



Journalism is Not Terrorism:

Free Eskinder Nega

Articles

Written
By Eskinder Nega

COMPILED BY: BEFKADU GETACHEW

I AM Eskinder Nega

A Journalist Soldier, He Who Fight Tyranny by his PEN

A Compilation of Articles, Written by Eskinder Nega

May 2012

Free Eskinder Nega

A short Professional Biography and Eskinder's Current status

Eskinder Nega, a journalist and dissident blogger based in Addis Ababa, is one of Ethiopia's leading advocates for press freedom and freedom of expression. Eskinder has been publishing articles critical of the government since 1993, when he opened his first newspaper, *Ethiopis*, which was soon shut down by authorities. He was a general manager of Serkalem Publishing House, which published the newspapers *Asqual*, *Satenaw*, and *Menelik*, all of which are now banned in Ethiopia. Eskinder has also been a columnist for the monthly magazine *Change* and for the U.S.-based news forum EthioMedia, which are also banned. He has continued to publicly call for an end to political corruption and repression despite being continuously harassed and denied a license to practice journalism.

He is currently being held at Kaliti Prison in Addis Ababa, where political prisoners are housed with criminals. Family visits are extremely limited.

Eskinder Nega's trial for charges under the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, which covers the "planning, preparation, conspiracy, incitement, and attempt" of terrorist acts, began on March 6, 2012. The prosecution's evidence against Eskinder and the 23 other defendants has consisted of nearly inaudible recordings of telephone conversations and other comments and video of a town hall meeting in which Eskinder discusses the differences between Arab countries and Ethiopia. Eskinder took the stand on March 28 and denied all the charges against him, saying he has never conspired to overthrow the government through violence and admitting only to reporting on the Arab Spring and speculating on whether a similar movement would take place in Ethiopia. Eskinder's wife, fellow journalist Serkalem Fasil, maintained that Eskinder is "a journalist, not a member of a political party."

On May 1, 2012 Eskinder is awarded the PEN American Center Freedom to Write/Barbara Goldsmith award at a ceremony at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Eskinder's wife Serkalem accepts on his behalf.

Free Eskinder Nega

Eskinder Nega's English Articles

1. The Politics of Appeasement and EPRDF

By [Eskinder Nega](#), July 17th, 2010

History will always remember British PM Neville Chamberlain waving a piece of paper, on which rested the signatures of Hitler and himself, as he proclaimed to an eager world, “peace for our time.”

The setting was September 1938, a mere nineteen years after the horrors of the First World War had finally ended, and when Europe faced the dreaded prospect of yet another round of cataclysmic continental war. But only six months later, in March 1939, the greatest war the world has ever seen engulfed Europe. The “peace for our time” was no more than a mirage despite numerous concessions to Europe’s dictatorships. Ever since then, Chamberlain’s policy of avoiding war at any cost—to buy temporary peace—has been universally vilified.

Truth to be told though, the policy of appeasement, which insisted on peace at any cost, and was an outgrowth of mass hysteria induced by the horrors of the First World War, was very popular in Europe and North America between 1918 and 1939. In fact, when Chamberlain returned to Britain from Munich in 1938 with the peace agreement between Britain and Fascist Germany that he waved to the world (at the expense of Czechoslovakia’s annihilation, by the way), he was greeted as a hero. He was even invited to Buckingham’s Palace, in an unusual gesture of royal approval, before he reported to Parliament. Only Winston Churchill, who was to replace Chamberlain as British PM in 1940, after the outbreak of war in 1939, was a notable dissenter. And indeed, as Churchill had feared, the policy of appeasement only made things worse by leading the Nazis to believe that their belligerence will always be met by further concessions. In the end, it needed a world war to put an end to this vicious circle in which aggression was always mollified by concession.

The parallel between the two decades liaison between the EPRDF and the legal opposition; and Nazi Germany and Europe’s democracies in the run-up to the Second World War is salient. There is much to be learned from this history.

Of course, this is by no means a call to arms against the EPRDF, as Churchill did against Fascist Germany. I am thinking of what is possible, appropriate and desirable strictly within the confines of the peaceful and constitutional parameters. But this is a protest against the sentiment of appeasement, in the aftermath of EPRDF's 99.6 % election "victory", which is threatening to overwhelm the legal opposition because it is on the verge of surrendering all peaceful and legal protests beyond mere electoral engagement—be it in the guise of lack of preparedness or moderation.

EPRDF's 99.6% electoral "victory" is the upshot of a two decades war of aggression against the peaceful opposition. This campaign stirred circumspectly in the early and mid-90s; achieved some level of confidence and comfort in the late 90's and early 2000's; gained trajectory in the aftermath of the 2005 elections; and finally peaked(hopefully!) in the 2010 elections. It was the same with the Nazis. They tasted the water with an illegal rearmament and push into the Rhine; achieved comfort with the Austrian Anschluss; gained trajectory with Czechoslovakia's demise; and finally peaked with the invasion of Poland when they were finally resisted.

EPRDF first explored how far it could go with a series of clever ploys against its coalition partners in the transitional government of the early 90s, against which opposition parties were disastrously unable to react in unison. When the EPRDF was able to see how much it was able to get away with, it acquired enough audacity to orchestrate a blatantly farce constitutional enactment process. Its dubious outcome was not to be earnestly challenged both locally and internationally and was appeased with cynical resignation. The motion of aggression went on to achieve a level of cruise comfort when the nation's first "multi-party" election was held absent major opposition groups; only to be hailed for its "historic achievement" by the international community. The opposition, for its part, could muster no more stamina than to look ahead to 2000, when the second round of elections were scheduled to be held, to score some victories. (Not to win the election, mind you. No one dared to hope that much.) In 1998, however, war broke out with Eritrea, and the quest for national unity, not democratic reforms, took precedence; to which the legal opposition patriotically acquiesced. And thus passed the 2000 elections dominated by the EPRDF's unchallenged sense of entitlement.

By 2005, a few years after the end of the Ethio-Eritrean war, and fourteen years after EPRDF's rule, both the opposition and the public were ready for change. A crisis ridden EPRDF,

undermined by the implosion of its core leadership, in the TPLF, its strongest constituent member, was unsure of its intent and direction and loosened its grip briefly; which led to its swift trashing at the polls. Its reaction was instinctive, overt and merciless.

The legal opposition was divided on how to react. Part of it calculated that the time to resist had come, that this was EPRDF's Rubicon, which if it is allowed to cross by stealing an election it had lost, will be the point of no return for it. But a sizable element of the opposition, along with the entirety of the international community, felt that the aggression of the EPRDF, though outrageous, had to be placated by appeasement yet one more time. And this was all the opening that the EPRDF needed to maximize what it had begun intuitively—it progressively decimated the opposition, the free press and the civil society in 2005 and subsequent years. And sadly for the appeasers, just as each act of appeasement had only increased the appetite of the Nazis for more belligerence; so had the appeasement of 2005 only augmented the craving of the EPRDF for more repression and power. In other words, just as the annihilation of Czechoslovakia was not enough to pacify the Nazis and only led to further aggression against Poland; the concession of 2005's election to the EPRDF only begot its determination—by what ever means necessary—to trash the opposition in the 2010 elections.(Though the 99.6 % “victory” was attained inadvertently.) Appeasement bred aggression.

The Nazis thought they could get away with Poland, too. They sued for peace after instigating their invasion, but Chamberlain could not oblige them. Both the public and the bulk of his party were against additional concessions. But it is not clear whether he really had change of heart. His Foreign Minister, Lord Halifax, was urging the Poles to accept the Nazis' demand up to the last minute. The Poles, of course, rejected his advice and plunged the Nazis in to a world war before they had become too strong to be defeated.

The lesson from this tale is clear for Ethiopia's opposition. Each concession to the EPRDF's belligerence had made it progressively stronger and more aggressive, as was the case with the Nazis in the 1930s. But war and violence are not an option for the legal opposition, as it was for Europe's democracies. Out of necessity, and to realize a very necessary break with the nation's deeply ingrained heritage of political violence, the only suitable option for the legal opposition is within the peaceful and constitutional framework. But participating in elections is not the only means of political engagement in democracies, and even the Ethiopian constitution

acknowledges that much. Election participation has become the veil under which lie a debilitating culture of inertia and appeasement in the opposition camp. The legal opposition needs to be saved for the sake of the country, and for that to happen the veil must be lifted and the problems that lies underneath resolved.

2. VOA and Ethiopia: Challenges and Danger

By Eskinder Nega

Come Monday, July 25, 2011, a protest rally by Ethiopians on 330 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC will most likely draw the keen interest of a southern Republican Senator, Tom Coburn. Here at last is the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the US government agency which has oversight authority over the VOA, at the center of a brewing controversy.

Coburn is the junior Senator from Oklahoma who was first elected to Congress in 1994. A fiscal and social conservative, Coburn, a medical doctor by training, was elected to the Senate in 2004 after serving six years in the House of Representatives. In 2010 Oklahomans returned him to the Senate with a whooping 73 % of the votes cast. In 2004 his plurality had stood at only 53%.

What has impressed conservative Oklahoma most about Coburn is his war against government waste. He is celebrated for his battles against pork-barrel and the expansion of the federal government. And no government agency than BBG irks him more. “The BBG is the most worthless organization in the federal government,” he has said in an interview with The Cable in 2010. “All they are doing is spending money.”

BBG was established in 1994 with an oversight mandate over all non-military U.S. government international broadcastings. This means, in the words of a GAO report, “five separate broadcast entities,” including the VOA. But amazingly, all of the eight bi-partisan governors that make up the BBG, which has management responsibilities over a 600 million dollars budget and nearly 4000 employees, are unpaid part-time volunteers. And Coburn insists, perhaps a bit too harshly, that BBG board members are “people who know nothing about media and foreign policy.” (Dana

Perino, once a White House press secretary and now a BBG board member, concedes she did not know about the Cuban missile crisis until recently.)

Three members of this BBG, Susan McCue, Dana Perino(yes, of the Cuban missile crisis fame), and Michael Meehan traveled to three African countries between June 21 and June 27, 2011. They came primarily as part of BBG's expansive "review of broadcast operations in Africa,"and no doubt with Ethiopia in mind, which jams VOA, "(to) stress the importance of a free and unfettered press."

They came to Ethiopia hoping to meet with government officials. Meles, of course, would have been the ideal person to see. He continues to sanction jamming and had abysmally accused the VOA of "genocidal disposition." (Ironically, it was one of his favorite radio stations during his years as an insurgent.) But he snubbed them. They had to settle for his decidedly less pleasant underling, Berket Simon.

Berket is notably incapable of either dialogue or negotiation. He instinctively lectures or demands. And had it not been for the extraordinary courage of David Abnor, then VOA's horn of Africa chief and one of four media officials traveling with the board members, Berket's bizarre demands and complaints would never have seen light of day.

Astonishingly, Abnor did not opt for the safest means of exposing wrong. He could have easily leaked the documents and watched the story unfold from the sidelines, as is conventionally done. But Berket's prejudice and malice must have riled him. He went on to personally publicize and refute the complaints Berket had obviously assumed would stay behind closed doors; heroically jeopardizing his career prospects. He was soon suspended (and later reinstated to a different position.)

The diversity of the people blacklisted by Berket, first disclosed partially by Abnor, and then fully by the outstanding investigative reporting of Addis Voices' editor, Abebe Gelaw, illustrates just how insecure EPRDF's key leaders have become since the dramatic events of the Arab spring.

One could reasonably expect Dr Berhanu Nega, leader of outlawed Ginbot-7, and Dr Beyana Soba, spokesperson of outlawed OLF, to be on any blacklist the EPRDF would have. But what, if not hysteria, explains the inclusion of even Dr Beyene Petros, a member of parliament for nineteen of the past twenty years? This neither is fanatical intolerance nor, as some may suspect, calculated posturing to garner maximum concession before an eventual settlement. Rather, this is neurosis revealed of a regime profoundly uncertain of its future. Here is proof if ever there was the need of a government in a state of crisis. This is the blessing in disguise the public had needed for some time. In plain sight now stands an authoritarian EPRDF visibly less stable and less sure of itself than popularly imagined.

