

Ethiopia Blocks Publication of Newspaper Covering PM's Health Scare

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London — Ethiopian authorities over the weekend blocked the publication of a prominent independent newspaper which included details of prime minister Meles Zenawi's deteriorating health condition, according to press freedom advocacy group, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on Tuesday.

According to CPJ 30,000 copies of the weekly Feteḥ newspaper were blocked on the grounds that they were "inciting national insecurity and endangering the government and the public".

Speculation over Zenawi's health grew after he failed to attend the African Union Summit held in Addis Ababa last week for the first time since he came into power in 1991.

The Ethiopian government recently dismissed reports claiming that Zenawi was critically ill. Government officials say he was on sick leave and will soon be returning to office.

According to CPJ, the paper had prepared articles citing reports from the BBC and the exiled opposition group, Ethiopian National Transitional Council. However, the state owned printing company, Birhanena Selam, told Feteḥ early on Sunday morning that the government had ordered that week's edition of the paper to be blocked.

"The ban on Feteḥ's latest issue illustrates the depth of repression in Ethiopia today, and authorities' determination to suppress independent coverage of the prime minister," CPJ East Africa Consultant Tom Rhodes said.

"Every citizen has a right to be informed about the well-being of their leader and the conduct of their government. Authorities should reverse their decision and allow the publication of Feteḥ's weekend edition to proceed."

In the Reporters Without Borders 2011-2012 press freedom index Ethiopia ranked 127 out of 179 countries, with neighboring Eritrea in last place.

Attempts by Sudan Tribune to get a response from the Ethiopian government failed.

According to Addis Fortune newspaper, Zenaw returned home on Friday after "successful surgery" in Germany for an unspecified illness. This was not confirmed by Ethiopian officials.

According to Ethiopian opposition groups Zenawi is suffering from brain cancer.

He was last seen in public during the June G20 summit in Mexico.