

UNIT EIGHT

Post 1991 Developments in Ethiopia

8.1 The Transitional Government of Ethiopia

Overview:

The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was established following the overthrow of the Derg regime on June 28, 1991. The Derg, a military regime, had ruled Ethiopia for seventeen years before being replaced by a coalition of armed rebels led by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The TGE was formed after a National Conference in Addis Ababa and operated under the Transitional Period Charter until the new constitution was adopted in 1995.

Key Changes During the Transitional Period:

1. **Administrative Restructuring:**

- The TGE introduced a new administrative structure based on ethnic and language groups, replacing the previous geographic-based provinces with fourteen regions.

2. **Demobilization of the Military:**

- The former Ethiopian Armed Forces were dismantled, and ex-soldiers and policemen were demobilized, leading to a significant number of job losses.

The 1995 Constitution:

• **Historical Context:**

- Ethiopia had some historical documents and traditional institutions with constitutional elements, but the first modern constitution was issued in 1931 and revised in 1955. The Derg regime suspended the 1955 constitution, ruling by decrees until its overthrow in 1991.
-

• **Constitutional Development:**

- The TGE prioritized drafting a new constitution, leading to the creation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, endorsed in August 1995. This constitution ended the TGE's mandate and established a new political framework.

• **Features of the 1995 Constitution:**

- Recognized human and democratic rights, including international declarations on human rights.
- Article 39 granted "unconditional right to self-determination" to every Ethiopian nation, nationality, and people. This article was

controversial, with some arguing it could lead to secession and threaten national unity.

8.2 Ethiopia after the 1995 Constitution

Formation of the FDRE:

- **Establishment:**
 - The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) was officially established in August 1995 with Ato Meles Zenawi as Prime Minister and Dr. Negaso Gidada as the first President.
- **Federal Structure:**
 - The FDRE adopted a federal structure with a parliamentary system, initially comprising nine regions and two city-states (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). Two additional regions, Sidama and Southwestern Ethiopia, were later added.

Political System and Elections:

- **Multi-Party System:**
 - The 1995 Constitution replaced the one-party system of the Derg with a multi-party system. However, in practice, the EPRDF maintained dominance, with limited opposition success.
- **Elections Overview:**
 - General elections were held in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015. The EPRDF consistently won the majority of seats, although the 2005 election saw significant opposition gains and subsequent unrest.
- **Opposition and Democratic Rights:**
 - While the constitution recognized democratic rights, opposition parties faced challenges, and there were allegations of restricted freedoms and flawed elections.

Peace and Democracy:

- **Ethio-Eritrean War:**
 - The conflict with Eritrea began in 1998 over the disputed Badme region. Despite a UN-brokered peace agreement in 2000 and a ruling by the Ethio-Eritrean Boundary Commission in 2002, tensions persisted.
- **Post-War Relations:**
 - Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea remained strained until improvements began following the rise of Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia.

Socio-Economic Issues in Ethiopia

From Command to Free Market Economy

Under the Derg Regime:

- **Command Economy:** Ethiopia was governed by a command economy under the Derg regime. The government controlled nearly all aspects of the economy, limiting private sector involvement and imposing a cap on private investment.
- **Government Dominance:** The Derg owned most enterprises, including small retail businesses, and restricted private capital to a maximum of 500,000 Ethiopian Birr. The economy was heavily centralized and managed by the state.

Transition to a Free Market Economy:

- **Shift in Policy:** With the rise of the EPRDF in 1991, Ethiopia transitioned to a free market economy. The government reduced its control over economic activities and privatized many state-owned enterprises.
- **Capital Limit Removed:** The limit on private investment was lifted, allowing greater private sector involvement in the economy. Although the EPRDF still played a role in the economy, there was a significant shift towards market-oriented policies.

The Land Issue and Agriculture

Under the Derg Regime:

- **Nationalization:** In 1975, the Derg nationalized rural land, distributing it to landless peasants. Land was made public property, and peasants could not sell their land.

Under the EPRDF Government:

- **State Ownership:** Land remained state property. The EPRDF continued the policy of land ownership but introduced improvements in agriculture.
- **Agricultural Progress:** The government promoted agricultural development by providing fertilizers, improved seeds, and training Agricultural Extension Workers. These measures led to increased agricultural yields and modernized farming practices.

Infrastructural Developments

Government Focus:

- **Infrastructure Investment:** The EPRDF prioritized infrastructure development, focusing on roads and education. The "Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization" (ADLI) strategy highlighted the importance of infrastructure for economic growth.

- **Major Projects:** Key projects included the expansion and rehabilitation of rural roads and the Universal Electrification Access Program (UEAP). Efforts were also made to enhance telecommunications infrastructure, creating urban employment opportunities.

The Hydro-Politics of the Nile

Historical Treaties:

- **Colonial Agreements:** The 1929 and 1959 treaties, signed by Britain, Egypt, and Sudan, allocated Nile waters without Ethiopia's involvement. These treaties granted Egypt and Sudan control over the Nile's waters, excluding Ethiopia, which contributes the majority of the Blue Nile's flow.

Modern Developments:

- **Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD):** In 2011, Ethiopia began constructing the GERD, which aims to generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity. Funded by Ethiopian contributions, the dam is a major national project.
- **Regional Tensions:** Egypt and Sudan have expressed concerns and opposition to the dam's construction, citing potential impacts on their water supply.

The Role of Ethiopia in Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping Contributions:

- **International Participation:** Ethiopia has a history of involvement in UN peacekeeping missions, contributing troops and expertise to various global operations, including in Korea, Congo, Rwanda, and Somalia.
- **African Union Efforts:** Ethiopia also plays a significant role in the AU peacekeeping force in Somalia (AMISOM), providing personnel to support stability in the region.

Combating Terrorism:

- **Anti-Terrorism Actions:** Ethiopia has actively fought terrorism, particularly in Somalia, where it has launched military campaigns against groups like Al-Shabaab and collaborated with international partners, including the USA, to address regional threats.

Summary

The transition from a command to a free market economy marked a significant shift in Ethiopia's economic policies. The EPRDF focused on privatization, infrastructure development, and agricultural improvement. The construction of the GERD symbolized national unity and development. Ethiopia's involvement in peacekeeping and counter-terrorism efforts highlights its role in regional stability and international cooperation.