

**President Isaias Afwerki's interview
with local media on May 20 on the occasion
of the 26th Anniversary of Independence Day**



Many have been concerned with respect to the intensive work visits and discussions between senior government officials of Eritrea and Egypt as part of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Some also tend to distort this situation and speculate about its negative effect on our region. Further, it has been repeatedly claimed (propagated) that Egypt is establishing a military base in Eritrea. What is the basis of this speculation and what are the pillars of the relations between Eritrea and Egypt, and other countries in the region as well?

Let me first convey my best wishes for a happy Independence Day to the Eritrean people living inside and outside the country as well as to the friends of Eritrea.

In regard to the bilateral ties between Eritrea and Egypt, I do not wish to dwell on innuendos but rather focus on the substantive issues. It must be seen within the context and framework of our regional policy. That our ties are growing at a fast pace in various sectors and field is too palpable to merit emphasis. The underlying doctrine of our foreign policy is naturally anchored on our domestic situation and geared towards the promotion of a congenial regional environment or safe neighborhood which will significantly influence the successful implementation of our domestic plans and projects. We have to exert vigorous efforts to promote this reality. The cultivation of common understanding with all our partners in the region is indeed imperative for the establishment of robust ties. Ties fostered for tactical or short-term benefits will not be sustainable. In spite of considerable challenges, we have been pursuing an active and not

passive diplomacy in the past 25/26 years to create the desired conducive environment with all the countries and peoples in our wider neighborhoods.

The Red Sea is one of the four constituent geographic pillars in our wider region. The importance of the Red Sea Region is too evident to merit explanation. The second geographic zone is the Horn of Africa that includes Kenya. The Nile Basin is the adjacent region that extends westwards. The fourth part is the Gulf States region. All these regions or sub-regions have interrelated linkages in strategic terms. The geopolitical and economic importance of these wider region in global terms are also obvious and primary causes for the various conflicts that have raged in the past 25 years as well as in preceding periods. These conflicts must be resolved to usher in a stable neighborhood. Upheavals, wars, atrocities, conflicts had become the order of the day in the past 25 years. The mayhem has become boundless in the past four/five years. Why are conflicts exacerbated and deteriorating from bad to worse with time in this region? Do these conflicts stem from the domestic realities in each country? Are these provoked by strained ties between the countries in the region? Are they instigated by mainly extremist forces who have their own disparate agendas? The negative implications of these conflicts both in regional and global terms cannot also be underrated.

How can these conflicts be resolved? More importantly and beyond the mere resolution of conflicts, is there a mechanism for common action to ensure mutual respect, cooperation and unity of all the peoples in the region to guarantee their common economic and security interests? Why are these problems perpetuated and aggravated with time? The primary causes must be addressed fully and comprehensively. These are precisely the agenda of our talks when we foster bilateral or multilateral ties. We are neighbors that live in this given region. We have common interests. How can we cultivate robust ties – economic, trade, investment – and cooperation when conflicts are pervasive? Is it possible to consolidate economic and other cooperation without first securing regional stability? These and other related issues have remained the subject of our diplomatic engagements.

We have since long adopted a strategy of engagement in our relationship not only with Egypt but also with all the countries in the four regions. We have strived to create mutual understanding with all the countries by addressing the crucial issues candidly and fully. A crucial parameter in this regard is how to resolve and find a panacea to imbalances in the region that often prompt and fuel extraneous interventions? If we take the Red Sea region for instance, we can easily see its distinct strategic importance. What can we say about its stability in the past 25 years and in earlier times? Have all the littoral States been contributing their share to secure their national interests as well as the maritime importance of sea lane? Or have they been sidelined as mere observers? How

does the Red Sea affect the individual countries concerned and the region as a whole? The Red Sea will not be stable if extraneous intervention is preponderant and the countries and peoples of the region have no role. These are various related issues mulled for a long time but that have not found satisfactory solutions to date.

In the Horn of Africa, the prevailing realities in Somalia and Ethiopia; the conflict instigated by patrons of the TPLF regime between Ethiopia and Eritrea; the consequent instability that has afflicted the region are matters that merit scrutiny. Why have the Somali people been plunged into a situation of interminable turmoil for the past 25 years? Why are they unable to establish their own government? Why are they not active in managing and shaping their own affairs? How long can the situation continue with the intervention of UN or African forces? How can its negative ramifications in the region be rectified? Which are the forces that are active in this region?

