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ETHIOPIA: Blasts injure 42 in eastern town

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NAIROBI, 30 May (IRIN) - At least 42 people were injured when three blasts rocked the town of Jijiga in eastern Ethiopia at the weekend, the state-run Ethiopian news agency reported. The simultaneous explosions, which occurred on Saturday night, hit a hotel and two restaurants in Jijiga, about 720km southeast Addis Ababa.

"Forty-two people have been injured in three simultaneous explosions that occurred at Central Hotel, London Cafe and Family Cafe," Abdulahi Hassan, the president of the Somali region, told the news agency. Of the 42 injured in the capital city, 23 were wounded seriously, he said, calling the blasts "futile attempts of anti-peace forces to disrupt the gains acquired by the [current] government."

Since the beginning of the year, more than a dozen mystery explosions have hit Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia amid heightened political tension. Two weeks ago, nine blasts rocked a crowded cafe, a bus station and buses, killing at least four people and wounding more than 40. Those explosions brought the death toll to at least 11.

Meanwhile on Saturday, at least one person was killed in clashes between security personnel and angry traders who refused to make way for the construction of a shopping mall in the central Ethiopian town of Nazret, 98km south of Addis Ababa.

"Small traders who rejected the decision of the city administration to hand over their places for investors demonstrated on Saturday. ... The police intervened to restore order; one person died," said a federal police officer who asked not to be named. The officer could not explain exactly how the death had occurred, nor how many demonstrators were present. The situation had calmed down, he said.

Police said the traders, who had been paid compensation and offered new sites to pursue their businesses, had been given until 27 May to leave their shops.

Tension has been high in Addis Ababa since at least 84 people died during protests in June and October 2005, against alleged fraud in May elections. Currently, 111 defendants, including nearly the entire leadership of the main opposition party, are accused of fomenting a post-election coup. Most of them have been detained since November.

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