But there is also the disquieting facet to this still unfolding saga. In a July 18th report, VOA censorship revealed, Abebe Gellaw, published the contents of a leaked email from Gwen Dillard, who heads VOA's African division, to journalists in the horn of Africa section. "VOA should be more focused on development matters," she wrote, apparently acquiescing to Bereket's core demand. "There should be less attention to the Ethiopian Diaspora as well as issues focused on political affairs."

The editorial shift was highlighted within days when a story about a high-profile public discourse between major political parties held in Washington was abruptly dropped. Outraged Ethiopians have vowed to protest on Monday.

The VOA's standing in the Ethiopian market was meticulously cultivated by consistency in reporting up-to-date hard news and events. This excellence, rather than bias in favor of his party, was what had once made Meles Zenawi an avid listener. And it is also this dependability that has ensured VOA's phenomenally high listener's devotion over the years. Tamper with the nucleus of this standard, as a coerced rather than market-driven focus on development issues will inevitably entail, and listeners will simply tune off in droves. No media can take its market for granted.

There are indeed scores of VOA services, Arabic, Persian, and Pashto amongst others, which would clearly gain from a strategic overhaul. But the horn of Africa section is hardly one of them.

A word of advice to BBG: If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

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3. Ethiopian Love Story: EPRDF and Hunger

By Eskinder Nega, July 15, 2011

The older the nation the more the partiality for reserved leaders. And Ethiopia is famously old. The penchant for romanticized leaders who overpower by mere grace and presence is an enduring national fantasy. The standards of public decorum established by Ethiopia's royal courts remain undiminished as ever in public imagination.

But in the person of Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia's autocratic leader, now in power for two theatrical decades, are exemplified the mavericks who see no need to be restrained by strictures imposed in bygone ages. And Parliament has been the venue of choice for Meles Zenawi to demonstrate his break with the past. This is clearly a "no-holds-barred" politician, to borrow a phrase from the world of wrestling. He rages at will against opponents, relishes mocking Parliamentarians, and oft-times flings tactless words with startling ease, all on live radio and TV transmissions to the nation. He cares not who is outraged.

It was in one of those melodramatic moments in Parliament that Meles deliberated on what it takes to be a capable member of his cabinet. To be educated is not essentially indispensable, he said. Even an illiterate person could be a member of my cabinet, he told a shocked nation. All it takes to be a competent Minister in this cabinet is a thorough knowledge of EPRDF's program, he winded down triumphantly.

He was not bluffing.

Meet his long time Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and presumed heir, Adisu Legese, now retired (pushed aside, some contend) with generous perks since the 2010 elections.

Now, Adisu is no prototype of the illiterate Meles had alluded to. Make no mistake there. He has been to elementary school, and then proceeded to high school. In the 50s this was no small feat. More impressive, he went to college. And he graduated. Undeniably, this is a man with some education. But, alas, as has been extensively reported over the years, he was trained to be a physical education instructor. There was hardly the predisposition nor the need to apply himself to the hard sciences.

Between his graduation and retirement almost four decades were to pass. After a brief stint as a physical education instructor in a public school, he spent roughly a decade and a half as an insurgent. And then a decade as President of the Amhara region, Ethiopia's second largest. Finally, at the apex of his political career, he was Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The pride of the EPRDF, the ruling party, is its agricultural-led industrialization plan. This is supposed to be the answer to Ethiopia's quandary of entrenched underdevelopment, the means to food self-sufficiency and the emergence of a middle class in the midst of Ethiopia's rural majority. Unlike virtually all other developmental schemes, the agrarian sector is at the core of this blueprint. Fail there and the entirety of the grand blueprint goes down the drain.

Two ministries, that of agriculture and rural development, were initially entrusted with the primary responsibilities to oversee this plan. They were later merged into a single Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD).

The Parliamentary Proclamation that established MARD lists its duties as conservation and use of forest and wildlife resources, food security, water use and small-scale irrigation, monitoring events affecting agricultural development and early warning system, promoting agricultural development, and establishing and providing agriculture and rural technology training.

Unlike some other ministries, this is a turf where not merely political but also technical leadership from the very top is crucial. Adisu was by no means the professional the Ministry needed during its crucial early years. It was only a question of time before morale was to suffer.

Of course, there is more than misplaced Adisu to explain EPRDF-led Ethiopia's failure to attain food self-sufficiency. The failure is structural as well as policy. What Adisu's long tenure at MARD rather explains is an ingrained complacency with the status-quo. There is no sense of national crisis and emergency, despite consistent dependence on food aid for decades. Food aid is expected and tolerated even amongst policy makers. A distinctive case of food-aid-dependency-syndrome has developed at government level.

Meanwhile, millions suffer. The Ethiopian government on Monday acknowledged that 40 percent more people than last year are in need of food aid. This means 4.5 million are hungry. USAID estimates many more. Without food aid there will be devastating famine.

The tolls from past famines are shocking. The worst one lasted ten years between 1888 and 1898. One third of the populace and 90 percent of herds were lost. Eritrea was lost to the Italians as an immediate consequence. But 60 years were to pass before another major famine was to break out in 1958. Close to 100,000 died in Tigray alone. Tens of thousands more died in the mid-seventies, mostly in Wello. But thanks to food aid, famines have largely been avoided since. Only the "biblical famine" of 1984-1985 was the exception.

And Meles savors any opportunity to point out that there were food shortages, not famine, under his watch. This is supposed to be the progress that should endear him to Ethiopians. And here lies the mentality that has nurtured not only complacency and dependency but also kind of a love story between the EPRDF and hunger/food-aid.

Ultimately, there is permanent hunger in Ethiopia because there has never been a government accountable to an electorate that could throw it out of office. Only under a dictatorship is permanent hunger possible. Democracies do not go hungry for two decades. Hunger is a political problem in Ethiopia. It requires a political solution.

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Corrigendum:

Professor Tecola Hagos writes:

I have two points that should be corrected or clarified so there be no misunderstanding: 1) You referred to Emperor Yohannes IV as “King Yohannes” that is a gross error if it is intentional. During the period you were referring to, there was a treaty signed by Ethiopia and Great Britain/Egypt on 3rd of June 1884 (Hewett Treaty) wherein Yohannes is referred to as “Negoos Negust of Ethiopia” i.e. “King of Kings.” Emperor Yohannes IV by then had already appointed Kings under him. Emperor Yohannes confirmed King Menilik as King of Shoa in 1878; he also appointed Ras Adal Tesema of Gojam as King Teklehaymanot of Gojam and Keffa in 1881. Thus, referring to Emperor Yohannes IV as “King Yohannes” is inappropriate and must be corrected.

Professor Tecola is absolutely right. My regrets. Thank you Professor.

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4. Gadhafi's fall and Meles Zenawi

By **Eskinder Nega**, August 26th, 2011

Nero was famously eccentric in Roman times. He longed to be remembered for his theatrical abilities rather than leadership of one of the world's greatest empires. But his other quirks were more horrifying than amusing. He imagined, for example, an implausible bed—yes, bed— which would commit murder. And there were the psychotic eccentricities of Russia's Ivan the terrible who, as legend has it, had an elephant killed for refusing to bow to him.

Modern times' eccentrics have generally been less deadly. There is, for instance, Mehran Karimi Nasseri, the Iranian asylum seeker who lived in the departure lounge of Charles de Gaulle's Airport for many years. (He inspired Tom Hank's fictional 2004 movie, The Terminal.)

At the opposite end of the pole, though, the modern age also has Libya's ominous Muammar Gadhafi as a world famous eccentric.

Gadhafi was born in the great Saharan desert in 1942. His parents were Arabized Berbers. Libya was under the inept rule of Fascist Italy back then. But twenty years later, in 1961, with the first wave of decolonization on the verge of sweeping Africa, Libya was hastily transformed into an independent, and hopefully conservative, Kingdom by Western powers. But with next door revolutionary Egypt exciting passions across the Arab world, a revolution in Libya was only inevitable from the very outset.

Inspired by the success of Egypt's Nasser and his free officers in the mid-fifties, radicalized young Arabs joined their countries' militaries with the hope of eventually using them as revolutionary weapons, too.

And so a Nasser-awed, aspiring revolutionary Gadhafi, one of many like-minded youth in the Middle East, made his way to his nation's military academy, where he was promptly accepted. Eight years later he was unexpectedly running Libya. Even he hadn't planned it this way, though. It was a feat worthy more of fate than earthly being. Gadhafi was only 27.

His eccentricities were not really evident at first. But in retrospect, perhaps there was an early sign at Nasser's funeral. Nasser died of a sudden heart attack only a year after Gadhafi's accession to power in 1969. The Arab world was stunned. He had just presided over a pan-Arabic summit. Tens of thousands poured spontaneously into the streets all over the Arab world wailing in utter grief. On the day of the funeral, five million came out to pay their respects. And while tears rolled down the faces of PLO's Chairman Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein, the Arab world's newest leader, Gadhafi, fainted twice. An unusually passionate man had come to power in Libya.

Over the next forty years he would go on to amuse the world with his all-female bodyguards; his "voluptuous Ukrainian nurses;" his outrageous statements ("HIV is a peace virus;") pitched tents from where he conducted state business; and, of course, his memorably colorful attires.

But there were also his less amusing internal polices and blood-tainted foreign adventures. Though himself one of the Berbers, North Africa's indigenous ethnic groups, he systematically suppressed their languages and cultures. (He called it "poison.") He killed internal dissidents at will; those who escaped to exile were assassinated. His intelligence agents planted bombs on Pan AM flight 103, which blew over Lockerbie, in Scotland, killing hundreds. Obviously, the value of life carried little weight with him.

This reckless disregard for human life was again apparent in the early days of February 2011 when serious protests, inspired by the Arab Spring, against his forty years rule broke out in several cities. He struck with vengeance. And when protests threatened to overwhelm him, he recruited mercenaries to shed more blood. He counted on the potency of mass murder and apathy of the international community to prevail. But he calculated wrong.

Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi, who now leads Africa's largest dictatorship, and who many suspect is calculating as Gaddafi did at first, should take serious note.

Killings enraged Libyans as it did Tunisians and Egyptians before them. Inexplicably and suddenly massacre failed to terrorize the young any more. Despite Gadhafi's assertion that only a drugged youth could have refused to succumb to live bullets, hope is really what had fueled the protests.

Eric Hoffer had famously argued that it was hope not oppression that had made revolutions possible. And indeed neither Egyptians nor Libyans had more reason to rebel in 2011 than they did for decades. Too few were any more capable of imagining life free from the oppressive status-quo. Too many had been co-opted; many more had simply learned how to muddle through. But events in Tunisia changed everything. Change was proved possible. The people mattered, after all. And hope was born in the Arab world. There was then really nothing Gadhafi could have done to fundamentally change the course of events. Even without NATO's involvement he could only have delayed not prevented his regime's eventual demise. Hope is insuppressible. The surprise swift fall of Tripoli into rebel hands, despite numerous predications of a stalemate, underscores this fact.

Hope will come to sub-Sahara's remaining dictatorships, too. The Arab Spring has already brought it to their doorsteps. It will not wait forever to get in. No one knows which sub-Saharan dictatorship will relent first. But that is almost irrelevant. What matters is that its spread will be unavoidable once it begins. The triumph of hope in only one sub-Saharan dictatorship will beget a continent wide African Spring, hopefully all peaceful. And as Egypt, the Arab world's biggest dictatorship during Mubarak's reign, was the Arab Spring's golden prize, so will Ethiopia, sub-Sahara's biggest dictatorship, be the golden prize for an African Spring. There couldn't have been an Arab Spring without Egypt. There will be no African Spring without Ethiopia.

Hopefully, Meles understands this and is willing to do his country and Africa one big favor. When the time arrives, the inevitable must not be futilely resisted. This is the crucial lesson that should be learned from Gadhafi's needlessly destructive finale. Ethiopia must and should avoid violence. If Ethiopia shuns violence so will most of sub-Sahara Africa. And only then will the advent of the African Spring be even better news than that of the Arab Spring.