With respect to the Nile Basin region, there is one evident problem. This problem stems from the agenda that the TPLF regime resuscitated 23/24 years ago. This boils down to the utilization of the waters of the Nile as a political instrument to advance the agendas of domination, influence, control and subordination of others. All riparian States have their own interpretations and approaches on this matter. The main problem or controversy at this point in time is the Millennium Dam Project. This is a fantasy and has become an additional cause of discord to prevalent misunderstandings and friction in the region. The situation in the Gulf States is evidently. There are also new realities in the vast arc extending from Afghanistan to Libya and Iraq... That have unfolded in the aftermath of what is termed as the “Arab Spring”. In general, bilateral and multilateral ties will not flourish seamlessly as long as instability and conflict in these four regions are adequately addressed. This is indeed the prevailing consensus among all the countries in the region. In this regard, identification of the fault lines and imbalances is crucial. This is still work in progress.

Egypt has not played its appropriate role in the region in the last 30 years due to its own domestic realities and the influence of external political forces. This was one of the major gaps. Activating its regional role is now one of the goals of the Egyptian government. This will bring positive dividends and benefits to the region. It cannot be harmful at all. The same is true with Saudi Arabia in spite of its considerable resources and opportunities. This may not, perhaps, be termed as a “major gap” but Saudi Arabia’s “potential” has not leveraged to enhance the regional importance of the Red Sea, the Horn, the Nile Basin as well as the Gulf region. Focus on these countries is not meant to underrate the respective roles that all the other countries in the region must play. All countries must contribute in accordance with their capabilities. We in Eritrea have to do the same without

exaggerating our role. The ultimate objective is to ensure the contribution of all the countries – big and small – in a manner that is commensurate with their capabilities to advance the common good; i.e. the stability of the region; for our common economic and security interests. This must of course be predicated on mutual respect and mutual interest. It must be predicated on shared values and developed further to consolidate the overall benefits to the regional. In this perspective, we need to exert efforts to create the necessary mechanism that will promote and lubricate collaborative work to achieve our common goals. The fact is the existing continental and regional institutions (African organizations, the Arab League etc.) are rather nominal and not as effective as expected. In this context, there were no mechanism for activating robust ties in various sectors – agriculture, trade, education, health and other areas – with Egypt and other countries in the region in spite of the prevalent good will. Now we can say, these have begun in good earnest. In our relation with Egypt and other countries, there have been aspirations to work together in different sectors such as agriculture, trade, education, health and others. In tandem with this, we have to identify and jointly thwart the threats in the region. We have to vanquish the forces of terror and conflict in this region. .

Discourse about “a military base here or there” is a throw-back to old times; it represents an outdated philosophy. We have no desire or appetite to entertain and resurrect concepts of military and security alliances/blocs in the Horn of Africa that existed not only in the past 25 years but also before and that did not contribute to regional and international peace. To create and pledge allegiance to this or that bloc is a redundant philosophy and politics at this time. What is discussed now is outside this old framework. It is not about establishing military blocs. Obviously, fostering military and security cooperation is not a taboo. We all have our respective capabilities in this regard. The central issue is how we pool and leverage our respective resources. Essentially, these revolve around the exchange of information, identification of common threats and consultation on joint tactics. This is not in fact a matter of choice but normative relations between all countries. Therefore, the cooperation between Eritrea and Egypt or Eritrea and other countries in the region, which aims at promoting stability, should not be surprising at all. It should not be misconstrued as a problem by any standards. On the other hand, military cooperation and the cultivation of a common approach do not materialize through the signing of agreements only. They are built incrementally in phases by diligently preparing the ground.

