technical experts. As Egypt considers the Nile as a survival issue, it has to also acknowledge the natural rights of riparian countries to exploit the

resource, Kagame added. Noting that the Nile issue is an issue for all riparian countries, the Rwandan president called on to solve disputes over the river through Africa-based discussions and negotiation forums, adding that his country is committed to being part of the solution.

President Sahle-work for her part said Ethiopia has been committed to establishing the principle of reasonable and equitable water use among the Nile Basin countries. Citing the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), as an achievement that stems from Ethiopia's commitment, the President underscored that Ethiopia has been working closely with the rest of the riparian countries. Ethiopia has also been facilitating comprehensive engagements to address the concerns of the riparian countries since the inception of the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, President Sahle-work added. She hoped the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles that was signed in Khartoum between Ethiopia, Sudan and, Egypt would be implemented and prove Ethiopia's stance that the Nile Basin can be a source of cooperation rather than conflict and misunderstanding.

Former President Dr. Mulatu Teshome Delivers PM Abiy Ahmed's Message on GERD to EU and French Officials

A high-level delegation led by former president Dr. Mulatu Teshome has concluded its mission to deliver the message of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to the leadership of the EU Council and Commission as well as to French president Emmanuel Macron.

The message to Council president Charles Michel was delivered to Mr. Francois Roux, Chief of Cabinet while the message to EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, was delivered to Josep Borrell, Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union.

On the following day, the message to President Macron was delivered to his senior adviser for African Affairs Franck Paris.

During his encounter with the EU and French officials, Dr. Mulatu explained Ethiopia has been committed to finding a win- win solution to the ongoing negotiation between Ethiopia, Egypt and the Sudan with regards to the first filling and annual operation of the GERD.

He explained at length Ethiopia's commitment, from the outset, to promote the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization and not causing significant harm.

Dr, Mulatu has further explained that based on the clear stipulation of the Declaration of Principles signed between the three parties in 2015 Ethiopia will have to continue the first filling of the GERD in parallel with the construction of the Dam.

He further expressed the need to set the record straight that Ethiopia has never backed down on the ongoing negotiations on the matter but rather requested all parties to the negotiation for more time to conclude its national consultation on the status of the negotiation.

Both the EU and the French officials have noted Ethiopia's intent to look for a win- win solution.

They have also further affirmed the discussion has helped them understand what salient differences lay in the negotiation and expressed their wishes for the three parties to reach a mutual understanding on the matter.

The engagement is believed to have helped clear Ethiopia's position on the status of the negotiation and get an understanding from the EU and France.

The tour is part of Ethiopia's intention to create an understanding and support on the ongoing tripartite negotiation on the first filling and annual operation of the GERD to Nile Riparian countries and international partners at large.