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Preparing Ethiopia for a changing world



THE BRIEF

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THE ETHIOPIA

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Envisions to Build

“A country that does not anticipate change eventually finds change deciding its fate for it.”

— Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, delivering his inaugural address as he begins his next five-year term leading Ethiopia.

What does a country do when the world around it is changing faster than the certainties on which it once relied?

For Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the answer is preparation. Prepare the economy before the next disruption. Prepare the state before the next crisis. Prepare the defence force before the next threat. Prepare the youth before the next technological revolution. Prepare Ethiopia before history once again arrives without warning.

That idea sits beneath the five-year vision the Prime Minister placed before parliament on 5 October 2026. It is a vision that reaches well beyond the ordinary business of government. Its destination is what Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed calls the building of a new Ethiopian civilization.

The argument begins with history because, in the Prime Minister's view, history has already given Ethiopia the warning.

Ethiopia has known what it means to possess strength at one moment and find the world transformed at the next. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed points to the Industrial Revolutions and, most powerfully, to the second Italian invasion. After Adwa, Italy spent decades preparing for another confrontation. Ethiopia did not prepare with the same urgency. When the two sides met again at Maichew, they were no longer confronting the same world. Italy arrived with modern aircraft and weapons shaped by a new technological age. Ethiopia was forced to fight a transformed adversary with inadequate preparation.

“There is no day more harrowing than facing an enemy on an unprepared front.”

The lesson Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed draws is larger than military history. A country that does not anticipate change eventually finds change deciding its fate for it.

The world now entering another period of transformation is therefore central to the Prime Minister's thinking. The global order is becoming more uncertain and more multipolar. Old political and economic certainties are giving way to competition among different ideas, interests and centers of power. Ethiopia cannot stand outside this process. Its position between East Africa, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean places it directly within one of the world's most strategically important regions. ►



“When we possessed strength, we determined our own destiny; when we were weak, others decided our fate for us,” the Prime Minister said.

The next five years are presented as an effort to make sure that Ethiopia possesses the capacity to determine more of its own destiny.

That begins at home.

The principle Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed places at the center of the national project is Medemer. It is the idea of addition, synergy and coming together. As the Prime Minister put it through an Oromo proverb, “A house cannot be built with a single hand.” In the Prime Minister’s formulation, Ethiopia’s diversity need not be a source of fragmentation. Local identity can exist alongside national belonging. Individual interests can be reconciled with collective goals. The past can be connected to the present rather than treated as its enemy.

This is also how the Prime Minister approaches the question of what kind of system Ethiopia should build. The country should learn from the experience of others, but it should not simply transplant foreign ideologies and institutions onto Ethiopian soil. What works elsewhere must be examined, adapted and brought into harmony with Ethiopia’s own history, culture and circumstances.

“It is said that a river which forgets its source will inevitably dry up.” The metaphor captures the balance Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed seeks between modernization and continuity. Ethiopia, in this vision, should learn from the world without losing the foundations from which its own civilization has grown.

The ambition is consequently not merely to reform individual sectors. It is to create a system that works together.

The economy is expected to become more productive and more diversified. Agriculture, manufacturing, mining, energy and investment are to reinforce one another rather than leave the country dependent on a narrow economic base. The expansion of irrigated wheat and rice production, the growth of dairy, poultry and egg production through Ye Lemat Trufat (Bounty of the Basket), and the Ethiopia Tamirt (Let Ethiopia Produce) production initiatives all belong to the same idea. Ethiopia should increasingly produce for itself and produce more for the world.

Food security is therefore not presented simply as an agricultural objective. It is part of sovereignty.

The same thinking extends to national assets. State enterprises are being restructured, development enterprises are expected to become productive, and assets that once generated losses are intended to contribute to national wealth. Economic reform, in this vision, is not an end in itself. It is a means of building a country with greater productive capacity.

Technology is another part of that capacity.

Digital finance, digital markets, digital public services, digital identification, artificial intelligence and digital platforms are presented as foundations for Ethiopia’s next economic era. The country should not merely consume the technologies transforming the world. It should develop the capacity to participate in that

transformation.

The cities are meant to change with it.