If we look at the speculative innuendos on the issue at hand, they essentially stem and are an extension of the smear campaigns against Eritrea by the TPLF regime and its patrons. The latter have chosen to prop up the TPLF regime as a plaint vehicle to advance their interests. In their view, this must be accompanied by an unremitting invective campaign against Eritrea. This has been underway

for years now. The aim is to attribute any problem in the region to Eritrea and to distort facts and evens to demonize, isolate and actually undermine Eritrea. The preposterous accusations against Eritrea for “gross violation of human rights... as a spoiler in the region... for sponsoring terrorism etc. “ originate from the same quarters and for the misguided motive described before. ... The spurious accusations related to the Millennium Dam Project – the false allegations that Eritrea and Egypt are conspiring (have used the Bene Shangul) to attack the Millennium Dam - are linked to such fabrications. A sane person cannot possibly harbor these ideas. And in any case, why should they be obsessed with normal ties of cooperation that Eritrea cultivates with any country in the region?

However, if we look at the Millennium Dam Project from a different perspective, I believe that this project is one of the White Elephant projects in Africa and the Ethiopian people are unlikely to benefit from this project. As I said earlier, this project is associated with the hegemonic motive of successive Ethiopian regimes who claim that the water resource they are endowed with is equivalent to the oil resources the Arab countries are endowed with and it is felt that it can be used as a leverage to control those countries in the region. Regarding the electric supply to be potentially generated from this dam, how are the transmission and distribution mechanisms to be operationalized? For example, how are the people to benefit from this project – at household level, in agriculture, industry, services, etc.? It is also propagated a lot about exporting supply of electricity to such countries as Somalia and South Sudan. Before attempting to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of exporting electricity, it is better to deeply think in terms of the benefits of this dam to the Ethiopian people. There are many questions that that can be raised in relation to this project. Anyone concerned about this project has to think primarily in terms of its usefulness to the Ethiopian people.

When it comes to the issues propagated about Eritrea in relation to this project, we are preoccupied with other priorities and this issue is a trivial one for Eritrea. We should be more concerned about enhancing the stability of the Red Sea region as we believe working together to deal with common interests are useful for bringing stability. We should also be more concerned, to the extent that our limited capabilities allow, about the situations in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia given the cumulative experiences of the last 25 years. We also work closely with the Gulf States for the same reasons. Unfortunately, this has been worrisome to those who harbor ill-will against Eritrea. This must be seen against the backdrop of the failure of all the unwarranted measures stacked against Eritrea: the imposed sanctions; border disputes; demonization; and, diplomatic campaigns to isolate Eritrea.

Regardless of the speculations and unjustified perceptions, we will continue to work closely with all the relevant actors in our region for the purpose of pooling and synthesizing our resources for advancing the common good. There is no other alternative to this route. The ties that Eritrea is cultivating have good prospects in the near future. As I emphasized before, our history and political tradition attests that we do not join or flirt with military blocs and alliances which are mostly characterized by short-lived benefits and interests. We believe in constructive and interdependent engagement. Our relationship with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates as well as the peoples of Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and other peoples in the region are not short-lived; rather they are based on long term and mutual benefits. Concerning the multi-layered cooperation with Egypt, which may currently be at its formative stage, we are determined to scale it up and accelerate its pace in the period ahead. From this perspective, it must also be noted that if we wish to expand our military and security cooperation, it will not be deferred or postponed under any circumstances.

Ethiopian authorities have been making repeated pronouncements in the past few months about a new “draft policy” on Eritrea which they will “soon submit to the Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The regime states that this will replace the “failed peace, military and other instruments that it has pursued in the past”. What is the underlying rationale of this announcement? What is its principal objective?

When I look into the whole situation in retrospect, the damage inflicted on Eritrea by the TPLF regime and its allies can never be compensated in any way. The loss incurred in our region for over 20 years now by instigating hostility between the Ethiopian and Eritrean people cannot indeed be underrated.

Why and to achieve what objectives did they resort to this policy? A detailed exposition is perhaps unnecessary for this forum. But briefly, the damage they have inculcated in the last 25 years and especially so from 1994-95 onwards, by inducing fragmentation and vertical polarization of the Ethiopian people under the rubric of establishing a “democratic and federalist Ethiopia” is enormous indeed. A toxic political subterfuge or subversion of this scale is unprecedented in Ethiopian history. To expose the people of Ethiopia to jeopardy of this dimension by fomenting ethnic cleavages is not a simple matter. The dangerous ramifications that have unfolded in the region cannot be ignored either. The TPLF regime’s invasion of Somalia, apparently to advance other external agendas; the destruction and turmoil that ensued thereafter are other dimensions that must be seen in this context. The latter was packaged as a surgical operation that would last a couple of weeks only. All the external interventions in Somalia have not weakened or uprooted Al- Shebaab from the country but only exacerbated interminable mayhem.