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The writer can be reached at serk27@gmail.com

5. Ethiopia: Time for peaceful action

By [Eskinder Nega](#), September 2nd, 2011

"Of course, you may change the subject of your presentation," told me a UDJ official affably over his cell phone.

"Thanks. Believe me, this is more topical. Anything else would almost be a waste," I went on, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically.

“What do you have in mind,” he asked cautiously.

“How to realize peaceful change in Ethiopia,” I exploded.

There was a pause. Few seconds elapsed.

“Sure. Why not? I see no problem. But I will have to clear it with the others first,” he said.

UDJ, one of Ethiopia’s main opposition parties, has been organizing weekend-town-hall-like-meetings on the premises of its head office in Addis now for a couple of months. No permit is required. A video presentation by University of Dayton’s Professor Messay Kebede had drawn a respectable crowd. So did the editor of Awramba Times, Dawit Kebede. A presentation by Professor Al Mariam is in the pipeline, possibly next week. I am due early Sunday.

A curious and interesting aspect of these meetings is the increasing involvement of the youth. Perhaps this says something about the restive times we live in. But this is also the age of visibly shortened attention spans. Engaging and sustaining their interest is a formidable task.

Here was my dilemma. The youth are primarily the people I wish to address on Sunday. But the topic I had agreed to dwell on, the role of civic society in a democratic society, while sensible and important, offered little chance of broad reflection. And yet, with events in Libya and Syria dominating headlines, its time for Ethiopians to at least assess the six months since the advent of the Arab Spring and reflect on the future. I had to change the subject of my presentation.

Friends offered a wide range of advice. Oppression, inflation, corruption, hunger dominated their thoughts. They thought any one of these subjects would suffice. But most preferred I address the exasperating issue of weak opposition groups.

“There would have been an Ethiopian Spring had it not been for the weakness of opposition groups,” many opined. “The people need the reassurance of a viable alternative to press for immediate change. Challenge them to rise up to the occasion.”

“But were opposition groups any better in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Syria?” I always countered.”
Did the Arab masses have feasible option?”

Silence always ensued.

The missing ingredient, I believe, is neither weak opposition nor absence of political and economic push factors. The shortcoming lies in absence of people who have so far failed to hazard the first steps. Ordinary citizens took the initiative all over North Africa and the Middle East. The results made history. They are powerful precedents for the rest of humanity.

While inspiring words, sober analyses and robust debates are indispensable as ever, they will remain exactly no more than mere words unless translated into actions. To Ethiopia this means risking the core of a much cherished collective vision—peaceful transition to democracy. In the event of prolonged absence of peaceful action, an implosion, perhaps violent and no doubt dangerous, is unavoidable. Needless to say, the status-quo is increasingly untenable.

The time to call for peaceful and legal action has arrived in Ethiopia. History can not be postponed indefinitely.

Stay tuned.

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ADDENDUM:

While working on my presentation I came across an interesting 2006 US embassy cable released by

Wikileaks last week. Revealed is what the US department really thought about the 2005 treason trail.

There was no call for violence and genocide in 2005. There was only a stolen election.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 001402

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO, AF/E, AND DRL:K.GILBRIDE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV KDEM KJUS ET

SUBJECT: TRIAL OF ETHIOPIAN OPPOSITION BEGINS WITH VIDEOS
OF PUBLIC CAMPAIGN SPEECHES

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 1231 (AND PREVIOUS)

Â B. ADDIS ABABA 49

1.SUMMARY.

Six months after arrest, federal prosecutors began presenting the High Court with evidence it said would substantiate capital charges ranging from treason and attempted genocide against CUD chairman Hailu Shawel and other opposition members, independent journalists, and civil society representatives. The first two weeks of prosecution arguments have been underwhelming: more than 20 hours of seized CUD videotapes have shown public campaign speeches by opposition leaders mobilizing voters to participate in national elections, as well as town hall meetings in which local residents throughout the country discuss a littany of human rights abuses (including detentions, intimidation, and arbitrary killings of opposition supporters by security forces). While showing public criticism of the government's policies, in none of the evidence presented thus far has there been any call for violence or genocide. (HUDDLESTON)

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The writer can be reached at serk27@gmail.com

6. Debebe Eshetu's arrest and New Year

By [Eskinder Nega](#), September 9th, 2011

Researchers detail ten types of smile. There is the tight-lipped smile which the English particularly fancy. There is the twisted smile of the angered. There is the dealer-smile of the sly. There is the nothing-I-can-do-smile of defeat. And on it goes.

Most people could muster a reasonable mimic of most types of smile. Who, after all, does not occasionally flash a not-understanding-you-smile? But one, the heartfelt-felt-smile, defies feign. It really has to come from the heart.

I needed no telling that Debebe Eshetu, our co-defendant in the Treason Trial, was smiling from the heart when he approached me after a visit to police hospital in 2005. Every muscle on his face was manifestly convulsed. What I did not suspect was the staggering news he had for me.

“Baby Eskinder is on the way,” he exclaimed, smiling brilliantly.

It was a smile that dominated the face; an expression of wholesome delight. And before I could recover from the shock, I, too, was overwhelmed with his joy. And so I learned for the first time, in prison, facing treason and genocide charges, I was to become a father.

Debebe's infectious smile sustained prisoners' spirit in those difficult times. Of all the prisoners, his easy smile, authentic and warm, gave us reason to hope against hope. He somehow made the prospect of long prison sentences bearable. There was no gloom where Debebe tread and naturally prisoners clamored for his company.

His physical health could have been better when I met him last. But his spirit was as lively as ever. We mused about the treason trial, lamented the wasted years since, but parted with a note

of optimism about the future. There was absolutely nothing to indicate a changed perspective. The commitment to non-violence was as intact as ever.

Much has been said about the improbability of journalists as plausible terrorist suspects, but Debebe's case is really a class unto itself. This is a frail man in his mid-60's; long plagued by chronic back pain; a free man only under a conditional pardon; a prominent dissident who knows he is under close secret-police scrutiny; and a committed family man whose wife and daughters dot on him. How in the world could such a person be involved in terrorism? It simply defies logic.

Even if unbeknownst to the EPRDF, there is such a thing as a world-wide profile of a terrorist. That person is usually male; probably in his 20s; unmarried; and always a fanatic. Zeal and terrorism go hand in hand. Minus the fanaticism the terrorist is not a possibility.

None of the recent detains under the terrorism charges remotely resemble the profile. Debebe is probably the ultimate antithesis of the fanatic, his pragmatism, his easy nature, defines him. Neither do journalists Webesht and Reyot and opposition politician Zerihun Gebre-Egzeabher fit the profile. The same goes for the calm university professor, Bekele Gerba. And of course the list could go on.

Why are Ethiopia's alleged terrorist suspects so unique? The answer is too obvious to merit detailing here. I would rather reflect on what Ethiopian New Year, 2004, only two days into the future, bodes for the nation.

Look at what had happened in the world in 2003, and it's easy to complain about the things we do not have. No freedom. Raging inflation. Rising unemployment. Rampant corruption. A delusional ruling party. An uncertain year ahead of us. And the list could go on.

But consider the exciting prospects:

2004 could be the year when we, too, like the majority of our fellow Africans, will have a government by the people, for the people.

2004 could be the year when we will finally stop killing each other for political reasons.

FREE ESKINDER NEGA & ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS, in ETHIOPIA!

2004 could be the year when there will no more be tortures in our prisons.

2004 could be the year when Ethiopians will no more be incarcerated for their political convictions.

2004 could be the year when Ethiopians will no more have reasons to flee to exile.

2004 could be the year when freedom of expression and association will be respected.

2004 could be the year when we could take justice for granted.

And again, the list could go on.

The gist of the matter is that there are ample reasons to hope. Tyranny is in retreat everywhere. It has lost one of its two last great bastions, the Arab world. The momentum is now on the side freedom.

Freedom is partial to no race. Freedom has no religion. Freedom favors no ethnicity. Freedom discriminates not between rich and poor countries. Inevitably, freedom will overwhelm Ethiopia.

And with the advent of a new year, we are one step closer to freedom. It's wonderful to be alive!

Happy New Year!

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7. Ethiopia: Meles' and Mengistu's visits to China

By **Eskinder Nega**, August 19th, 2011

This was a bitter sweet visit for Ethiopia's increasingly precarious PM, Meles Zenawi. It was obvious he traveled to the Orient savoring the ensuing headlines. His cheerful mood was apparent as he boarded the chartered Boeing that was to ferry him to the Middle Kingdom. He was mysteriously all smiles.

Unbeknownst to many that day was Chinese approval of 500 million dollars in new loans to Ethiopia. Meles was due in Beijing to proudly preside over the official signing ceremony. What could the near bankrupt West do but look with marked tinge of envy? Certainly, no one would miss this cunning Chinese response to Hillary Clinton's provocative "beware of Chinese colonization" June 2011 speech in Tanzania. And he would be in the spot that any leader in power for two decades naturally craves most, the international spotlight. In addition, there will of course be the 500 million dollars to take back home as proof that he still is, despite lingering uncertainty generated by the Arab Spring, an international player to be reckoned with. There were ample reasons to be upbeat.

But curse the hunger. It changed the narrative.

Somehow, there was more interest about the separate 55 million dollars food-aid offered by the Chinese; a paltry tenth of the loans generously extended in this age of financial pandemonium.

Meles wanted to speak about investment and loans when he met Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier. Economics dominated his thoughts.

But Jiabao had a crisis—yes, he called it a crisis!—in mind.

A crisis? What crisis? Have demonstrations broken out in Addis? Meles wasn't smiling anymore.

"China will stay with Ethiopia to cope with the current crisis (hunger), beef up cooperation and strive for common development," an unsmiling Jiabao told the media after the meeting.

To any one who read between the lines, this was the Chinese version of a public snub. Meles wanted economics to dominate his visit and hoped to limit the looming threat of famine to an afterthought. The Chinese opted for the opposite. They clearly wanted their guest to sensibly prioritize his needs by feeding the hungry first. And they let the world know, albeit by way of their customary doublespeak. There were only muted promises of investment. Much more was said about hunger.

Few days later, President Hu Jintao reinforced the official line when he met Meles in the Southern city of Shenzhen. I am concerned about hunger in the horn, he told Meles. This time there wasn't even mention of other issues, at least as far as the media was concerned. There was no ambiguity. Hunger, not trade and investment, was center stage, much to the dismay of uppity Meles Zenawi.

Almost unconsciously, China has acted like the rising super-power it is. Confronted with irrefutable proof of a humanitarian disaster in the making, China has for the first time asserted real leadership far beyond Asia. For any one who cares to take notice, here is a historical milestone. Beijing could no more indefinitely stave off the responsibility of moral leadership that comes with world-power status.

The last time the Chinese snubbed an Ethiopian leader was in the 80s. Beleaguered Mengistu Haile-Mariam was in Beijing to complain about “imperialists” sabotaging his socialist revolution and plead for aid. But with ideologue Mao long dead, reforming Deng, then firmly in control of China, was in no mood for revolutionary rhetoric.

“Negotiate with your opponents and concentrate on feeding the people,” advised Deng.

Mengistu was outraged. He left Beijing not only disappointed but also angered. The audacity of Deng had unnerved him. He had excuses for his problems. The insurgents were little more than nuisances, they were not a real threat. Negotiating with them, he reckoned, would only be making a mountain out of a molehill. And ever the orthodox ideologue, drought not flawed policies bred Ethiopia's hungry millions. He was not to blame.

In the end, of course, Deng was to be proved right. Even from a distance, his foresight was striking. But by the time Mengistu was finally prepared to heed his advice, it was too late.

Meles is not the only despot who sees more than there actually is in the rivalry between the West and the Chinese in Africa. Fantasies aside, unlike the cold-war era, when two world views were competing for world domination, the ball of contention is entirely different these days. The Chinese may aspire to eventual economic primacy but are perfectly cognizant that they offer no plausible alternative to liberal democracy. Their interest in Ethiopia, or indeed any where else in Africa, has always been exclusively commercial in the post-Deng years. Like the Japanese before them, they have neither politics nor world-view to export. Soft power remains an unchallenged domain of the West.