The corridor development program and urban renewal efforts are intended to create cities with better transport, connectivity, public spaces, business environments and services. The Prime Minister describes a transformation from settlements that merely contain people into cities that can support economic activity, conferences, leisure, history and modern public life.

The physical landscape is part of the same project. The Green Legacy initiative, irrigation expansion, riverside development and environmental restoration are intended to strengthen the country’s productive and ecological foundations.

Yet the Prime Minister’s vision does not stop at development.

He sees the next five years as a period of political and institutional consolidation. Constitutional amendments are expected to follow the national dialogue. The political system is to find a balance between cooperation and competition. The government is to remain committed to working with opposition parties, particularly those that participated in the election.

Peace, in this vision, requires both reconciliation and preparedness. Dialogue and forgiveness are to be pursued while security and intelligence institutions remain ready to respond to threats.

The state itself is expected to become more effective. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed calls for stronger action against corruption, theft, nepotism and partisan administration. Civil service reform is to continue. Public services are to reach citizens through more modern administrative systems. Government performance is to be judged increasingly by what it achieves and changes, not simply by whether procedures were followed.

Education has a longer horizon still. The objective is to preserve quality while cultivating a generation with the knowledge, skills, character and civic responsibility required to build the country Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed describes.

Culture, religion and civic institutions are central in this architecture. They are expected to strengthen moral values, social cohesion and a modern civic identity. The task of building Ethiopia is not assigned to government alone.

Beyond the country’s borders, the same principle of capacity shapes the Prime Minister’s outlook.

Ethiopia’s neighbours are described as natural allies, and the government intends to pursue peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with them. Global partnerships are to be guided by national interests. But the Prime Minister also places maritime access firmly within the country’s long term strategic calculations.

Ethiopia, he argues, cannot fully develop its civilization without access to the sea. His government will therefore seek an outlet and inlet based on reciprocity.

This is part of a larger ambition for Ethiopia’s regional position. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed describes Ethiopia as an “anchor state” for the Horn of Africa, a strong and influential country whose rise should occur alongside the peoples of the region. ►

The ambition reaches beyond simply securing Ethiopia's place in the changing order. "Our aim is not merely for Ethiopia to be changed by the world, but for it to actively transform the world itself," the Prime Minister said.

That regional role requires security capacity. The defence force Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed envisions is modern, innovative and continuously prepared. It should anticipate threats before they emerge, respond when they do, and operate effectively across changing environments. The Prime Minister also said Ethiopia will develop the capacity to establish air superiority in the region.

The connection to the historical lesson is unmistakable. Ethiopia should not again encounter a transformed strategic environment without having transformed its own capabilities.

But there is another preparation the Prime Minister considers essential, and it may be the most consequential of all. Ethiopia must learn how to continue.

For Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, one of the country's recurring problems has been the failure to carry achievements from one generation into the next. Projects begin but are not completed. Foundations are laid but not built upon. What one generation gathers can be scattered by another.

"True civilization is inconceivable when one generation scatters what another gathered and tears down what another built."

That is why the five-year agenda ultimately points beyond the five years themselves.

Economic reform matters because it creates productive capacity that can endure. Digitalization matters because it prepares the country for an economy that is still taking shape. Education matters because the next generation will inherit responsibilities that cannot yet be fully known. Constitutional and institutional reform matters because a country's strength cannot depend indefinitely on individual moments or individuals. Defence matters because sovereignty requires preparedness. Diplomacy matters because Ethiopia's future is inseparable from the changing region around it.

And Medemer matters because none of these ambitions can be sustained if the country's strengths remain divided.

The Prime Minister's vision is therefore not simply for a richer Ethiopia or a more modern Ethiopia. It is for an Ethiopia with enough internal cohesion and national capacity to enter a changing world on its own terms.

That means an Ethiopia that can produce before it needs to import, prepare before it needs to respond, build institutions that survive political cycles, modernize without severing itself from its roots, and engage the world without losing the ability to shape its own direction.

It is also a vision that places responsibility beyond government. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed called on those engaged in armed struggle to return to peace. Opposition parties were urged to compete through ideas while standing together on matters of national interest. Citizens were encouraged to reject the habit of treating dissent as treason. Young people were called upon to prepare themselves through knowledge, skills and ethical values. Older generations were asked to pass on their history.

