

**AFRICA RISK CONSULTING****Ethiopia Monthly Briefing February 2020**

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**Ethiopia Summary 13 February 2020**

*The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia asks immigration authorities to establish the citizenship of presidential hopeful and member of the Oromo Federalist Congress party, Jawar Mohammed. Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party members accuse prime minister Abiy Ahmed Ali (2018-present) of ethnicity-based cabinet selection as he appoints three new cabinet members, removing one of the two remaining cabinet portfolios held by the previously influential TPLF. Tens of thousands of people take to the streets across northern Ethiopia demanding answers from the government over the kidnapping of 27 students in early December. Government receives heavy public criticism over its decision to keep operating state-owned Ethiopian Airline flights to and from China as fears over the coronavirus ground other airlines.*

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**Presidential hopeful citizenship queries ...**

The **National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** on 12 February asked immigration authorities to establish the citizenship of presidential hopeful and member of the **Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)** party, **Jawar Mohammed**.<sup>1</sup> Jawar holds **United States** citizenship and **Ethiopian** law does not allow dual citizens to run for a political seat. A reliable and knowledgeable confidential ARC source in Ethiopia said that Jawar is unlikely to compete in the upcoming general election – which has been tentatively scheduled for 16 August – due to his citizenship issues, but that he is likely to play a decisive role behind the scenes.<sup>2</sup> Jawar is yet to declare what post he will be seeking.

As prime minister **Abiy Ahmed Ali's** (2018-present) "*honeymoon phase*" ends, Jawar's influence in opposition politics and his political profile are growing.<sup>3</sup> Our source said there is now "*more criticism than praise*" for Abiy, and that there is a feeling in the country that the **West's** latest darling in **Africa** is slowly becoming more authoritarian. Our source said that Abiy's anti-terrorism law, passed by parliament on 2 January, is a sign that he is resorting to old ways of repressive tactics, which "*will only get worse as elections get near.*"<sup>4</sup> Jawar's rise in political influence and subsequent administrative and security challenges appear to fit this picture.

In a letter sent to the Ethiopian immigration authorities, the NEBE said it wants clarification on the technicalities for Jawar regaining Ethiopian citizenship by 17 February. In November Jawar declared his interest to contest the forthcoming elections as a member of the opposition OFC, and he claims he renounced his **American** citizenship in January 2020.

Jawar is a prominent critic of Abiy's government, and has previously criticised the NEBE's decisions, including the timing of the elections. Jawar is one of Abiy's more serious challengers in the election due to his power and influence in the media and his popularity among **Oromo** youth. Jawar was at the centre of violent protests in **Oromo Region** in October that resulted in the deaths of nearly 90 people after he accused the government of endangering his life by withdrawing his security detail.

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg, 12 Feb 2020

<sup>2</sup> Confidential source in Ethiopia

<sup>3</sup> Confidential source in Ethiopia

<sup>4</sup> Confidential source in Ethiopia

### ... as Abiy is accused of making ethnicity-based cabinet appointments

Prime minister Abiy appointed three new cabinet members on 22 January, removing one of the two remaining cabinet portfolios held by the previously influential **Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)**.<sup>5</sup> The cabinet reshuffle improves the chances of the newly-formed ruling **Prosperity Party (PP)** in the upcoming general election, tentatively set for 16 August. But Abiy's appointments have received strong criticism from the TPLF, which argues the selection was ethnicity-based.

The tendency of Abiy's administration to appoint commercial and political elites from the **Amhara** region, Abiy's political base, will strengthen the alliance between the country's two largest parties: Abiy's **Oromo Democratic Party (ODP)** and the **Amhara Democratic Party (ADP)**. State-affiliated news outlet **Fana Broadcasting Corporate** reported that **Getahun Mekuria** will replace **Tilaye Gete Ambaye** as education minister, **Abraham Belay** will replace Getahun as innovation and technology minister, and **Melaku Alebel** will replace **Fetlework Gebreegziabhier** as trade and industry minister. Melaku was previously serving as Amhara regional head at the **Industry and Investment Bureau**. As **United Kingdom**-based global information provider **IHS Markit** notes,

*"The appointment of Melaku Alebel Addis to the trade and industry portfolio indicates a continuation of commercial preference for ADP-affiliated businesses, over TPLF-affiliated ones – as has been demonstrated by the growing influence of the state-directed **Tiret Corporate**."*<sup>6</sup>

Fetlework is deputy chairperson of the TPLF and a former combatant during the years of TPLF armed struggle. It is unclear if she will be getting a position in the federal government. Tilaye's future position in federal government is no more certain.

