

Ethiopian Weekly



Press Digest

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The Week's focus

In Government Media

House nullifies sub-article in Ethiopian Election Law

The House of Peoples' Representatives has ruled out an election promulgation that calls for the resignation of candidates from government offices.

The House, during its regular session, December 2 unanimously voted for the nullification of Article 46/1 of the Ethiopian Election Law (Proclamation Number 111/87).

The void sub-article had it that any private or party affiliated candidate, except political appointees, must resign from government office.

House members said lifting the restriction signifies wider opportunities for citizens in government offices to run for elections. According to members of Parliament, the decision would also bolster confidence on the part of the candidates in addition to ensuring the rights of citizens.

Meanwhile, the House has also endorsed the Ethio-Yemen agreement that provides for bilateral investment promotion and security, technical, industrial and cultural co-operation.

It has also approved the co-operation agreement reached between the Ethiopian Foreign Trade Promotion Agency and its Yemeni counterpart. (*Addis Zemen*, December 3/99)

Ethiopia will not sign document that fails to ensure its sovereignty: Meles

Ethiopia will not kneel down to any pressure imposed on the country to accept the Technical Arrangements, unless the document is prepared to guarantee its sovereignty, Prime Minister **Meles Zenawi** said.

In an exclusive interview he gave to the Ethiopian Television December 6 Meles said that the

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EDITORIAL POLICY

The objective of *Press Digest* is to provide useful information through a varied but balanced selection and objective presentation of news and views. The views expressed in the selected items do not necessarily represent the views of the editors.

spotlight has switched to South Africa where Mengistu is currently receiving medical treatment. And there are reports that Ethiopians had requested his extradition from there. BBC reporter **Caroline Dempster** has been following the story. On the line, BBC asked her how the South Africans responded.

Caroline Dempster: The South African government's position is that they are not aware of any formal request from the Ethiopian government to extradite Mengistu Haile Mariam. There is no extradition treaty between South Africa and Ethiopia. And, according to the South African Justice Minister, the South African government is not at all looking at the prospect of prosecuting Mengistu in South Africa. "After all, Mengistu has not committed any offense in South Africa." Those were his actual words.

BBC: *The Official line is that the South Africans haven't been approached formally. And even in our programme we have heard the Ethiopians saying that they are after Mengistu. They want South African assistance. I presume this whole affair is rather embarrassing for the government of South Africa.*

Caroline Dempster: Well, there does appear to be quite a lot of confusion surrounding the status of Mengistu in South Africa. He was allowed into the country for medical treatment on humanitarian grounds. He has the status of a refugee in Zimbabwe. And, very early on in the day, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry here said it would be wrong to hound Mengistu as a refugee. He said that if South Africa was preaching reconciliation, how could one expect South Africa to bring Mengistu to book. So this was the stance that was taken initially by the South African government. However, it would appear as if the stakes have been raised slightly by a letter that Human Rights Watch, the International Human Rights organization, sent to the justice ministry asking South Africa to try Mengistu Haile Mariam under a customary international law. And in terms of the South African constitution and according to the views of legal experts, that could be entirely possible. South Africa could try Mengistu instead of deporting him to Ethiopia.

BBC: *Now the government in Addis hasn't been slow in pointing out that, in the past, Mengistu offered quite a lot of support to the African National Congress (ANC) when they were struggling against*

apartheid. But what is the relationship between Mengistu and the ANC government like?

Caroline Dempster: I can't say what the relationship is like now. But, what I can say is that, from the reaction that I have had from government spokespeople, from the reactions and the statements that they have made in the media, they are not prepared to pursue this case. It doesn't appear as if they are willing to prosecute or even contemplate the matter of prosecuting Mengistu Haile Mariam. It seems as if a political decision was taken to allow Mengistu enter South Africa, and that a political decision has been taken to allow him to leave unscathed.