"The opportunity to build a new Ethiopian civilization lies in our hands."

The country Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed described is therefore not a finished destination. It is a project to be carried forward.

The ambition is to leave behind more than projects. It is to leave behind capacity.

A country that can see change coming. A country that can prepare for it. A country that can preserve what it builds and build upon what it inherits.

An Ethiopia that does not wait for the future to decide its place in the world but develops the strength to decide that place for itself.

"Today lies before us as an opportunity." ■

“

True civilization is inconceivable when one generation scatters what another gathered and tears down what another built.

— Prime Minister
Abiy Ahmed

”

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Ethiopia's new five-year political term has opened with the reappointment of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the inauguration of the Seventh House of Peoples' Representatives and the formation of a new federal cabinet. The transition has established the country's political leadership and set the stage for a broader development agenda centred on peace, economic sovereignty, institutional effectiveness and a stronger international role. Addressing a joint session of the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation on October 6, 2026, President Taye Atske-Selassie outlined eight priorities to guide the government's work in the new parliamentary year.

Peace and national unity form the foundation of these priorities. President Taye said Ethiopia's development and prosperity depend on lasting peace, calling for dialogue, cooperation and the protection of national interests. The wider government programme also emphasises reconciliation and the implementation of recommendations from the National Dialogue. The aim is to consolidate stability while building a shared national future in which the country's diverse communities can participate.

**ETHIOPIA MUST
MOVE BEYOND
INTERNATIONAL
ACCEPTANCE TO-
WARDS GREATER
INFLUENCE ON THE
GLOBAL STAGE.**

— President Taye
Atske-Selassie,
addressing a joint
parliamentary session
on 6 October 2026.

The priorities place particular emphasis on the quality of development and the ability to deliver results. In education, healthcare and social protection, the government intends to move beyond expanding access towards improving the quality of services and responding more effectively to citizens' needs. In the productive sectors, President Taye called for comprehensive structural transformation and greater domestic production of essential agricultural and industrial inputs. This focus on self-reliance is intended to strengthen the foundations of economic growth and infrastructure development while reducing dependence on external supplies in critical areas.



Economic transformation also depends on how effectively public resources are mobilised and used. President Taye identified faster project implementation, more efficient project financing and stronger accountability as priorities, alongside modernising the tax base, improving revenue collection and managing public debt prudently. Better control of government revenue and expenditure is intended to strengthen fiscal capacity and economic sovereignty. The emphasis is on ensuring that financial resources translate into completed projects and tangible development outcomes.

Institutional coordination and international engagement complete the broader picture. President Taye Atske-Selassie called for stronger cooperation between federal and regional administrations to ensure that national priorities are implemented consistently across the country. In foreign relations, he outlined a shift from international acceptance towards greater influence, with Ethiopia seeking to expand its partnerships, strengthen regional peace and promote economic integration. This ambition also connects with Ethiopia's pursuit of sea access through peaceful engagement and mutual benefit. The President highlighted Ethiopia's preparations to host COP32 and the government's target of attracting more than 1.6 million visitors, alongside a projected economic growth rate of 10.1 percent.

The formation of the federal cabinet on October 8 marked a further step in putting the programme into effect. The House of Peoples' Representatives unanimously endorsed the nominees presented by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, comprising Deputy Prime Minister

Temesgen Tiruneh and 22 ministers. Their portfolios span foreign affairs, finance, defence, agriculture, industry, education, health, justice, energy, technology, infrastructure and other key areas of government. The cabinet brings together the executive responsibilities required to advance the government's economic, social, security and diplomatic objectives.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said the selection process considered educational qualifications, professional experience and demonstrated implementation capacity, alongside commitment to public service and national interests. Gender, ethnic and religious diversity were also taken into account. These criteria reflect the stated intention to combine professional competence with representation of Ethiopia's diverse society. Alongside the ministerial appointments, the Prime Minister announced senior positions covering democratic system-building, cabinet affairs and government communication, completing further elements of the new administration's leadership structure.