The TPLF issued a statement on the day of the new appointments condemning what it called "*intentional and coarse*" measures targeting its members in the federal and **Addis Ababa City Administrative** positions, which Abiy later denied.<sup>7</sup> This is likely to strain an already acrimonious relationship with the federal government and the TPLF's Amhara counterparts. The TPLF objected to the formation of the PP, saying there was no shared agenda, and it will therefore be competing as one of a number of strong regional opposition groups in the upcoming elections. The TPLF is the fourth former regional ruling bloc and main supporter of the creation of the **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)**.

### Improvement in corruption rating

**Germany**-based non-governmental organisation **Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)**, released on 23 January, shows that the corruption risk in Ethiopia is reducing. Ethiopia's latest score is a three-point improvement from the previous year and its ranking improved from 114<sup>th</sup> to 96<sup>th</sup> place out of 180 countries.<sup>8</sup> The index, which is designed to give a sense of public sector corruption, rates countries on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Abiy's political and economic reforms – reducing the size and influence of government – have played a part in improving the countries CPI score, and will continue to do so.

TI 2019 CPI Rankings for Ethiopia <sup>9</sup>					
	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
<b>Ranking</b>	96/180	114/180	107/180	108/176	102/168
<b>Score</b> (out of 100)	37	34	35	34	33

<sup>5</sup> ETV, 3 Feb 2020

<sup>6</sup> IHS Markit, 11 Feb 2020

<sup>7</sup> Borkena, 22 Jan 2020

<sup>8</sup> Transparency International 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index

<sup>9</sup> Transparency International 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index

Ethiopia ranks 15<sup>th</sup> in **sub-Saharan Africa**. In **Africa**, **Seychelles** (66) earned the highest mark in the region, followed by **Botswana** (61), **Cabo Verde** (58), **Rwanda** (53) and **Mauritius** (52). At the bottom of the index are **Somalia** (9), **South Sudan** (12), **Sudan** (16) and **Equatorial Guinea** (16). Neighbouring **Egypt** came in 106<sup>th</sup> place with a score of 35.<sup>10</sup>

### Student kidnappings grip Ethiopia ...

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets across northern Ethiopia on 28 January demanding answers from the government over the kidnapping of 27 students in early December.<sup>11</sup> Armed men abducted the students, all of whom are female. The incident has sparked massive demonstrations and calls for Abiy to help with their rescue. A source told ARC that the kidnapping case is an “*example of how rapidly security is deteriorating in the country*”, and that it shows the level of the government’s incompetence in security matters.<sup>12</sup>

The source said there are “*unprecedented levels of anarchy*” nationwide and that “*crime levels have spiked*” in the capital, **Addis Ababa**. The source said that Addis was one of the safest cities in Africa but is now losing that title. The source blamed the country’s security issues on government’s failure to implement timely and effective reforms and a lack of leadership in tackling security matters.

The army on 1 February said it had rescued 21 students who were among those kidnapped from **Dembi Dolo University** in the central **Oromia Regional State**. A few social media reports alleged that some of the abductees had been killed but on 3 February Abiy denied media reports suggesting that 12 students had been killed. Abiy told parliament, “*no report has reached me confirming any deaths so far.*”<sup>13</sup> Abiy said:

*“The government refrained from issuing strong statements [about the kidnapping] fearing that the kidnappers are unorganised individuals who could harm the abductees. We kept quiet because our desire was to give priority to finding the abductees alive.”<sup>14</sup>*

### ... as Ethiopian Airlines downplays coronavirus risks

Ethiopia’s health ministry and **Public Health Institute** said on 28 January that they have quarantined four people suspected of contracting **coronavirus**, identified through a screening conducted at the **Addis Ababa Bole International Airport**.<sup>15</sup> The government has received heavy public criticism over its decision to keep operating its flights to and from **China** – albeit slightly reduced – using national airline **Ethiopian Airlines**, Africa’s largest airline. While stopping flights would temporarily reduce trade and damage relations with one of Ethiopia’s key trading partners, a coronavirus outbreak would cause significantly larger economic and human damage given Ethiopia’s large population and inadequate healthcare system.

Health officials said on 5 February that test results from four suspected cases turned out to be negative. At time of writing, no coronavirus case has been confirmed in Ethiopia or on the continent, but the risk of an outbreak remains high. Ethiopian Airlines has cut down its February weekly flights from Addis to **Beijing**, **Chengdu**, **Guangzhou** and **Shanghai** by 33%. However, citizens fear that the reduced service is not enough to avoid what could be a looming crisis.