BBC: *Just how ill is he? Do we know what is actually wrong with him?*

Caroline Dempster: It has been quite hard to find out exactly where Mengistu is receiving treatment. What we do know now is that he is at a private clinic in Johannesburg where he is receiving treatment for a heart condition. And how serious it is, I haven't been able to get that information out of the hospital concerned. It is also not clear how much longer he is going to be in hospital for. What I do know is that he was not able to get the treatment he needed in Zimbabwe. And that is why he is here. (*Focus on Africa, BBC, November 3/99, monitored by PD*)

Former dictator Mengistu back in Zimbabwe; says the present Ethiopian rulers are a bunch of a minority from the "Tigray tribe"

The former Ethiopian dictator Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam is now back in his exile home in Zimbabwe, after receiving medical treatment in South Africa. Reports say that Ethiopian authorities had asked the South African government to extradite the former head of state to Ethiopia to face charges of genocide. Veronica Edwards has been speaking to Mengistu Haile Mariam on the line to Harare. She first asked him what his medical condition was.

Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam: I was a little bit ill. Actually in my stomach. My colleagues in the two countries have arranged the tour for me. I went there. There were examinations by different experts. And I found that I have ulcer. They call it peptic ulcer, which is a little bit serious unless you get a treatment at the proper time. So I got some

treatment. I found what my problem is . So I came back.

Veronic Edwards: *Is it true that you fled South Africa, because you are worried that you are going to be extradited to your former country to stand trial there?*

Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam: No! No! This thing has been exaggerated a lot. In the first place, the present government of South Africa are my comrade-in-arms, and friends and colleagues. There is no such kind of tendency in that country towards me. In fact, there was some kind of pressure from my political opponents to do so. The answer that the South African government has given to the Addis Ababa government is: "There is no crime in the history of mankind as Apartheid."

Veronic Edwards: *Were you afraid for your life while you were in the hospital?*

Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam: No! I was well secured. The place was well arranged. In fact, I was not only getting treatment but I was also relaxing. Every thing has been exaggerated. There was no such kind of pressure at all.

Veronic Edwards: *Are you glad now to be back in Zimbabwe?*

Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam: Of course. Zimbabwe is my second home. Everybody must be glad to be back home.

Veronic Edwards: *The last time I spoke with you, you had said you will not go to Ethiopia to stand trial. Even if you were dead, you would not want your dead body to go back to Ethiopia. Have you changed your mind now? Do you think after all these years, you have given it thought and you think it is better for you to go and stand trial and defend yourself?*

Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam: No. I didn't change my position. I do not really believe that there is a government in Addis that represents the Ethiopian people. They are just a bunch of minority national Tigray tribe that came by arms. They are not a popularly elected government. We didn't come by war. We ran a popular revolution. We were invited by the entire nation, not by gun. In the second place, I do not believe that they are in a position to judge me. Instead, if history came to our side, they are the

ones to be in a court.(Network Africa, BBC, December 8/99 monitored by PD)

EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

In the private media

Rescue our young sisters from sufferings!

There has been a huge influx of young Ethiopian women into several Arab countries in search of employment opportunities. Sad enough, a number of Ethiopian women have died in those countries under mysterious circumstances shortly after they had left their country. Others have returned to Ethiopia after they have become mentally unstable, or deformed.

As reports have it, others who have returned to Ethiopia had said that they had been raped and/or badly beaten by their employers in the Arab countries.

We believe that the Ethiopian pertinent authorities should carefully examine this case and work towards finding solutions.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other appropriate organs operating under it seem to be indifferent to the plight of our young sisters who go to Arab countries where they undergo great sufferings and come back dead or with their bodies deformed.

To make matters worse, the number of illegal brokers involved in sending Ethiopian women to Arab countries are growing by leaps and bounds. We, therefore, call upon all those pertinent authorities to take the appropriate measures to rescue our young women from the great sufferings they are undergoing in Arab countries.(Genanaw,December 3/99)

Government allergic to giving, receiving information

The government has a number of shortcomings. One of these consists in its unwillingness to give or receive information. The government keeps a wealth of information on the nation's history, current developments, you name it. But only an insignificant percentage of information reaches the public.

For instance, *Sha'bia* has repeatedly claimed that it had helped the EPRDF descend on Addis Ababa and assume state power. Was it really the