The government's priorities connect peace and national unity with productive capacity, better public services, responsible fiscal management and a more influential foreign policy. The cabinet provides the executive structure through which these objectives are to be pursued, while the President's address establishes the direction for the new parliamentary year. Together, they set out a development agenda grounded in national interests, stronger institutions and the ambition to translate Ethiopia's economic and strategic potential into sustained progress. ■

"The selection process considered educational qualifications, professional experience and demonstrated implementation capacity, alongside commitment to public service and national interests."

— Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, on the selection of ministers for Ethiopia's new federal cabinet.



THE NEW ETHIOPIAN CABINET



H.E. Abiy Ahmed (PhD)
Prime Minister of the Fed-
eral Democratic Republic
of Ethiopia.



Temesgen Tiruneh — Deputy
Prime Minister



Gedion Timotheos (PhD) —
Minister of Foreign Affairs



Fitsum Assefa (PhD) —
Minister of Finance



Mohammed Edris — Minis-
ter of Defense



Hanna Arayaseslase —
Minister of Justice



Musa Adem — Minister
of Peace



Aynalem Nigussie — Minister
of Revenues



Bereket Fesehatsion — Min-
ister of National Strategy



Adisu Arega (PhD) — Minis-
ter of Agriculture



Yasmin Wohabre — Min-
ister of Trade & Regional
Integration



Fisseha Yitagesu (PhD) —
Minister of Industry



Habtamu Iteta (PhD) —
Minister of Water & Energy



Alemtsahay Paulos — Minis-
ter of Mines



Sadat Nesha — Minister of
Logistics



Frehiyot Tamru — Minister
of Innovation & Technology



Mohammed Abdurahman
(Eng.) — Minister of Urban &
Infrastructure Development



Sultan Woli (PhD) — Minister
of Irrigation & Lowland Areas



Berhanu Nega (Prof.) —
Minister of Education



Mekdes Daba (MD) — Min-
ister of Health



Awelu Abdi — Minister of
Labour and Skills



Selamawit Kassa — Minister
of Culture and Tourism

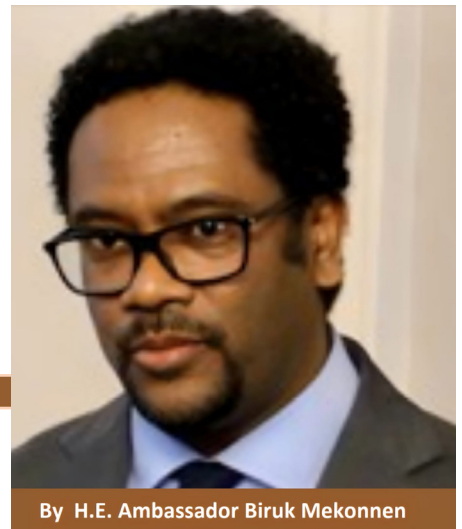


Shewit Shanka — Minister of
Women and Social Affairs



Aklilu Tadesse (PhD) —
Minister of Youth and Sports

Sovereignty Cannot Be a One-Way Street



By H.E. Ambassador Biruk Mekonnen

International media are confirming that Eritrean troops have crossed deep into Ethiopian territory and are advancing through Ethiopia's northern region. This is a violation of Ethiopia's territorial integrity and a direct threat to its national security.

As a fundamental duty of a state, Ethiopia has every right to defend its territory, protect its citizens and prevent foreign forces from operating inside its borders.

Eritrea's actions expose the contradiction at the heart of its increasingly vocal campaign on sovereignty. Apparently, respect for territorial integrity is an absolute principle when Eritrea invokes it, but a negotiable one when Ethiopia is on the receiving end.

For Ethiopia, this is about more than a military incursion. It is about a longstanding pattern of hostility towards a country whose stability and development should be an opportunity for regional cooperation, not a source of anxiety for its neighbours.

Eritrea's official narrative presents its independence as the product of a long struggle against Ethiopian domination. But its preferred version of history leaves out incon-

venient chapters. The 1998–2000 border war remains a defining example. The Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission ruled that Eritrea's initial resort to force at Badme in May 1998 violated international law. The lesson is straightforward. A territorial claim does not confer the right to use military force, and sovereignty is not a licence to violate the territorial integrity of another state.