But with almost a million Chinese now living in Africa and trade having expanded spectacularly from 6 billion to 100 billion dollars in less than a decade, Chinese perspectives must inevitably broaden. Too much is now at stake. No more is it feasible to look askance when genocide was in play, as was the case in Sudan. No more is it possible to pretend that all is rosy as millions go hungry, as is the case with Ethiopia. Not only has China become rich and strong enough to make conscience an imperative but bad publicity is famously bad for business.

It's time for a dose of imagination in Chinese foreign policy. A budding superpower could do more than merely oppose the West. And perhaps banning the sale of jamming devices would be the best place to start. It has tarnished China's image.

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8. Ethiopian perspectives on London's riots

By **Eskinder Nega**, August 12th, 2011

Had it transpired anywhere in the US, home to world-famous Uzi-brandishing street gangs, hardly any other person but victim and family would have paused to take notice. But fatal police shootings are still rare in the UK. They tend to raise many eyebrows.

Operation Trident Officers, who are tasked with tracking gun related crimes in London's formidable African and Caribbean communities, had no reason to suspect that the pending August 4th, 2011, arrest of Mark Duggan, 29, would be anything but routine.

How events exactly unfolded when Duggan was approached by the police is not yet clear. But shots had suddenly rang out and by the time it was over Duggan was dead; a police officer had been wounded; and a police radio had been wrecked by a bullet.

Mark Duggan was no criminal. The police had no record of him. He was well liked by friends and neighbors. The gun fight dumbfounded his world-famous community in north London, Tottenham.

This is London's most diverse neighborhood; more than 300 languages are reportedly spoken. It's also where city's highest unemployment rate is concentrated. Little of London's fabled wealth is evident here. Crime, petty as well as organized, and dominated by rival armed gangs, thrives on the backstreets.

Tottenham had its first riot in the mid-1980s following the death of a black woman during a search of her home by the police. This was a week after the infamous riots of Brixton, and much to the shock of Britain a police officer was killed by protesters; a first in more than 150 years. And suddenly, not only did Tottenham, mostly immigrant and non-white, but also the police, mostly white and indigenous, had reason to be angry. Worse, there was ample room for more bitterness over the subsequent trial of three minors and three adults charged with murder of the police officer.

The two sides more or less remained at odds ever since. Residents complained of alleged police heavy handedness while law enforcement officials quietly mulled over alleged un-British disregard of law and order. An explosion was inevitable.

Protest began two days later, August 6, 2011. It was peaceful at first. Three hundred people gathered at Tottenham's police station demanding "justice for Duggan's family." The authorities responded with police on horseback. They did not expect serious resistance. It was a colossal miscalculation.

Provoked, protesters reacted with devastating ferocity. Two police cars were immediately torched. And before anyone could give serious thought to what had happened, violence had spread all over Tottenham. Three hours later, more than forty fires had been set around Tottenham. Another two more hours and the protests had degenerated into widespread looting. Anarchy was threatening to overwhelm parts of north London.

Britain was shocked. The public could see no rational for the lootings. Outrage rather than copycat riots was expected for the next day, Sunday, August 7, 2011. But that was exactly what did not happen.

The riots first spread to Enfield and Brixton. Police were attacked, fires set and stores looted. Oxford circus, Chingford Mount, Ponders End and Islington were soon under siege by rampaging youth. The police were distressed. They did not have enough personnel to contain a city wide rampage.

Worse was to come on Monday, now the third night of riots. Scotland Yard reported "that areas of north, east and south London were affected." Birmingham and Manchester joined on Tuesday. The speed with which the riots spread was simply breathtaking. Despite loud criticism by the fiery British tabloid press, no law enforcement apparatus could have been prepared for it.

This is where yet another crucial lesson lie for Ethiopia's archaic ruling party, the EPRDF. Despite reprehensible lootings by rioters and the omnipresence of hysterical tabloids, there is more to the English riots than mere criminality. Unemployment and hopelessness are underlying causes. If protests break out in Ethiopia for any reason they will also spread swiftly and

uncontrollably like they did in England. There is repression, corruption, inflation, unemployment and rising hopelessness to serve as underlying causes. But unlike the apolitical British protests, Ethiopia's will most probably be quickly overwhelmed by the political issues of repression and change. And as has happened in Egypt and Syria there will then be no turning back.

The longer reforms are delayed, the more the imperative for Ethiopia, peaceful transition to democracy, will be at stake. The British will not prevent further riots by merely increasing the number of police on the streets. Social ills will have to be tackled earnestly. Neither could the EPRDF rely indefinitely on the strength of its security network to prevent an explosion. Both Meles Zenawi and the EPRDF have overstayed. Change is inevitable and should be accommodated rather than resisted futilely.

But six months have now passed since the demise of Mubarak's rule in Egypt. And the much predicted protests have yet to break out in Ethiopia. Does this mean that analysts have after all been off mark? Or has the increased police presence on Addis' streets effectively deterred protests permanently? Not necessarily.

The repression is as unrelenting as ever. Food inflation has reached the atrocious 50 % mark. Unemployment shows no sign of declining. Small businesses, the backbone of the expanding service sector, are suffering perceptibly. The specter of famine dominates the headlines.

Corruption is getting worse. There is growing tension within the ruling party. And overshadowing all these is the Arab Spring, which has inspired the restive urban youth. The analysts have always been right. These factors matter more than the repressive capabilities of the state. The threat of an explosion will continue to loom large for the foreseeable future.

The police and security services both in Ethiopia and Britain should be given a break. It's not for them to solve the underlying problems their countries face. In democratic Britain the remedy lies in economics and social policies. In authoritarian Ethiopia it lies squarely in politics.

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9. Mubarak in court : Is Meles next?

By [Eskinder Nega](#), August 5th, 2011

Thirty years in the limelight and yet Mubarak seldom smiled. Arab leaders rarely do. Perhaps it's the 600 years under the Ottomans. But the last time he appeared on television, February 10, 2011, there was more than the customary solemnity. The sneer was manifestly apparent. This was after all a veteran soldier speaking, a decorated hero of the 1974 Israeli-Arab war which had restored Egypt's confidence and dignity, and he was impatient to tell the world that succumbing to the demands of an unruly mob was the last thing on his mind.

"I will not resign," he finally said, defiantly stressing each word to maximize impact.

Egypt was literally outraged. The rest of the world held its breath. And the impossible happened next: he was ousted in less than 24 hours!

Six months later, he was back on the airwaves, his image and words transmitted live to a world-wide audience.

"Yes, I am here. I deny all the accusations wholly," rang out 83-year-old Hosni Mubarak's still surprisingly deep and strong voice.

But he was clearly not the man he was on February 10, 2011. He was speaking from one of Egypt's infamous prisoners' cages, laying helplessly in bed, accused of murder and plunder. The hair was still the dyed jet-black it had always been, but the facial expression had changed

noticeably. A ghostly hollowness in the eyes dominated the face. The only movement was around the lips, involuntarily.

The world was not supposed to see him like this. Ostensibly running Egypt are men all appointed to their exalted positions by Mubarak. To their credit, they hadn't forgotten. While the whole world spoke of his overthrow, of a people's revolution, they were loyally adamant that he had "voluntarily stepped aside in the interest of the nation."

Fuming young revolutionaries, however, thought otherwise. "We took him down in plain view of the whole world," they protested. Along the way, more than 800 unarmed and peaceful protesters died. He must see his day in court of law, they demanded passionately.

The setting was complete for a battle of wills. And more than the pace of reforms was at stake in the outcome. The very soul of the revolution was on the line.

Which side prevailed was apparent when ethereal Mubarak was briskly wheeled into a mostly empty court room in a hospital bed. Victory has gone to the revolutionaries. Though it's too early to write off the military entirely, by losing the blinking contest they have lost the initiative. They are now less likely to dictate the pace of change.

Will the wretched sight of Mubarak behind a prisoners' cage impel dictators to cling to power at all costs? Have Assad in Syria, Saleh in Yemen and Meles in Ethiopia now lost what incentive there was to negotiate? Will the fate of Mubarak inadvertently become an antidote to peaceful transition?

More than 800 people should not have died in mere eighteen days. Most were shot wantonly by sharp-shooters to spread terror. Some were recklessly knifed by ruling party thugs. Many more were seriously injured by an overzealous police. More than 100 people were either being killed or injured every day during those three weeks. But the vast majority of protesters were unarmed and peaceful. There was coldhearted calculation to the killings.

This was more than a state reacting to restore law and order. There was clear motive behind the killings.

There is a fine line between murder and casualty that must not be crossed. Mubarak had callously crossed that line. He is now paying for it. Had he left office earlier, before killing gratuitously, he would most probably not be where he is today. His friends would have been able to help. His last minute behavior, more than the entirety of his record, is what has compelled the trial.

Saleh and Meles could and should learn from Mubarak. After bombarding Hama with tanks, however, it looks like its too late for Syria's Assad. He will have to account for his actions, sooner or later. His friends and well-wishers, even those in Iran, would now be really hard pressed to help him. Saleh, too, would have been beyond the pale by now had it not been for the obvious threat posed by Islamic fundamentalists in Yemen, some with ties to Al-Qaeda. But hopefully Saleh is aware that he lives in the age of satellite television. A single image could sway world-wide public opinion against him. And no one will then be able to buttress his regime or help him personally, as the Saudis have been doing ever since the implosion of the crisis.

Every step Saleh takes is laden with multiple risks and dangers. The earlier he leaves the better for all: himself, his country and the region.

Meles Zenawi of course has yet to face a crisis. But he will. An African Spring, with Ethiopia, Africa's largest dictatorship, as its epicenter, is unavoidable. And he knows it. But his reaction stands in sharp contrast to the Moroccans. While the Moroccan regime, soberly mindful of what had happened in Tunisia and Egypt, has voluntarily instituted democratic reforms to preempt a mass uprising, Meles has chosen to dramatically increase police presence on the streets. There is no talk of democratic reforms. All signs are that he intends to make a stand. Now rather than later is the best time for friends to caution him otherwise.

Meles must not draw the wrong lessons from Mubarak's plight. Mubarak's last minute behavior, not his track record, determined what happened to him after his ouster. The same most probably holds true for Meles Zenawi.

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10. Negaso and EPRDF: The Inside Story

By [Eskinder Nega](#), July 29th, 2011

Book publishing had its golden age in the 60s and 70s. So did theater. The singular genius of Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, whose magnificent adaptations of Shakespearean plays are arguably the best of their kind anywhere in the world,

inspired and to a large extent sustained a rare, lively world of African theater. It may still be the best in Africa. Books and literary magazines thrived on multitude of talents, Behalu Girma, Sebhat Gebre-Egzabher, Berhanu Zerihun, and many others. Good books easily sold tens of thousands of copies.

The 80s and 90s were less pleasant. Tsegaye was distracted, first, by the nation's new rulers, whose ethnocentrism he abhorred, and later on, by ill-health. (He died in the US in 2006.) And in the world of book publishing, the explosion of private newspapers in the mid-80s literally became an existential threat. Good books could barely sale 5000 copies anymore.

But there have been the occasional bestsellers. Mengistu Haile-Mariam's book-formatted interviews probably hold the record in this regard, reportedly selling in the tens of thousands. Berhanu Nega's take on Ethiopia's politics in 2006, written, smuggled out and published while he was still in prison, was unavoidably a runaway success. Seye Abraha's book was also successful but could have done better had less space been devoted to court proceedings and more to politics. (He has promised such a book in the future. A good book from him could set a new record.) And now there is a latest entrant to this select league, Negaso Gidada's book-formatted

interviews. (There were of course many more successful books over the years. But I can't possibly detail them all here. Sorry.)

Entitled “Negaso’s journey”(Negaso’s mended) and written by Daniel Tefera, a young journalist, the 384 pages book was released in Addis Ababa about two weeks ago. Here is Negaso narrating his early life, reminiscing about student politics, revealing new secrets about the EPRDF and expounding his vision for the nation verbatim.

Naturally, at a time when public disapproval of EPRDF’s corrupt and inflation ridden authoritarianism has climbed to an all time high, the most alluring parts of the book lie in the chapters about the ruling party.

Here are 5 EPRDF inside stories revealed by Negaso in this book.(There are more but you will have to buy and read the book.)