The border dispute the TPL provoked with Eritrea falls in the same pattern. This has long been resolved legally. But the regime persists in its reckless acts by flouting international law to “paralyze” Eritrea. They have fomented new animosity by jettisoning the solidarity between the peoples of Eritrean and Ethiopia that was built in a common struggle. One can also mention the unwarranted sanctions imposed on Eritrea as a continuation of this destructive policy. The intervention conducted until recently in South Sudan is part and parcel of this jigsaw. In brief, the misguided policies they have pursued and the subsequent ensued in the region are profound developments that warrant proper accountability.

To revert to your question, what will TPLF officials submit to the Parliament? Who are the intended targets of this message? The new (US) Administration in Washington? Certain supporters of the regime in Europe? To the Somali, Ethiopian, South Sudanese or Eritrean peoples? And what does it mean in substantive terms? What is the new policy drafted? Has their Parliament jurisdiction over other peoples? I doubt whether they know what they are talking about.

They have and continue to use Eritrea as a scapegoat in order to deflect attention from the domestic opposition that they are facing. They accuse Eritrea for “acts of destabilization” and these days for “collaborating with Egypt and other forces to that end”. We need to understand their mindset and their actual condition. These baseless allegations emanate from and reflect their frustration. The misguided strategic policies that the TPLF regime and its supporters pursued in the past 20-25 years have yielded dangerous regional instability only. In the circumstances, our task must be to look forward, to draw appropriate lessons from this negative experience. To dwell on their hollow pronouncements will be a waste of time. Our message to all those who wish to weaken or paralyze us is that this will never happen; that we will never be derailed by these campaigns”.

Why is Eritrea seen as a threat when it cherishes and is actually peaceful and stable? The hostilities are manifested in various forms. It is under sanctions and faces harassment under rubric of human have in stock? But again, why and what is the threat from Eritrea?

Sometimes we habitually tend to look at what is just in front of us or we remember recent developments only. When I look at the matter in a historical perspective, many questions crop up. What do these people want? What is their problem? Why this obsession over Eritrea? To answer these questions, we have to go back to Italian colonization. Various intricate issues and developments unfolded during the 60 years of Italian colonial presence in the region. Italy used 150,000 Eritrean Askaris (conscripts) for its expedition in the region. We should

study and know the history of these Askaris... those who went and fought in Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia... Italy may have entertained colonialist dreams as a result of the Battle of Adwa Syndrome. We have to recall the Eritreans who were imprisoned and killed in Nakura; those who faced repression; those who resisted Italian colonialism... Eritreans who threw bombs against Italian colonial authorities even in Addis Abeba. The history is long and complicated; Italian colonialism can be seen in its proxy dimensions too. In any case, this is one chapter.

Next, we have to look at the end of the Second World War and the new realities that it created in the region. The end of the Second World War was followed by the onset of the Cold War. It entailed a new configuration of bi-polar dynamics in global power politics. Against this backdrop, certain Western powers that were also victorious in the Second World War, essentially the US and the UK, designated Iran, Israel and Ethiopia as proxy vehicles to advance and maintain their interests in the region. The deprivation of Eritrea's right to self-determination; the denial of its independence occurred due to overriding decisions and designs of these external forces. These were not acts of the Haile Selassie or Mengistu regimes. What it boils down is that the hostilities directed against us stem from geography; from the geopolitical importance of the country.

We were subsequently forced to pay hefty and precious sacrifices to assert our independence. But the hostilities continue. We continue to be targets because the same mind set is at work. Indeed, global power configuration; the prevalence of a bi-polar or uni-polar international order has not had any impact on our predicaments. Ultimately, it is the rule of law, respect of international law and mutual respect that can guarantee stability. The upheavals that we see in the wider region – north, south and west – are largely consequences and fall outs of globally instability. More badly, it is the existences of local proxies that aspire to expand their influence by promoting the agenda of these powers that exacerbate local adversarial realities. These are historical tendencies that warrant rectification and which constitute agendas of our consultation with our partners in the region.