That lesson is especially relevant today. Eritrea continues to portray itself as a country under constant threat from Ethiopia, even as its own troops operate inside Ethiopian territory. The contradiction is difficult to miss. Its repeated appeals to international law would carry considerably more weight if its own conduct did not undermine the very principles it invokes so insistently.

In 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed made a historic choice to break with decades of hostility and pursue peace with Eritrea. Ethiopia opened the door to a new relationship based on cooperation, economic opportunity and regional stability. The initiative offered Eritrea a chance to move beyond its confrontational mindset and build constructive relations with its largest neighbour. Ethiopia hoped and

chose to look forward rather than remain imprisoned by past grievances.

Yet Eritrea failed to turn that opening into a lasting partnership. Relations deteriorated, military tensions returned and Eritrean forces entered Ethiopian territory. This raises a fundamental question. If Eritrea's hostility is rooted primarily in the nature of the Ethiopian government, why has it persisted across different political systems and successive administrations? The record suggests that the problem runs deeper than any particular Ethiopian leader. Ethiopia's political identity has changed, but Eritrea's suspicion and hostility towards a much prosperous and unified Ethiopia have proved remarkably resistant to change.

Nor does the problem begin and end with military deployments. Eritrea's support for the TPLF and other armed opposition groups that share its mindset, its exploitation of Ethiopia's internal differences and its persistent efforts to undermine the Ethiopian state form part of a wider pattern of conduct that threatens regional stability. Its lectures on sovereignty and non-interference would be more convincing if Asmara practised what it preaches. A government cannot credibly demand that others keep

their hands off its internal affairs while interfering in the affairs of its neighbour. Sovereignty is a principle, not a privilege reserved for one side.

Ethiopia's pursuit of access to the sea must be understood in its proper context. For a country of Ethiopia's size and economic significance, reliable maritime access is a fundamental economic and strategic interest. It is a matter of secured trade, connectivity and long-term development. It should be addressed through practical agreements and regional cooperation, not turned into an endless pretext for accusations of territorial ambition.

Ethiopia has made clear that it seeks a sustainable solution to its maritime needs. Yet Eritrea treats the subject as though discussing access to the sea were itself an act of aggression.

The regional diplomacy surrounding the Red Sea exposes a glaring double standard. Countries that contribute nothing to the Nile's waters presume to discuss its future while excluding Ethiopia, which contributes about 86 per cent of its waters. Yet these same countries insist that the Red Sea is the exclusive concern of littoral states, dismissing Ethiopia despite its proximity to the coast and its vital development and strategic interests. The absurdity speaks for itself. If countries that contribute nothing to the Nile claim a voice in its affairs, on what grounds can Ethiopia be denied a voice in the Red Sea? Sovereignty and regional interests cannot be invoked selectively to suit political convenience.

There is also a deeper strategic question. Why should Ethiopia's stability be treated as a threat rather than an opportunity? A peaceful and prosperous Ethiopia offers Eritrea, as it does to countries in the Horn, a major market, opportunities for trade and investment, and prospects for shared infrastructure and regional development. A weakened Ethiopia would instead mean greater insecurity, disrupted commerce and heightened risks across the Horn of Africa. If Eritrea believes that its own security depends on limiting

Ethiopia's strength, it is pursuing a strategy that sacrifices long-term regional prosperity for short-term political advantage.

Ethiopia's development is not an act of aggression. Its pursuit of economic growth, regional connectivity and maritime access does not threaten Eritrea's independence. The idea that Eritrea can secure its future by obstructing Ethiopia's progress is both shortsighted and dangerous. No country can build lasting security by treating the weakness of its neighbour as a strategic asset.

Eritrea's continued hostility towards Ethiopia, its interference in Ethiopian affairs and the presence of its troops inside Ethiopian territory constitute a direct

challenge to Ethiopia's sovereignty and national security. It amounts to aggression that would be met with a proportionate response. No amount of rhetoric about historical grievances or territorial claims can justify such conduct. Ethiopia will not allow its security, territorial integrity or economic future to be held hostage to Asmara's hostility.

Sovereignty cannot be a one-way street. Eritrea cannot demand that the world respect its borders while violating Ethiopia's, preach non-interference while meddling in

its neighbour's affairs, and portray Ethiopia's development ambitions as a threat while presenting its own military actions as defensive. Such contradictions do not become less glaring through repetition.