Ethiopian Airlines has become the loudest proponent of sticking by China and keeping trade links open. Six other African airlines, including **Kenya Airways** and **South African Airways**, have suspended their flights to China. Ethiopian Airlines CEO **Tewolde Gebremariam** said:

<sup>10</sup> Transparency International 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index

<sup>11</sup> France24, 28 Jan 2020

<sup>12</sup> Confidential source in Ethiopia

<sup>13</sup> BBC Monitoring, 3 Feb 2020

<sup>14</sup> BBC Monitoring, 3 Feb 2020

<sup>15</sup> FANA, 28 Jan 2020

*“China has a strong trade and investment relationship with Africa, and Ethiopian Airlines is the major carrier that links China with many African countries. If we stop flights to China, we break that relationship.”<sup>16</sup>*

Ethiopia began coronavirus laboratory testing on 8 February through support from the **World Health Organisation** and **Africa CDC**.<sup>17</sup> The Public Health Institute has reportedly distributed over 21,000 face masks for the staff and health professionals working in airports and isolation centres. Some 258 travellers from China are being monitored outside the isolation centres through the **Emergency Operating Centre** established in the premises of Public Health Institute.<sup>18</sup>

### Planner

20-24 Feb 2020 Addis Ababa (**Ethiopia**) Ethiopia International Trade Expo;

29 Feb 2020 (**Africa Caribbean Pacific**) Expiration date of the **European Union**'s framework agreement with a 79-country bloc of **African, Caribbean, and Pacific** states;

9-10 Mar 2020 **Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire)** Africa CEO Forum;

18-24 Mar 2020 Addis Ababa (**Ethiopia**) United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 53<sup>rd</sup> session;

1 Jul 2020 (**Africa**) African Continental Free Trade Area deadline for 90% tariff liberalisation;

16 Aug 2020 (**Ethiopia**) Tentative general election date;

### Chronology

12 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Bloomberg*. **National Electoral Board** asks immigration authorities to establish the citizenship of presidential hopeful and member of the **Oromo Federalist Congress, Jawar Mohammed**;

8 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *New Business Ethiopia*. **Canada's** prime minister, **Justin Trudeau**, says during his visit to Ethiopia that Canada is keen to expand trade and investment in Ethiopia ;

4 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Politico*. **United States**-based media company **Politico** says prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** is playing off **China** and **Europe** in a bid to modernise the economy, boost investment and reduce debt;

4 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Travel + Leisure*. **Ethiopian Airlines** CEO **Tewolde Gebremariam** says the company is spending an estimated \$5 billion to build the largest airport in **Africa** by 2028;

3 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *New Business Ethiopia*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** says federal government did not sideline the people of **Tigray** from federal government ministerial positions and has no intention to do so in the future;

3 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Xinhua*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** inaugurates the **Chinese**-built 254-megawatt **Genale Dawa III** hydro dam project at a cost of around \$451m;

2 Feb 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Quartz*. Government receives heavy public criticism over its decision to keep operating its flights to and from **China** amid the **Coronavirus** outbreak;

<sup>16</sup> Washington Post, 9 Feb 2020

<sup>17</sup> ENA, 11 Feb 2020

<sup>18</sup> ENA, 11 Feb 2020

30 Jan 2020 **(Washington) United States** *CNN*. **United States**-mediated tripartite talks between **Ethiopia**, **Egypt** and **Sudan** over the disputed **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam** on the **Nile River** continue;

30 Jan 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Investing.com*. Government passes new investment law opening up the economy to foreign ownership, but the changes will not affect the banking and insurance sector;

29 Jan 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. **United Nations**, the **Ethiopian** government and its partners launched a \$1 billion humanitarian response plan for 2020 aimed to help 7 million of the 8.4 million people identified as being in need of humanitarian aid in Ethiopia;

28 Jan 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *France24*. Tens of thousands of people take to the streets across northern **Ethiopia** demanding answers from the government over the kidnapping of 27 students over 50 days ago;

28 Jan 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *FANA*. Health ministry and **Public Health Institute** say they have quarantined four people suspected of contracting the **Novel Coronavirus**, identified through a screening conducted at the **Addis Ababa Bole International Airport**;

27 Jan 2020 **Oromia (Ethiopia)** *Amnesty International*. **Amnesty International** confirms that at least 75 supporters of opposition party **Oromo Liberation Front** were arrested over the weekend from various places in different parts of **Oromia Regional State**;

21 Jan 2020 **Abuja (Nigeria)** *TechCrunch*. **Nigeria**-based digital payments start-up **Paga** acquires **Ethiopia**-based software development company **Apposit** for an undisclosed amount and says it will launch its payment products in Ethiopia immediately and in **Mexico** this year;

15 Jan 2020 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. **National Election Board of Ethiopia** proposes to hold its national vote on 16 August, the first election since prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** took office in 2018;

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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