As I pointed out before, we can talk about the mind-set and acts of the Haile Selassie and Mengistu regimes. In regard to the TPLF, we struggled together for about 20 years before and during the Mengistu regime with the hope of creating a new reality of solid cooperation. As we know, things relapsed to the old mode. A State of Emergency has been declared in Ethiopia. The regime is dithering under enormous internal pressure. Yet, it is getting massive financial/economic succor. There are acute food shortages. But these are not reported in the news media. They go to extreme lengths to preserve and the regime. The TPLF regime had to initiate hostilities with Eritrea as part and parcel of its pact with

certain powers. Badme was really an excuse. To scapegoat and level false accusations against Eritrea thus constitutes a transparent ploy for maintaining domestic control as well as to mollify external agendas. In brief, we have to examine all these interlinked issues in a holistic manner. Globally too, the drive to consolidate a uni-polar international order is facing serious challenges; a manifestation of which are the profound changes we are witnessing these days in Europe, America and other parts of the world.

All these trends compel us to soberly and patiently assess how matters will pan out in our neighborhood? The essential point is not to be distracted by pronouncements and isolated events. We have to look forward and focus on the critical issues of paramount importance.

Mr. President, We have to proceed to Domestic affairs now, we are almost into the summer season now, and we have had a bountiful rainy Azmara, as you stated in your new year's address, in the last 10 years we have laid the necessary water catchment infrastructure. Can you tell us what are the current plans are underway this year?

As I had stated before we have to realize a sustainable development. How do we achieve sustainable development? First of all sustainable development includes not only water but also energy, transportation, education and health. These have to be integrated within every development project in each sector of the country. In terms of water security, one of the pillars of the strategy is water and soil conservation. In order to avoid dependence on the unreliable and inadequate rainfall we have made huge investments towards construction of dams over the years. In the western development region of the country dams such as Gereset, Kerkebet, Badmit, Fanco have been built. These can amass decent amounts of water. But the tight spot of reservoirs is not amassing water, but how to utilize it. The challenge remains in how and for what purpose to use it. There is a broad project going throughout the country. By dividing it into three developmental zones, the West, the Highland and the East, and each of these zones are envisaged to be self-reliant. Following a line of research, the water supply each of these three zones ensure, is expected to reach the services mentioned earlier through a set of transmission system. These are aimed at boosting agricultural production, expanding social services and ensuring the provision of potable water supply. What we have to understand is, if these dams have the possibility to give adequate service to the agricultural areas found within their proximity. If so how can we manage it? We are yet to fully utilize the amount of water we have amassed in our dams mainly due to the reasons that we are yet to acquire the necessary technological equipments. But that is a short term goal that we have to reach step by step. Nonetheless the current harvested water is enabling communities to harvest two-three times per year using irrigation farming.

Overall our development efforts in energy, water, transportation are closely correlated with the necessity to further improve our health and education sectors. The energy sector, that the main priority must be sustainable expansion of energy services to the Eritrean people. This will require both the development of new supplies, more efficient utilization of current energy resources and diversification. In order to diversify energy sources, renewable energy in that of wind energy and alternative biomass energy supplies, solar energy are being promoted for high value uses. For instance electricity is pivotal in agricultural development plans, the irrigation schemes are equipped with electric power for pumping the water and powering the agro-processing plants and cold storage units that are built to preserve and add value to agricultural products. This year aggressive programs and investments in increased efficiency will be a key element to rapidly increasing Eritrean's standard of living.

In summary, it is imperative that water is central to all our development plans in the coming years. Water is at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socio-economic development in our country.

Your Excellency, the imbalance in the relationship between producers and consumers is the cause for the price hike in the retail sector. The consumers are shouldering the burden. There are also the middle men that are exasperating the situation. What regulatory measures do you think should be taken to curb the problem?