Ethiopia will defend its sovereignty, pursue its legitimate national interests and determine its future free from external coercion and based on relevant international laws and the UN Charter. That is not a threat to Eritrea. It is the sovereign right of the Ethiopian people. ■

The article is authored by H.E. Biruk Mekonnen, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.



If Eritrea believes that its own security depends on limiting Ethiopia's strength, it is pursuing a strategy that sacrifices long-term regional prosperity for short-term political advantage.



Strengthening a vital economic corridor, Ethiopia and Djibouti are advancing regional trade, energy security and connectivity.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT COULD REWIRE EAST AFRICA

For a country as large and ambitious as Ethiopia, the journey to the sea is an economic fact of life. A shipment entering through Djibouti may eventually find its way to a factory in Addis Ababa, a warehouse in Modjo or a market far beyond Ethiopia. Its journey can determine how quickly and efficiently goods reach the people and businesses that depend on them.

That is why some of the most significant developments taking place in East Africa today are not confined within national borders. They are gradually joining the economies of Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya through a web of trade and energy connections that could give the region a stronger role in African and global commerce.

The scale of the relationship between Ethiopia and Djibouti is already considerable. More than 95 percent of Ethiopia's import and export trade by volume uses the Addis Djibouti corridor. The corridor is therefore much more than a transport route. It is one of the principal economic links between Ethiopia and the outside world, while Djibouti's location gives it a vital role in connecting the Ethiopian market with international trade.

The next stage is about making that connection work even better.

Ethiopia, Djibouti and the Dangote Group have announced plans for a 120-kilometre refined petroleum products pipeline connecting Damerjog in Djibouti with Dewele in Ethiopia. The project will include more than one million cubic metres of combined storage capacity at the two ends. The objective is straightforward. Fuel that currently travels long distances by road can increasingly move through dedicated infrastructure, strengthening the reliability and efficiency of an essential supply route.

But the significance of the pipeline extends beyond fuel.

An economy moves on many things at once. It needs energy, raw materials, manufactured goods and agricultural products to reach their destinations efficiently. The real value of infrastructure emerges when these different movements begin to complement one another.

That is the significance of Modjo Dry Port. ►



Advancing cross-border cooperation to power East Africa's economic integration.

The expansion of the modern logistics centre at Modjo has added another important piece to Ethiopia's connection with the coast and with regional markets. The 60-hectare facility has terminals and warehouses designed to handle up to one million twenty-foot containers annually. It also includes Ethiopia's first rail mounted gantry crane and digital infrastructure for cargo handling. The facility is connected to the Ethio Djibouti railway and is also being linked to the wider DESSU corridor towards South Sudan and Uganda.

The story, therefore, is no longer simply about getting goods from a port to a destination. It is about making the journey itself more efficient.

A container arriving at a port needs a reliable railway or road. A railway needs cargo. Cargo needs storage and distribution. Energy needs dependable routes from where it is produced or received to where it is consumed. Each connection gives greater value to the others.

This is also where the African Continental Free Trade Area takes on a practical meaning. The ambition of a larger African market depends not only on agreements between governments, but on whether a producer in one country can move goods efficiently to a customer in another. Better logistics can turn geographical proximity into commercial opportunity.

Further south, Kenya's Lamu corridor offers another important piece of the regional picture.

The groundbreaking of the Dangote East Africa Petroleum Refinery in Lamu marks the development of a planned 700,000 barrel per day refinery within the broader Lamu and LAPSET corridor. The project is being presented as an important investment in energy supply, industrial activity and regional trade, while Lamu itself is being developed as a major gateway connecting Kenya and the wider region to international markets.

For Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, the significance of these developments lies not in one corridor replacing another, but in the emergence of several routes that can connect production, energy and markets across the region. Together, they are giving East Africa a broader platform for trade, investment and economic cooperation.

The developments also point to a changing role for African capital. The participation of the Dangote Group in major infrastructure projects in different parts of the continent illustrates how African businesses are becoming important partners in expanding the productive capacity of African economies. Governments, financial institutions and private enterprise can each bring different strengths to projects whose benefits extend beyond national frontiers.

The larger picture is therefore one of connection.