1. On murder and impunity.

On page 213 Negaso addresses the issue of performance reviews in the OPDO, one of four constituent members of the EPRDF coalition. Even when apparent breach of law by officials was established, prosecution was not automatic, Negaso says. They were merely transferred to different positions.

In one shocking instance, “a stubborn and spiteful official, whom I would rather not name publicly, was accused of murder (but was not prosecuted,)” Negaso discloses.

2. On Major General Abadula (now Speaker of the Federal Parliament.)

Abadula Gameda (nominal chief of the army in 2000) was in Paris when news of fallout between TPLF leaders broke out, recounts Negasso. But after his return he was quick to throw his lot with Meles. He and two other active-duty Oromo Generals, Bacha and Alemeshet, who were constitutionally compelled to stay out of politics, were soon lobbying for open support of Meles.

“We (Negaso and Kuma, leader of the OPDO) insisted that the military should stay out of politics,” says Negaso.

But the Generals were adamant that with the TPLF weakened by internal strife, the ANDM was becoming too powerful in the EPRDF. OPDO must support Meles and buttress its standing in the EPRDF, they maintained.

“We rejected their argument and opted to reconcile TPLF leaders,” says Negaso.

But access to palace grounds, where Negaso was housed as the nation’s titular President, was suddenly prohibited and people could see him no more, frustrating the effort.

“When I inquired with security, I was told the order had come from Tefera Walewa,” explains Negaso. The presidential title notwithstanding, he was unable to override Tefera’s order. He was transformed into a virtual prisoner in the grand palace.

“Meles cleverly used the ANDM,” he says.

But ultimately, even if unsaid by Negaso, devoid as the ANDM has always been of a capable leadership, it was never really in a position to dominate the EPRDF. Meles’ standing has always been secure, and he most probably knew it.

3. On Meles and Seye Abraha et al.

And there is Negaso’s gripping (and disturbing) narration of Meles’ account of the fallout between him and his best friends, Seye Abraha et al.

“We took away their jackets and threw them out naked,” bragged deranged looking Meles at an EPRDF meeting days after illegally expelling almost half of his party’s senior leadership.

“I was flabbergasted,” says Negaso. “I immediately told him he sounded like Mengistu Hiale-Mariam.”

For a brief moment it seemed as if Meles had gone too far. There was silence in the room. But Genet Zewde, an ANDM member, suddenly burst into tears.

“How could you compare him to Meles?” she implored sobbing.

And abruptly Negaso was on the defensive.

“I did not say he was Mengistu Haile-Mariam. I only said he sounded like him,” Negaso had to blurt out.

The tide turned. Meles was saved.

4. On corruption.

Worried by increased feedbacks from the public about the rising tide of corruption, Negaso approaches Meles demanding action.

“There is nothing I could do right now,” replied an irate Meles. “Securing conclusive evidences in individual cases is easier said than done. The smart move is to concentrate on culturally stigmatizing corruption.”

Negaso, however, was unmoved.

“My final impression was that he was not serious about fighting corruption,” charges Negaso.(A UNDP report has recently revealed that Ethiopia has lost up to 3 billion US dollar to corruption since 1990. Senior government officials are prime suspects.)

5. On Meles Zenawi.

“We never had a close personal or working relationship,” says Negaso. He has been to his house only a couple of times. “

Meles is a heavy smoker. “(Some leaders of the EPRDF) are heavy smokers, but Meles smoked much more than everyone else.”(Isn’t this a sign of ingrained anxiety?) His favorite drink is red win. He is, no surprise here, temperamental, and occasionally, “his choices of words are not always wise.”

There are also his arbitrary decisions, Negaso reminds readers. “General Tsadkan and General Abebe were dismissed from their positions arbitrarily (and illegally.) He should have consulted the party but did not.”

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11. Reflections on South Sudan’s Independence

By **Eskinder Nega**, July 8th, 2011

If it was up to the Egyptians there would be no independent country called Sudan. And briefly, in the mid-nineteenth century, Egypt and present day Sudan were indeed one under the wildly ambitious and much romanticized Albanian Khedive, Ismail the Magnificent. But Victorian Britain, the premier world power in the nineteenth century, and the country to which a financially bankrupt and politically exhausted Egypt was to succumb in the late nineteenth century, doggedly insisted on a separation.

Northern Sudan and Egypt have shared a common past for stretched duration’s before the ascendance of Islam. But whereas Arab conquerors succeeded in much of Egypt they were somehow unable to tread to the southern peripheries and subjugate Nubia, as the region was then known.

And what is now a large part of north Sudan and south Egypt effectively became independent for the next 700 years, until the beginning of the ninetieth century when Egyptians, nominally under the Ottomans but effectively sovereign, began to push southwards.

Ismail the Magnificent dreamt of uniting the Nile valley under direct Egyptian control. He thus pushed beyond historical Nubia to seize new territories in the south, where he faced no serious opposition and succeeded, and the east, where an impenetrable Ethiopian resistance, under king Yohannes, triggered not only his downfall but ultimately led to the collapse of Egyptian independence, too.

The British inherited the new lands in south Sudan when they formally occupied Egypt in 1882. What they found were an assortment of 200 disparate Nilotic ethnicities who had nothing in common with the Arabized, Islamized north. In due course they decided to administer them separately; and for thirty years extraordinarily prohibited the movement of peoples between the two regions to preempt southern assimilation. When it was time for the British to leave in the mid 1950s the two peoples were strangers as ever.

The prospect of decolonization triggered civil war in Sudan in 1955, a year before independence. Southerners modestly demanded limited autonomy but northerners insisted on absorption and integration. This was the 50s, well before multi-culturalism was to go mainstream in subsequent decades. The war, Sudan's first civil war, lasted until 1972. An uneasy but much welcomed ten year lull of hostilities then ensued courtesy of a peace treaty brokered in Addis Ababa; only to be cut short in 1983 when Islamic law was forcibly imposed on the south.

Sudan's second civil war was to last much longer than the first; twenty one years this time. The consequences were literally cataclysmic. Though the southern populace has never peaked above the 10 million mark, around 2.5 million were to die and 5 million more were to be displaced in two decades of mayhem. For each combatant who died in conflict, more than 20 civilians were either deliberately slaughtered or were caught in cross-fire. Every southern household was inundated one way or the other. The US government has classified it as genocide.

By the time a second peace agreement was signed in 2005, independence for the south, sooner or later, was a foregone conclusion. No other outcome could conceivably be acceptable to highly traumatized southerners. To their credit, and much to the relief of the international community, even northerners were able to acknowledge this much.

And so the big day has finally come. South Sudan will join the international community on Saturday, July 11, 2011. But while the outcome of the war is welcomed all over Africa there will nonetheless be few overt celebrations.

Many African governments dread the specter of revived secessionist ambitions across the continent. With the independence of South Sudan, the bedrock of the post-independence African consensus, the inviolability of colonial-era borders, has been shattered. Anything to the determinant of colonial boundaries is now plausible. In this sense, a new era has begun in Africa.

Even after the session of south Sudan no country will be more wary of the implications than north Sudan. Secessionist sentiment in Darfur, where a ferocious insurgency has cost the lives of half a million people and displaced millions more, will most probably be reinforced. Neither the government in Khartoum nor the international community will be in a position to dissuade calls for a referendum like the one held in south Sudan. And it will be harder to ignore Somaliland and Western Sahara.

85% of Sudan's oil comes from South Sudan. But the revenue is being split equally with the north, which controls the pipeline that delivers it to the international market. This will no doubt be challenged in the near future; a shorter pipeline to the Kenyan coast has already been proposed. The geopolitical significance of the north will inevitably shrink while that of the south is set to rise. Expect to see more and more Chinese in South Sudan over the coming years. Westerners are hardly in a position to compete.

But the overseas Consortium, Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company, that control the oil in the south is not controlled by the Chinese as has been widely reported. Their share stands at only 40%. The reminder is split between Malaysians, 30%, and Indians, 25%. This will be a difficult team to beat in the energy sector.

There is a question to which no politician or pundit has yet offered a convincing answer: Will an independent South Sudan be stable?

Dispute over border demarcation between north and south Sudan has already entailed the need to deploy UN mandated Ethiopian peacekeepers

in Abyei, a contested oil rich area. The statuses of northern controlled South Kurdufan and Blue Nile regions, areas much larger than Abeiy and claimed by both sides, are pending an outcome of a promised referendum. Now that South Sudan is finally free, however, the international community may very well look the other way if the north decides not to honor its promise. But there will be domestic pressure on the South Sudanese government not to abandon kins in the north.

No less menacing is the rivalry between Dinkas, South Sudan's largest ethnic group, and Nuers, the second largest, which threatens the emergence of a pluralistic constitutional democracy. Both sides are heavily armed and remain susceptible to external manipulators, not least northern Sudanese. The CIA has warned that "mass killing or genocide" will take place by 2015. There is also the bona fide danger of proxy war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. And rampant corruption is seriously undermining the legitimacy of the new state.

But whatever dangers may lie ahead the emergence of an independent South Sudan is cause for celebration. A people longed for freedom, fought for it against the odds, and finally triumphed. Here is history marching forward. Here is freedom overcoming tyranny. Here is David slaying Goliath. Here is exemplified the potential in all of us to do great things. Here is hope for humanity.

Welcome South Sudan. God bless.

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12.SOS: dissent and terrorism in Ethiopia

By Eskinder Nega

Entrapment is often a controversial but yet an established component of law enforcement even in democracies. But true to form the controversy is wholly absent in authoritarian countries. Entrapment is embraced with spiteful fervor. It is an elemental attribute of tyranny. But more often than not it is the gullibly innocent rather than the unwary criminally predisposed that end up being ensnared. And no better examples are there than in the ranks of Ethiopia's enduring political prisoners. From this hapless assemblage have come public "confessions" about alleged terrorist conspiracies.

As goes an excited announcement on public media on Thursday, an exposé about a new round of conspiracy, perhaps with a "confession" which links it to Eritrea, will soon be aired to the nation. No specific date has been set.

And four of nine alleged culprits have already been named by the police. Addressing journalists on Wednesday, Demmelash Gebre-Michael, spokesperson of the Federal Police, confirmed that Zerihun Gebre-Egzabher, chairman of the Ethiopian National Democratic Party (ENDP); Dejene Tefera, member of ENDP ; Woubshet Taye, deputy editor of Awramba ; and Reyot Alemu, columnist of Fethe, were amongst those arrested.

The charge: terrorism.

ENDP is one of Ethiopia's multitudes of tiny political parties. It has legal standing, and has vied to win seats in local and national elections. But its diminished name recognition has meant that its relevance has been more on the fringes than in the mainstream. This is its first brush with fame. And in the event of Zerihun's eventual conviction, it could very well secure a place in history as the first political party to be banned by the judiciary.

Unlike the 2005 treason trials, however, when newspapers were notoriously charged, convicted and proscribed as distinct legal entities, the government's wrath is more circumspect this time,

entangling only journalists, Webeshet and Reyot, rather than the entire newspapers they work for.

But be not deluded into thinking that this is an improvement in any sense of the word. The grand design has not been altered. The commitment to a one party state is as unyielding as ever. Only the threat has changed. While it was on the verge of overwhelming the EPRDF in 2005 it is only latent in 2011. There is no need for widespread clampdown yet; simply cultivating a climate of fear may suffice to deter it from growing in to an existential threat.

And in well-publicized applications of the dreaded anti-terrorism law lies the perfect means to stretch fear to its furthest limit. Already, rumors of pending arrests of journalists and members of the opposition are rife on the grapevine. The danger seems so obvious that some are being counseled by family and friends to leave the country. Many more live with the anxiety of an uncertain future. Raw fear is in the air. And journalists have been affected the most.

The popular understanding of terrorism in much of the world is that of any act which deliberately victimizes members of the public. But most legal definitions also incorporate politically motivated damages to private and public properties within the same realm. The UN defines it informally as, “(all) criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public.” American law identifies it as, “(any) premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets.”