Beyond the burden that it is creating, the message that it conveys and the mal practice is the most troubling. Why is such a situation that the majority of people are complaining about occurring? The producers in different say they are not benefiting from their produce. The situation is causing pressure on the living standard of the society and on the national economic development. People tolerate the situation may be due to lack of awareness or deliberately. The problem now has reached its peak. Why haven't the concerned government institutions use their regulatory mandates to deal with the problem? That is a big question that we should ask ourselves. Let's take the issue of water supply. Potable water supply has become the main challenge in Asmara and other cities in the country. The administration of the Central region claims that they sell a barrel of water for 47 or 37 cents. The water truck owners sell to consumers at 50 Nakfa a barrel. They may include expenses for spare parts and oil for their trucks, but the price exaggerated and unacceptable. It is a predicament has a consequence which should not be seen lightly.

It is the same with other consumer goods. Market prices could go up and down due to various factors. The consumers should develop awareness. Many media outlets talk about prices of items on daily basis. It would have been good if we

could introduce such practice in order to give consumers a clear picture of the market situation. We are talking about water; the housing problem is also there. The mounting residential houses' rent. We can talk about the price hikes of several consumer goods and the price difference of goods at their production site and the market. Who is responsible for the market imbalance? Who could afford to buy a house with the unaffordable price? What is the source of income of the consumer? It is said that there should have been intervention on the part of the responsible government organs. Government protection of consumer goods is being practiced in many countries.

What is the final solution? There should be a mechanism for water distribution so as to ensure the provision of potable water supply to the public. The use of trucks for water distribution is not the solution. There is a plan to have a final solution for the water problem. The plan will be implemented in 2018 the latest. We are talking about Asmara. Eventually permanent solutions should be found in all cities, semi-urban centers and villages in the country. And that could be realized gradually. The gap between the producers and consumers should also be narrowed. The responsible institutions should handle and strengthen controlling mechanisms and with that we could say that the problem could be alleviated in two to three years. The ultimate measure of economic development is good shelter for all citizens. Every citizen should have a house to live in. A plan of action has been charted out vis-à-vis the hiking house rent. There are measures to be taken to regulate and control rental houses. The administrations in different levels will assume the responsibility for the implementation of the program. That is a temporary solution.

Immediately after independence housing projects in Asmara and Massawa were launched. Similar initiatives were also taken in the vicinities of Asmara. However, the problem is perpetual and is still affecting the lives of citizens. That is not something to be left unnoticed, it should be solved. We should build small, medium-sized and big houses. In order to solve the problem, we should introduce modern technology, machineries for manufacturing building materials and develop human resources. Some initiatives are being taken in terms of introducing machineries, manufacturing building materials and proper allocation of resources and man power.

In the last 25 years, many people in Asmara, in the big cities and in semi-urban centers have been affected by shortages of residential houses. In some areas people have been allocated with plots of land for housing. The problem was one may build a house without considering the infrastructure needs associated with it. Building houses alone is not the solution; there should be equitable distribution of social services such as electricity power supply, potable water, education, health, transportation and others in the cities, semi-urban centers and

villages. We should introduce micro-credit schemes in order to develop the capacity of people to build their houses. The possibility of that is to be left for the banks and PFDJ institutions. That is one package of the lasting solution to the problem of residential houses. The initiatives taken as temporary solutions have minimal contribution in solving the problem of residential houses. A Preliminary study has been conducted in identifying the sites for building residential housing complexes and the preparation for implementation is being finalized. The implementation of the program will commence in 2018.

To sum up, improving the livelihoods of citizens, stabilizing the market and addressing the residential housing shortages and ensure macro-economic stability are among the packages for lasting development.

Mr. President, how do you evaluate the involvement of Eritreans in the Diaspora in the various development endeavors in the homeland, including private investment opportunities, on one hand, and the initiatives taken by the government in its policy to encourage them on the other?