Djibouti brings its established role as a gateway for Ethiopian trade to the Red Sea. Ethiopia brings a large and growing market and an expanding logistics and industrial base. Kenya brings the Lamu corridor and another important connection to the Indian Ocean. Around them, new infrastructure is creating opportunities for trade, investment and industrial cooperation.

The most interesting question is what happens when these connections begin to reinforce one another.

A port becomes more valuable when it is connected efficiently to inland markets. A railway becomes more useful when it carries goods in both directions. A logistics centre becomes more important when it can connect producers with consumers. A pipeline becomes part of a much larger economic story when reliable energy can reach the industries, farms and cities that depend on it.

This is the promise of regional connectivity.

For years, Africa's integration has been discussed in terms of markets, agreements and institutions. Those remain essential. But integration also has a physical dimension. It can be seen in the railway carrying a container inland, the pipeline moving fuel across a border, the warehouse preparing goods for another market and the port linking an African producer with the wider world.

East Africa is increasingly building these connections.

What is emerging is not simply a collection of infrastructure projects. It is the early shape of a regional economic landscape in which national strengths can complement one another and where the distance between a producer, a port and a market becomes less of a barrier to trade.

The promise is ultimately simple. When countries are better connected, their economies have more opportunities to work together.

And when the infrastructure of East Africa begins to function with that shared purpose, the region can move closer to the larger ambition at the heart of African integration, turning geography from a constraint into an advantage. ■

BEYOND TRANSIT



BY YARED MESFIN BIZUNEH

What if Ethiopia's most valuable economic asset is not simply what lies within its borders, but what passes through them?

Ethiopian Airlines has spent eighty years mastering the rather difficult business of connecting Africa to the world. The opportunity now is to turn that connectivity into something substantially larger, bringing more tourism, investment, trade and business into Ethiopia itself.

It is a provocative proposition, but hardly an implausible one. In 2024/25, Ethiopian Airlines carried 19.03 million passengers, transported 785,321 tonnes of cargo, served 167 destinations and generated approximately US\$7.6 billion in revenue. Britain has been part of that story since April 1973, way, way before I was born. More than five decades of presence in the UK should amount to something beyond selling seats between London and Addis Ababa. It represents relationships, market knowledge and commercial connections that could be put to much wider use.

The first eighty years have answered one question decisively. Can an African airline become globally consequential? Yes. The more interesting question is what comes next. Does Ethiopia simply want a bigger airline, or can it build a substantially larger economy because it already possesses one?

Africa's numbers make that question pressing. The continent has 54 countries, close to 28 per cent of UN membership, yet African airlines accounted for just 2.2 per cent of global passenger traffic in 2025. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), only 19 per cent of intra-African routes have direct flights. The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) estimates that as many as 22 per cent of Africans travelling between two African cities may have to connect through Europe or the Middle East.

There is something faintly ridiculous about leaving Africa to arrive in Africa. London to Manchester via Madrid would, one suspects, struggle to survive a Treasury value-for-money review.

Tourism presents a similar imbalance. UN Tourism recorded approximately 1.52 billion international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2025, with roughly 81 million received by its Africa region. France alone welcomed 102 million visitors, while Spain received 96.8 million. Egypt is classified within UN Tourism's Middle East region, so the comparison does not capture the entire African continent. Even with that caveat, the question remains. How does a continent of extraordinary natural beauty and some of humanity's richest cultural heritage capture so little of global tourism?

“The ticket need not be the culmination of the transaction. It can be its commencement.”

The problem is not a shortage of things worth seeing. It is getting people to them.

An extraordinary mountain, heritage site, hotel or safari is not yet an economic asset at scale simply because it exists. People must be able to discover it, reach it, book it and pay for it without requiring the patience of an explorer. The same difficulty extends to business events. The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) estimates that Africa accounts for around 2 per cent of the global international association-meetings market. These figures measure different things, but they point towards a common problem. Africa has valuable assets and comparatively limited success in turning them into economic activity.

This is where Ethiopian Airlines becomes more interesting than an airline.

Consider the passenger occupying a £1,200 or £1,500 seat. The fare has an obvious value to the carrier. But what is the economic value of the person? They could become a hotel guest, restaurant customer, conference delegate, domestic tourist, buyer, exporter, investor or commercial partner. They might return with colleagues, customers or family members.