But in a somewhat fanciful, but plainly futile, attempt to blackmail and stigmatize its opponents, the EPRDF has failed to acknowledge the crucial distinction between violence against civilians and armed insurrection. This calculated shortcoming has unavoidably politicized the issue of terrorism both in the eyes of the public and the regime’s stalwart international partners. And thus the refusal of the Americans, despite strong protestations by the EPRDF, to classify armed Ethiopian groups as terrorists. Virtually no one believes that the EPRDF’s armed opponents pose a terrorist challenge to the nation. The sooner the EPRDF recognizes this, the better for the nation.

As to our colleagues in prison, Webeshet and Reyot, we testify to their commitment to non-violence. No independent journalist has given the charges the benefit of the doubt. And we

reaffirm our commitment to peacefully serve the causes of truth, justice and democracy with our writings. We will not be intimidated.

Democracy is humanity's common destiny. There is no avoiding it whether you are an Eskimo or a Zulu; a Christian or a Muslim; white or black; developed or developing. It is truly universal. And after a long journey, Ethiopia's encounter with destiny is right around the corner. We are almost there.

We shall be free!

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13. Ethiopia: No to “Grand Coalition” with EPRDF

By **Eskinder Nega**

There is bitter irony to the story of the large Ethiopian Diaspora in the US. No more is it only large in sheer numbers but it's also progressively more and more successful, impishly enticing the nation's best and brightest to leave their native land. Two cases illustrate this unfolding saga of immigrants' hard work and reward as they lay claim to their share of the fabled American dream.

An Ethiopian owned business in DC, which generated more than 700 million dollars in sales last year, is now large enough, in a rare feat for immigrants from Africa, to attract the attention of anti-trust regulators. And on the west coast, a brilliant Ethiopian bridal designer, Amsale Aberra, has crowned her phenomenal success with a new reality show, Amsale Girls. No blue-blooded American in the designer world could aim higher.

The presence of Ethiopian Professors on the numerous campuses of American universities is no less impressive. There are far more PhD professors in the US than Ethiopia; many of them in the challenging fields of the hard sciences. And they are nothing like the archetypal species of redundant immigrants. America can not do without them; even in this time of the Great Recession.

Many of them have gone to the US in search of greener pastures— respectable wages; reasonable career prospects; decent schools for their children and, no less, pursuit of political and social stability. A significant minority, many of them in the social sciences, however, are there for political reasons. And perhaps no one represents this genre better than renowned Professor Messay Kebede, whose thoughtful commentaries have long been important contributions to public discourse.

Twenty years ago, Messay, who has a PhD from the University of Grenoble in France, was chairman of the department of philosophy at Addis Ababa University. Two years after the advent of the EPRDF to power, however, he was callously dismissed from his position for political reasons. But the dismissal inevitably turned out to be more a loss to the AAU than Messay, who went on to thrive at the University of Dayton in the US.

But like all reluctant exiles his passion for his home country, the forbidden fruit, so to speak, has increased with distance. Like millions of his fellow citizens he most probably patiently harbored hopes for revolution against Ethiopia's new tyrants for years, but was then unexpectedly inspired by the magical possibility of peaceful transformation in 2005, and was then suddenly beset by the collective plunge to despair and disappointment after 2007. Meanwhile, twenty years come to pass.

And after some reflection Messay sees an entrenched stalemate for all sides. Thus his latest piece, a manifesto, as he calls it, Meles's Political Dilemma and the Developmental State: Dead-Ends and Exit, is "not only (an analysis of) the problems of Ethiopia, but also (an attempt) to approach them from the perspective of the best way out for everybody." And a sincere and predictably brilliant treatise ensues.

The gist of his manifesto, however, hinges perilously on the premise that, “the birth of democratic states from an evolution of authoritarian regimes is no less a historical trend than the establishment of democracies as a result of the violent overthrow of authoritarianism.” And as examples, he cites, “Asian countries that applied the formula of the developmental state, but also of other countries, such as Turkey, Spain, Brazil, Chile, etc.”

However, not a single example is in Africa, where the more relevant examples for Ethiopia are and, as Hillary Clinton noted in her recent speech to the AU, more than half the countries have become successful multi-party constitutional democracies over the past two decades.

But most importantly, have the countries mentioned by Messay indeed evolved organically into democratic societies from an authoritarian past?

The Asian countries alluded to by Messay are obviously the Tiger countries, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, and perhaps the Tiger Cub countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

The first democratic revolution was not in the most advanced Tiger country, as any organic evolution would have entailed, but in the least developed Tiger Cub country, the Philippines. Serious demonstrations in support of democracy took place as early as 1983, well before the economic malaise that was to grip the Philippines after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino. The initial impetus was not economic hardship but democratic aspiration. There was no evolution here. This was a popular revolution that was to eventually inspire not only Asia but also, in a stroke of luck to humanity, Eastern Europeans. The rest, as they say, is history.

The most advanced Tiger country, Singapore, is still classified as “partly free” by Freedom House, and “hybrid regime,” which roughly means the same thing, by the Economist magazine. Even with a 43,117 dollars annual Per Capita income, which is higher than those of even most west European countries, the evolution to democracy has yet to show any sign of life. The reason, if there is any, begs an explanation from evolutionary theorists. The middle income threshold passed decades ago.

If there was ever any correlation between development and evolution to democracy, Hong Kong, the second richest Tiger, would have been a hotbed of democratic activism in China after 1997. Not so in reality, though. The dominant sentiment is submission to mainland norms rather than a push to expand freedoms to the hinterland.

There was no evolution in South Korea either. The South Koreans were inspired by the Filipino people's revolution in 1986, much as Egyptians were by Tunisians, and months later hundreds of thousands of them everwhelmed the streets. The military had to meekly submit to popular will. There was no, to use Messay's words, natural "transition from authoritarianism to democracy." This was a domino effect from the Filipino revolution.

In Taiwan, the poorest Tiger country, it was also the Filipino revolution that tipped the balance in favor of democracy. Months after the Filipino evolution and at about the same time as protests were shaking South Korea, martial law was preemptively revoked by the authorities. This was about hope being suddenly ignited in Asia, thanks to the Filipinos. Three decades later, this time squarely in the age of Satellite television, the same hope was triggered in the Middle East by Tunisia.

Indonesia, the biggest Tiger cub country, has become democratic long before the tenets of the developmental state were ever realized. But Malaysia, the most advanced Tiger cub country and whose per capita income is more than 2 times that of Indonesia, is still only "partly free." Thailand, whose per capita income is about half of that of Malaysia, is as free as Indonesia.

Even granted that there was no revolution in Spain, there was neither evolution, too. The fascist state was dismantled wholesale after the death of Franco. It was a thoroughly new beginning for Spain. Brazil and Chile had military governments, as did many countries in South America. The collapse of the Soviet Union explains the transition to democracy in that part of the world, not evolution.

Only Turkey remains. And admittedly there is continuity and evolution in the Turkish case. But given the unique history and experiences of Turkey, the relevance for Ethiopia would be far-fetched. Perhaps it is the Middle East that has more to learn from Turkey than Africa. The

“historical evolution” is simply not as widespread as Messay has implied. Where it exists the relevance to Africa is at best contentious.

But this is not the most serious flaw in Messay’s proposition. Rather, the error lies in the presumption that the demand for democracy from the grassroots is weak enough to be tempered by a “grand coalition of elites.” It is not. There is real pressure for democracy from the public, in Ethiopia and elsewhere. This is why democracy is a reality in more than half of the countries in Africa. This is why there was revolution in Egypt and protests refuse to die out in Syria. A reductionist view of politics as a dialogue between elites is at best wrong. The relevance of any elite, to use Messay’s own words, which is “firmly anchored in the opposition camp,” is only to the extent that it is able to articulate the needs and aspiration of the people.

And the message from the grassroots is that the EPRDF must go. No party must be in power for twenty years. There is no room for a “grand coalition of elites”, however well intentioned the suggestion may be. Ethiopia needs a clean, peaceful break from the past. And if this could somehow be negotiated as it was in South Africa, so be it. It must in fact be given precedence. The alternative is at best frightening, and despite appearances, given the un-sustainability of the status-quo, inevitable.

14. Ethiopia’s stolen 8.4 billion dollars and EPRDF

By **Eskinder Nega**

The folks at Global Financial Integrity may not know this, but their report on illicit financial flows is threatening to steal the thunder from an important milestone for the EPRDF, Ethiopia’s repressive ruling party,

which will be celebrating its 20th year in power on the 28th of this month. And more than a harmless opportunity to gloat is slipping away. GFI's report poses real danger of generating mistrust between EPRDF's senior leadership.

Commissioned grandly by the UNDP, the development arm of the UN, GFI's report explores the flow of illicit financial flows from Least Developed Countries (LDCs), of which Ethiopia has been an enduring mainstay. (Many countries, some in Africa, have moved up the ladder of development.)

Covering the 18 years between 1990 and 2008, which are all, but one, 1990, within the realm of EPRDF's reign, the report includes Ethiopia, one of the world's most impoverished countries, in the top ten countries from which funds have been transferred illegally in to banks and offshore financial centers in developed countries. The amount: a whopping 8.4 billion US dollars, which places Ethiopia at a shocking 9th place in the world, just below resource rich and gruesomely autocratic Myanmar with 8.5 billion dollars.

The report attributes the bulk, 65 to 70 percent, of Ethiopia's illicitly transferred funds to trade mispricings. Somewhere in the remaining 30 to 35 percent—up to 3 billion US dollars—are the laundered monies of corrupt government officials, almost all exclusively members of the EPRDF.

Clearly, some EPRDF officials are amply prepared for a comfortable exile. And there are of course others who believe in the fairy tale of the party's invincibility and see no need for a contingency plan. This will most probably be their wakeup call. The haste not to be left behind is now inevitable. The worst for the nation is yet to come.

Export figures released by the Ministry of Trade in late February 2011 show coffee still dominating the sector. Of the infinitesimal 1.14 billion US dollars the nation earned in six months from goods sold overseas in 2003 (in the Ethiopian calendar), 320 million dollars were attributed to coffee.

Guna Trading House PLC, a holding of the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray, EFFORT, a business empire managed exclusively by senior members of the EPRDF, is an

exporter of coffee. Guna is also a significant exporter of sesame seeds, another key export for the nation. Moreover, it has involvement in the import business.

There is no conclusive proof that EFFORT's holdings are involved in trade mispricings, but the possibilities that exist for party leaders are cause for particular concern. Perhaps, only the tenure of Seye Abraha , who was EFFORT's CEO before his fallout with Meles Zenawi and subsequent six years imprisonment, has been thoroughly scrutinized. (He came out clean.) With the EPRDF's obvious old boy's network cutting across party, government, and business circles, EFFORT is suspected by many of being a convenient conduit for illicit financial flows. But again, the hard proofs are lacking so far. (Ditto for the much smaller EPRDF affiliated endowment funds for other regions.)

Gold is now Ethiopia's second biggest earner of foreign currency, bringing in about half as much as coffee. Most of it is exported by MIDROC, owned by Mohammed Al-Amoudi, an Ethio-Saudi billionaire, who owns the largest gold mine in the country. With hundreds of millions of dollars earned from exports, MIDROC is easily the nation's principal exporter. Though instinctively apolitical, Al-Amoudi's odd affiliation with the ruling party has long raised eyebrows. But even here, there is nothing more than a lingering suspicion that there is more than meets the eye.

A favorite of corrupt officials everywhere is of course kickbacks. A kickback is the difference between market price and inflated payment to a company that wins a government contract. It's a favorite of third world dictatorships. And though practiced at all levels of government, the real money is with foreign companies, which is an exclusive preserve of senior officials. Arms procurement is their particular favorite. Interestingly, kickback from arms purchases was an issue during the wrangling for primacy between Meles and his critics in the EPRDF ten years ago. None of the charges were ever proved.

The 8.4 billions stolen from Ethiopia have no doubt mostly disappeared in to the black hole that is offshore banking. This is a huge part of international finance; more than 6 trillion US dollars lie there. The IMF estimates the illicit funds laundered annually by offshore banking at 1.5 trillion US dollars (of which half a billion is thought to come from fraud and corruption.) And

until recently, Swiss was the favored haven. But since 2008, others, amongst them the Cayman Islands, have risen in popularity. The deposits in Cayman Island, whose population is only 54,878, is estimated to hover around 1.9 trillion US dollars. In Africa, Ghana aspires to be the new destination for international offshore banking. There are abundant reasons to shun infamous Switzerland.