We have categorized the domestic sectors into three fronts with the diaspora as the fourth front. In the domestic sector we have the Eastern coasts, the highlands and the western lowlands. They all are distinctive in their own manner. If we look at the economic development, it could incorporate farming, livestock, fisheries, tourism or manufacturing. Indeed, the national economic development also includes the fourth front. This is not something new in our experience, because Eritrea's independence was achieved with the common effort of nationals both at home and abroad. As a matter of fact, the contribution of nationals abroad could be greater in some cases. In the present integrated efforts for sustainable development, however, we need to draft a blueprint as to how the Eritrean nationals abroad could further enhance their participation, starting with assisting Martyrs Families. It is not charity that I am underlining here. The most important thing is to create job opportunities both for themselves and their families here. Above all, Eritreans, especially those in the diaspora, need to develop the culture of saving so as to make these plans reality. Their collective capital could be utilized in the domains that we have mentioned earlier, which could be irrigation farming schemes, livestock or dairy development in addition to major agro-industrial programs.

There are also plans related to the mining and manufacturing industries. Hence, the capital savings both by individuals and groups need to be directed to investment. In this case, preparation of a roadmap is imperative to redirect their investment into various industries or sectors. Most of the focus of investment in the past has been in the service rendering sectors which include hotels, bars or

restaurants. But, the industrial sector has been untapped and if we are to talk about the tourism sector, we first need to make sure the constant supply of electricity, water, transportation and others. Therefore, the concerned bodies need to finalize their preparations to quite Eritrean nationals in investing their savings and remittance. It is very encouraging to see investors explore all the available sectors, but more effort need to be exerted. The nationals abroad need to be well informed about the existing investment opportunities at home.

These nationals could take part in of the infrastructure endeavours or supply and manufacturing of construction raw materials. But one thing that is very important is that there are a number of educated and skilled Eritreans in the diaspora and their participation in the collective sustainable development program at home is significant. One of the major programs for 2017-2018 is transfer of technology and know-how. Accordingly, we need to lay the necessary groundwork for them to enhance their contribution towards the integrated sustainable development program.

Over the past 25 years, we may have gone through various experiences, but Eritrean nationals abroad need to increase their input in all sectors and fronts. We will get a clearer picture of the economic development programs and participation of Eritreans abroad once the details of the implementation of the programs start unfolding. The general economic development programs also include human resource development and judicious allocation of the resources both at home and abroad.

we have passed through challenging times of fortitude, patience and resolute rebuff over the past 26 years of independence. Besides, we are celebrating our 26th Independence Day Anniversary under the theme, “Laying pillars for vibrant growth”. In light of that, can you give us an insight about future programs? Also what message do you convey on this occasion?

Awareness is very important. People may take it as a political figure of speech, but truly, the power of this nation is endless. I am not talking about numbers here, I mean, it is something experts in the field should conduct a research on. It is not a new thing. It has been said many times in the past that Eritrea’s resource is its people. The people’s incredible qualities are not only revealed during tough times or hardships. The people’s resilience has paid off; the time has come for a brighter future. As for me, I consider the Eritrean population a multiplier in every aspect of programs that prevail.

We discuss with our partners what real resource is. Many nations may be worried about the depletion of their oil resources or other mines, some may even

be preparing for an alternative resource to maintain their continuity, and some others may be relaxed at present because their resources could continue to be extracted 150 to 200 years. Although Eritrea may have a variety of resources, the only resource we have ever relied upon is the strength of our people. It is the only resource that gets stronger all the time and never drains. This resource needs to be looked upon. It needs proper understanding. Besides, everything we have talked about is targeted towards that particular resource.

We may take some challenging experiences pertaining to this particular area as educational. Nonetheless, nothing gets us on the leash and the only thing that matters is the opportunities that lie ahead. Indeed, we can tackle any kind of challenge that may come on our way. It is not something we should worry about. Hence, we need to concentrate on finding a vector to boost our human resource in a quantifiable manner. The human resource should also be quantified by a time factor in all the collective sustainable development programs. It is important to know your goal over the time spent to achieve that target, which helps you determine your pace and thereby reinforce your actions.

We need to further nurture this culture in order to achieve the intended goal in all the said sectors. Nonetheless, it is not a secluded path we are following here, it also includes our partners. It is because we have shared common understanding with other nations that we are at this stage. Cooperation in all sectors with neighboring partners such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others would add impetus to our development drive, and our preparations in vast fields of cooperation this year would help us for a smooth take-off in 2018. The spirit is there and the willingness is intact. Besides, our vision has broadened and I don't believe anything can stand in our way while implementing our programs.

Your Excellency, thank you and happy Independence Day.