The ticket need not be the culmination of the transaction. It can be its commencement.

Tourism is the most obvious place to start. Ethiopian Airlines need not become a tour operator, investment agency or chamber of commerce. Its opportunity is to become the convener, using its international reach and existing relationships to bring people, businesses and opportunities together.

How often could a relationship with a British travel company become a campaign to bring more visitors to Ethiopia? How often could a corporate connection lead to an investment introduction, a trade delegation or a commercial partnership? The airline already has access to networks that many Ethiopian businesses would struggle to build independently. The question is how much more could be done with them.

Cargo offers another perspective. Ethiopian Airlines transported nearly 800,000 tonnes in its last reported financial year. The conventional calculation asks what those tonnes generated in freight revenue. The more interesting question is what they tell us about the Ethiopian economy. ►



Persistent agricultural exports might reveal opportunities in processing, packaging, refrigeration and finance. Pharmaceutical traffic could point towards manufacturing potential. Corporate travel patterns might identify investment corridors. Diaspora movement can carry capital and expertise as readily as suitcases.

Movement is increasingly data. The challenge is to understand what that data reveals about demand, then connect the insight to businesses capable of acting on it.

This is where the wider economic argument comes into view. A hotel is infrastructure. A hotel connected to aviation distribution, destination marketing, conference demand, digital payments and international sales is an ecosystem. A convention centre is infrastructure. Connect it to airline schedules, investment missions and corporate networks, and it can generate value well beyond the building itself.

Dubai, for instance, understood this distinction particularly well. An Oxford Economics assessment estimates that aviation contributed US\$37.3 billion to Dubai's gross value added in 2023, equivalent to 27 per cent of GDP, including substantial benefits generated by aviation-enabled tourism. Ethiopia's circumstances and development priorities are, of course, different. The key lesson, however, is that Dubai did not simply channel passengers through its airport; it built an economy capable of turning their presence into wider economic value. Aviation supported hospitality, trade, property, exhibitions, finance and logistics. Those industries, in turn, created more reasons to fly. That reciprocity is the point.

Africa's unfinished air-transport liberalisation agenda matters for the same reason. The Single African Air Transport Market is often treated as an aviation-policy discussion when it is also a question of economic friction. More direct flights between African cities would connect hotels, manufacturers, investors, universities, tourists and markets. Protecting a larger share of a chronically small market is not necessarily economic triumph. Sometimes the smarter strategy is to enlarge the market itself.

Ethiopia is preparing to make a major bet on connectivity. Bishoftu International Airport is being developed with planned capacity of 60 million passengers annually in its first phase by 2030, ultimately rising to 110 million. At that scale, it would become Africa's largest airport by planned capacity and one of the world's major aviation hubs.

Those numbers should concentrate minds.

If Ethiopia builds the capacity to process 60 million passengers, eventually rising to 110 million, what economy will surround them?

An airport can process people. An ecosystem converts their presence into prosperity.

That is why Bishoftu should be viewed not merely as an airport, but as a wager on Ethiopia's future economic geography. Tourism should be the first conversion, but hardly the last. Aviation can feed hospitality and business events. Cargo can support logistics and manufacturing. Corporate travel can open investment channels. Diaspora connections can stimulate enterprise. Technology can help turn patterns of movement into market intelligence.

None of this happens automatically. It requires coordination between the airline, government, tourism businesses, investors and the private sector. It requires making Ethiopia easier to visit, easier to do business with and more rewarding to invest in. The airport can provide the capacity, but the wider economy must create the reasons to use it.

Ethiopian Airlines' first eighty years demonstrated what an African airline could become. Its next chapter may demonstrate something rather more consequential: what an African economy can become when one of its greatest institutions is deployed not merely to transport economic activity, but to catalyse it.

For eighty years, Ethiopian has been building the bridge. Bishoftu will make it wider.

The question now is not simply how many more people can cross it. It is how many can be persuaded to stay, spend, trade, invest and return.

That is when connectivity stops merely moving an economy.

It begins to build one. ■

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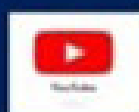
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