Beyond the cruelty of stealing billions that could have gone a long way, in the words of UNDP, “to help children go to school, help mothers give birth safely, and expanding access to basic health care, better nutrition, and clean water and sanitation for all,” is the question of how this grand theft was possible.

The answer is simple: feeble rule of law; suffocated civil society; suppressed free media; nominal judicial independence; patronage based civil service—in sum, absence of a democracy with checks and balances. Where there is despotism there is corruption; particularly in the presence of a private sector. The problem is compounded when politics and business mix, which is the case for Ethiopia.

The extent of corruption in Ethiopia, as indicated by the stolen 8.4 billion dollars, is a shocker not only to the naïve supporters of the EPRDF but also to its severest critics. Simply put, no one imagined it to be this big. But it is, and the problem requires an urgent remedy. This is money that has been stolen from Ethiopians, including all but a handful of the alleged 5 million members of the EPRDF.

Rest assured that the time for accountability will come in due time.

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15. May 28 and the message to Meles Zenawi

By Eskinder Nega

Yes. The impossible has happened and come tomorrow 7300 days—twenty years— will come to pass since the astonishing accession of EPRDF to the helm of a nation it had never intended to lead.

And a million-plus pro-EPRDF rally is being hastily organized in Addis for the big day, Saturday, May 28th 2011. Here is the EPRDF leadership at its best, cunning, manipulative and callous. It may very well manage a respectable rally—but probably short of its hoped million— despite its profound unpopularity. Hostile the public may be but it is still largely unorganized.

Nevertheless, with no end to the protests in the Arab world the future looks decidedly bleak for authoritarianism. It could be said categorically that the best days for despotism lie in the past rather than the future. There is nothing the EPRDF could do to prevent the inevitable. It can not defeat history.

But it wasn't like this all the time.

The most extraordinary facet of the EPRDF twenty years ago was the odd absence of the charismatic strongman at its helm. Strongmen had always appeared indispensable to successful insurgencies, but, intriguingly, the EPRDF had defied the convention with charming ease. At its core lay the bona fide collective leadership of the TPLF, one of the four constituent members of the EPRDF. Meles Zenawi, the nominal head, was really no more important than any other in the powerful TPLF politburo. It stood in sharp contrast to the Derg, which had for long—but not always— been singularly dominated by Mengistu.

Barely in his early twenties when he was one of the founding members of the TPLF, Meles spent his formative years in the mountains of Tigray as a less than impressive fighter during the crucial early years of the insurgency. But he compensated with his extensive readings and formidable debating prowess. If the TPLF was to have a future it needed more than mere spirited fighters. The nerds (in its innocuous sense) had to be given the floor, too. And Meles seemed like the logical and safest choice.

What his comrades did not anticipate was how power was to change him subsequently. Not only did he thrive in his new position but he was also intellectually and spiritually revitalized. He was soon no more content to serve the party. A diligent student of modern history, he was both culturally and temperamentally predisposed to the notion of a party that yields to the will of its visionary leader.

He was quick to recognize that real power lies in the state and not in the party. Not so his peers. They concentrated on the party, particularly the TPLF. When it was time for a showdown he took them down almost with his hands down. The party was no match to the state. And thus the EPRDF finally had its first strongman, almost ten years after the party's rise to power in 1991. EPRDF's exceptionalism was decisively cut short.

This is the genesis of EPRDF's propensity to total conformity, both inside and outside the party, which culminated in the infamous election results of 2010. Ethiopia has thus become progressively less democratic in the second half of EPRDF's two decades reign.

Meles Zenawi, as opposed to the entirety that is the EPRDF, is the chief naysayer to democracy in Ethiopia. There are of course others but they are more hoopla than substance. It took only the departure of Ben Ali to realize democracy in Tunisia. It will most probably take no more in Ethiopia.

But there is more at stake for Ethiopia in how the leader leaves power. Ethiopia can not afford the kind of protracted instability Yemen had to go through over the past several months. Ethiopia desperately needs a peaceful transition to democracy. Meles knows this. It's his most potent card to fight change.

Meles' great disadvantage is most probably akin to those of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubabarak. Both took their underlings for granted, assuming that patriotism had no place in their thinking. It was a fateful misjudgment for them. Only rarely in history, as in Nazi Germany, does collective common sense collapse entirely. There is more, not less, patriotism in Ethiopia, both inside and outside the EPRDF, than either Tunisia or Egypt. The voices in support of peaceful change will sooner or later be heard from the midst of his support network.

But as things stand now, the only real legacies of the EPRDF are poised to be the secession of Eritrea and a stint in power for Meles Zenawi.

Is this what fifty thousand fighters (mostly teenagers) of the EPRDF died for fighting the Derg?

The answer: a big emphatic NO!

And so, in deference to the tens of thousands of young Ethiopians who died to make May 28th 1991 possible, I repeat this message from the people to PM Meles Zenawi, which I first conveyed in an open letter a few months ago:

Sir, you have wasted the two decades with which you were blessed to affect change. In place of pragmatism dogma has prevailed, in place of transparency secrecy has taken root, in place of democracy oppression has intensified, and in place of merit patronage has been rewarded.

Sir, the people want—no, need—you to resign and leave office peacefully, legally and immediately.

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16. Open Letter to Hilary Clinton from Ethiopia

By **Eskinder Nega**, June 13, 2011

Dear Secretary Clinton,

Unlike the almost annoyingly fussy, routinely dead-beat and robotically mechanical welcome of the government, I extend to you the simple, warm welcome of Ethiopia's oppressed tens of millions:

Welcome to our ramshackle of a city, the embodiment of four wasted decades and barely over a century old, though, as Henry Kissinger usually likes to point out, the history of the Ethiopian state is older than even that of China.

Be sure to enjoy authentic servings of injera and wat, slightly different than what you would have tasted in Washington. I personally recommend the vegetarian dishes. And while improbable, a short sojourn in Axum and Lalibela would be a much needed respite to your busy schedule. The massive monolithic stone carvings are unlike anything you would find elsewhere. And for those in your entourage who favor art, there are marvelous 16th and 17th paintings in Gondar.

The story of Hilary Rodham Clinton is stirring, to say the least. I would be hard pressed to class it amongst conventional rags to riches narratives. While not classically rich, your father, Hugh Rodham, was neither a pauper in any sense of the word. I think the chronicle of your phenomenal rise to fame and prominence rather stands for the ideal absent in far too many countries, but not in the US: the early recognition of merit, its cultivation, and ultimate reward.

Indeed, as is frequently intoned, only in the USA could a wife overcome the huge shadow cast by a life-long over-achieving husband. But even in the US only an exceptional person could have done it. I suspect that it is this dazzling aspect of your public profile that particularly irks your paparazzi-like critics.

Two episodes strike me as uniquely remarkable from the young-Hilary-years.

The first lies, perhaps much too predictably, in your commencement address at Wellesley. While many savor and endlessly debate about your rebuke of Senator Brooke, who had preceded you as a speaker, I tend to single-mindedly cling to one line from your wonderful speech, “the challenge now is to practice politics as the art of making what appears to be impossible, possible.”

Madam Secretary, if only you knew how much those words still resonate with those of us who believe, hoping against hope, that it is possible to bring democracy peacefully to an Ethiopia run harshly by despotic EPRDF; admittedly, a valuable tactical, but by no means a strategic, ally of the US.

The second is how you abruptly approached your future husband, the young Bill Clinton, hand extended, and calmly introduced yourself: “If you keep looking at me, and I am going to keep looking back, we might as well be introduced. I am Hilary Rodham”

Wooooow! That took some guts, integrity and confidence. When I first read these words I remember thinking how this ought to be the one person Americans should trust to take that 3 AM phone call. No wonder your Commander-in-Chief potential was never questioned. And somewhat

coincidentally, guts, integrity and confidence are exactly the values Ethiopians need to nurture more to realize the much longed for peaceful transition to democracy. Democracy activists could learn much from your example.

But your image amongst democracy activists, to some extent here in Ethiopia but more so in the Middle East, has suffered since the outbreak of protests against Mubarak in Egypt. The word on the street, unfairly I believe, is that Hilary favors old, violent autocrats over young, peaceful

democrats. This would have had dire consequences for America's already precarious reputation if not for the personal popularity of President Obama.

There is widespread recognition that there was rational behind your initial cautioned response to the Egyptian protests. Reasonable people do not expect the US to abandon allies summarily, particularly in a region as vital and sensitive as the Middle East. Neither U.S. interests nor world stability would be served if such was the case.

What has annoyed democracy activists is the perceived policy transformation from that of caution to that of defender of the status-quo. Indeed, the US was distressingly late to champion the values of human rights and democracy forcefully. And once again, as had happened in Iran some 30 years ago, American policy makers were curtly upstaged by events in the streets.

This policy slip-up must be avoided in Ethiopia.

Balancing idealism and realism is easier said than done in foreign policy. The dilemma that you face as Secretary of State is palpable. But more often than not realism is confused for cynicism by too many professional diplomats, many of them veterans of your State Department. I fear this in part explains the Egyptian slip. And when Ambassador Donald Booth, the US Ambassador to Ethiopia, told journalists of an imagined link between per capita income and democracy, we have had our brush with that cynicism. (For the record, America was democratic way before becoming rich and urban.)

Take this open letter as a message from the streets of Addis Ababa, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious city, from where the sentiment and aspiration of the nation's majority reverberate.

Ethiopians covet the dignity of real citizenship possible only in a democracy. Ethiopians are adamant about voting in their first democratically elected government. Ethiopians would finally like to be free from the network of prosecutors, incarcerators and executioners who have for long made life hell for them. Ethiopians demand freedom of expression and association. Ethiopians desire an independent judiciary; a transparent, honest electoral system; and separation of powers between the three branches of government. Ethiopians insist on accountability for the unbridled

corruption that has undermined the nation's moral fabric. Ethiopians expect recovery of their stolen 8.4 billion dollars from Western banks.

Peaceful change is inevitable. It's a question of when not if. And whatever your underlings maybe telling you, doubt not that it will come well before a significant rise in per capita income.

We hope to hear from you, Secretary Clinton. We hope to hear you tell the EPRDF that it is time to change, that the status-quo is not sustainable. But most of all, taking in to account that this short visit is in a city that is the seat of the African Union, we hope to hear you reaffirm President Obama's pledge that the U.S. will not tolerate the killing of peaceful demonstrators. Stand up for democracy.

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17. Homage to Hillary Clinton's Message to Dictators

By [Eskinder Nega](#), June 17th, 2011

The list of distinguished American Secretaries of State is a long one. James Madison acceded to the Presidency after serving as the nation's fifth Secretary of State in the early years of the nineteenth century.

His track records on both counts were remarkable. Lincoln's Secretary of State, William Seward, was the lonely visionary who saw wisdom in the acquisition of Alaska from Russia. America's

longest serving Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, received a Nobel Peace Prize for his eleven grueling years in Franklin D Roosevelt's administration. George Marshall, who only served between 1947 and 1949, was critical in mobilizing support for Second World War devastated Europe. His were the most consequential two years of any Secretary of State (Foreign Minister) anywhere in the world.

But still, their many merits notwithstanding, latent Presidential potential was obvious in only a handful of them. Had he been born in the US instead of Germany, Henry Kissinger could conceivably have risen to the Presidency. Colin Powell had both the personal standing and political momentum in 2000 but fatefully pulled back from his rendezvous with history.

Hillary Clinton is also incontrovertibly Presidential material. And unlike Powell she had sought her moment in history with passion. Unfortunately, though, perhaps more because of the disastrous legacy of her husband's second term in office, it was not meant to be.

Desalegn, Ethiopia's nominal Foreign Minister, with picture-perfect Nevertheless, her presidential-level charisma, so to speak, endures undiminished as ever. It was discernible as she greeted Haile-Mariam blend of personal courtesy and the stately poise of an emissary of a superpower when she arrived in Addis. It was no less evident as she calmly walked past a roomful of senior diplomats from 53 African countries to take a seat next Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union. And it was manifest when she confidently assumed center stage as America's first Secretary of State to address the AU, which turned out to be one of her best speeches ever.

Inspirational speeches are supposed to be the preserves of activists and politicians. Foreign policy professionals have always instinctively stirred clear from them. Granted the rare one or two good speeches once in a while, bland but reassuringly safe messages are the preferred trademark of State Department speech writers. These words could not have been theirs entirely. What appear to be Clinton's lengthy insertions are almost patently decipherable.

"I am pleased to come to the African Union today as the first United States Secretary of State to address you," she said. But the timing could have been better. This was in fact the speech that

needed to be—but was not—delivered at the last summit of AU Heads of States, held in the immediate aftermath of popular uprisings in the Middle East.

“Today, I would like to briefly discuss three areas,” she began almost immediately. “They are democracy, economic growth, and peace and security.” But had it not been for the death of Bin Laden, security would have come first not last. After a decade in the wilderness, American foreign policy is finally limping back into the traditional mainstream where the link between US interests and the promotion of democratic values is duly acknowledged. There is no more rational for the singular dominance of the war on terror.

Thus: “First, democracy,” proclaimed a proud Hillary to Africa.

And she went on to articulate what is probably the world’s most understated fact of the last two decades: “More than half the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have embraced democratic, constitutional, multi-party rule,” she said. The widely touted cases were then cited: Botswana, Ghana, and Tanzania. But for those cognizant of Africa’s many trails and tribulations, it was the inclusion of Niger, Guinea, Nigeria and Kenya in the list that brought tears of joy. The tide has finally turned against despots in Africa, as it had already done so in Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe. Only the horn of Africa remains a regional holdout in the continent.

Hillary had a message for the diehards, in her own words, “the leaders in Africa and elsewhere who hold on to power at all costs, who suppress dissent, who enrich themselves and their supporters at the expense of their own people.” What thoughts were racing in the mind of her host, Ethiopia’s Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, who has been in power for twenty years absent a single free election, as she uttered those words is best left for imagination. But to the discrete delight of conspiracy theorists, the lights had gone out on her just as she began to speak of democracy.

Freedom is a universal value, she asserted. There is no room for imaginary national exceptionalism for her. “If you believe that the freedoms and opportunities that we speak about as universal should not be shared by your own people, men and women equally, or if you do not desire to help your own people work and live with dignity,” she said with visible passion, “you are on the wrong side of history, and time will prove that.”

These are actually words of wisdom from recent experience in Egypt. She knows what it means to be on the wrong side of history. Not even the might of a superpower was enough to avert an idea whose time had come. And democracy is the idea whose time has come all over Africa.

It's time for liberty, fraternity and equality. It's time to stop the killings. It's time to free political prisoners. It's time to really ban torture. It's time for free elections, freedom of expression and association. It's time for political pluralism, tolerance of religious and cultural diversity. It's time to end hate. It's time to break free from the cycle of violence. It's time to end rampant, semi-official corruption. It's time for transparency. It's time to be part of the international mainstream. It's time to believe even in the impossible.

In other words, it's time to hope in Africa. Freedom is no more a possibility but an imperative. The time has indeed come.

We shall be free!

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18. Ethiopia, Egypt and the Millennium Dam

By [Eskinder Nega](#), May 13th, 2011

The Egyptian Prime Minister, Dr. Essam Sharaf, is in Addis for a two days working visit. He is leading a large Ministerial delegation to Ethiopia and Uganda, where he attended, on Thursday, the controversial inaugural ceremony of President Museveni, who has been in power since the mid-1980s and has just been brazenly “elected” yet to another term by a “whooping majority.”

Under normal circumstances, Sharaf's visit to Addis would only generate long yawns from journalists. No respectable editor would run it as a story in independent media. The state media would have their exclusives. The multitude of MOUs to be signed, the generous promises to be made, the lofty goals to be declared, and the champagne glasses to be raised "to the long friendship between the two sisterly countries" would make ideal headlines for government newspapers and leading prime time news for their electronics counterparts. The delegation would then wearily make its way back home. And all of course will be swiftly forgotten. It's an established ritual.

But there is undeniably more to the rite this time. The international media are seriously asking if the world's first water war is in the making after Meles' dramatic announcement of plans to build Africa's largest dam on the Blue Nile. Most expect the answer to depend on the outcome of Sharaf's visit.

US-educated Sharaf is a man of contradictions. He resigned from Mubarak's cabinet in protest but still refuses to disclose his specific reasons. He was a leading member of the ruling National Democratic Party (even after the resignation) but joined the revolutionaries in Tharir square. On Israel he is proudly unlike Mubarak. "I am against normalization of relations with Israel in any area," he told a newspaper last year. His views on the Nile issue are less clear, but his Irrigation Minister, Hussein al-Atfy, has threatened war against Ethiopia.

The proposed dam, dubbed as the Millennium Dam, will have the capacity to produce 5,250 MW of electricity. This will make it the largest in Africa. But maybe not for long. If the Grand Inga Dam is ever built on the Congo River with the proposed 52 generator units and 39,000 MW capacity, the grandiosity of the Millennium Dam will be greatly diminished. Unlike Ethiopia's dam, the international community is earnestly pondering ways to finance the Congolese dam. And even now, China's Three Gorges Dam in Hubei, the world's largest, has a generating capacity of 22,500 MW, dwarfing the Millennium Dam's projected power. The Itipu Dam at the border of Brazil and Paraguay is second with 14,000 MW.

But whatever the strides in other parts of the world, the implications of the proposed Millennium Dam are indeed significant to Ethiopia. 5250 MW may be peanuts to the Chinese, but it is huge

by African standards. This is enough power to sustain half a decade of double digit economic growth for Ethiopia's tiny economy with extra for electricity export. The dam's estimated reservoir of 67 billion cubic meters of water is twice as large as Lake Tana , the nation's largest. The potential for the kind of large-scale commercial farming the nation really needs could hardly be underestimated.

Naturally, the instinct of patriotic Ethiopians is to greet news of such a dam with enthusiasm. And this was exactly how they reacted, their intense antipathy towards autocratic EPRDF notwithstanding. But there was also concomitant suspicion about the timing of the announcement.

The announcement came in the immediate aftermath of the Eritrean fiasco for Meles Zenawi, who had desperately tried to steal the thunder from the Arab uprisings by bluffing war against Ethiopia's former province. It was hard not to suspect a new ploy considering what was at stake for Meles if protests were to break out.

But for the Egyptians, the timing raised a thoroughly dissimilar —and alarming— possibility. Here they are in the midst of an exciting but difficult transition to democracy, where the weakening of the state was recently amply exemplified by sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims, and Ethiopia, source of 85 percent of Egypt's fresh water, suddenly unveils a plan to build a gigantic dam on the Nile River. It was hard for them not to suspect that Ethiopia was trying to take advantage of their momentary weakness.

Indeed, whatever the original motive of Meles (I personally suspect the former rather than the later as the primary impetus) now is the best time for Ethiopia to negotiate with Egypt. And not because of the ephemeral weakness the Egyptians suspect but rather because of the dominance of moderates in the transitional government. If any deal is possible between the two nations, this is the opportune moment.

But for some fantastic reason, Meles acceded to a request by a visiting 47-member Egyptian delegation to defer real negotiation over the Nile until a new government is elected in December. Ethiopia will thus not ratify the Cooperative Framework Agreement, which was hammered out

over eleven years of negotiations between nine Nile basin countries to ensure equitable distribution of water.

“Ethiopia, having seen the current situation in Egypt, where they need to establish their own government and go through a democratic process of electing their president, sees that it is sane and wise to wait for Egypt and give her time,” said Ethiopia’s Ambassador to Egypt, Mohamoud Dirir Gheddi. (By contrast, Meles endorsed Eritrea’s secession when Ethiopia still had a transitional government in the 1990s.) “Six months or a year because we need to stabilize, we need to finalize our revolution,” delegation leader Mustafa el Gindy told the media.

What prospects do the elections hold?

A Pew (an American firm) poll conducted between March and April of this year (after Mubarak’s fall) shows that 62 percent of Egyptians believe that Egyptian laws should follow the teachings of the Quran. 71 percent of Egyptians also have no misgivings about Islamic fundamentalists, Pew’s survey reveals. (This of course doesn’t mean they are for terrorism, though.) The implications are obvious. I will not detail them here. The only hope is in the military blocking the accession to power of extremists, which is uncertain at this point.

None of this is of course lost to Meles Zenawi. He is capable of calculating at a higher level. And thus the question: why is he doing what he is doing? Is he setting up this nation once more?

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19. What Osama bin Laden's death mean to Ethiopia

By **Eskinder Nega**, May 6th, 2011

Obama is a voracious reader. He has read expansively and intensely. Not even his tacky detractor, The Donald, as he likes to be called, who personally and unabashedly prefers a sizzling tabloid to a weighty hardcover, would dare to question him on this count.

But The Donald could credibly claim that however impressive Obama's reading list may have been before the late 2000s, he hardly read books on foreign policy. Ironically, Obama, whose nativity is questioned by a shockingly large number of Americans, instinctively militated to the original isolationist sentiments of the nation's founding fathers. In fact, so strong was this isolationist predisposition that he famously declined to hypothetically consider the possibility of deploying troops in Iraq to prevent genocide. Genocides have happened elsewhere in the world without America intervening, he reasoned.

This was the Obama that attained the Presidency with a respectable plurality in 2008. But a retreat to the familiar shores of continental America, as had once happened in 1918, when the US tragically refused to join and lead the League of Nations after the First World War, is hardly a possibility in the age of nuclear armed Pakistan.

The only alternative for Obama was between realism, which is multi-literalist, strictly interest driven and ostensibly in perfect sync with the persona of no-drama-Obama, and what he had criticized as the discredited idealism of his predecessor, which was precariously and unsustainably unilateral in approach and execution.

Obama reckons that America's future lies in the Far East, in South Asia and the Orient. Bush's fixation with the Middle East was a strategic blunder that he intended to correct urgently. Canada, Mexico, Latin America, the Middle East, and even Europe, which has dominated the world for the past half a millennium, would have to settle for back stage. Africa, of course, comes last.

But with the menacing threat of Al-Qaeda still unabated, immediate reorientation of American foreign policy was not politically and psychologically feasible for a Democratic President. However sensible the analyses, though, they also sounded like convenient excuses by a weak President to capitulate and run away from an intractable problem. Obama was unwittingly no less entangled in the Middle East than past administrations.

A respite from the suspicions has now come Obama's way courtesy of the death of Osama bin Laden. There will no more be the comparisons with Jimmy Carter. There will now be less pressure on him to sustain the war on terror as the central theme of America's foreign policy. AlQaeda is undeniably not finished yet, but the loss of its iconic leader will most probably weaken it considerably. At least this is the consensus. America could finally move on. Policy shift could begin in earnest.

This is bad new for the EPRDF.

The White House had quietly assessed the prospect of change in key US allies like Ethiopia well before the death of Osama bin Laden. Involved in the assessment was Gayle Smith, an old friend of the EPRDF and now a mid-level N.S.C staffer. Two broad conclusions emerged from the review:

1. Regimes cooperate with the US on security issues not for altruistic motives but because it is in their critical interests to do so.
2. There is no correlation between a nation's economic wealth and democracy, the most oft cited rational for US support of autocratic regimes in the developing world. (Apparently, the US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Donald Booth, who held a press conference after the review suggesting such a link, disagrees with the White House.)

In other words, in sharp contrast to the Bush years, the Obama administration has determined that the EPRDF has no fewer stakes than the US security cooperation. Moreover, the tendency in the administration is to view Al-Shabaab, America's primary concern in the horn, more of as a nationalist outfit, a reaction to Ethiopian invasion, than a worrisome branch of global jihad. The

State Department's 2009 report on terrorism maintains that no operational link between Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda has been established.

But of course all this does not mean that the Obama administration is firmly in favor of people power revolution in Ethiopia. It is not. What sets it apart from the Bush years is that it sees fewer stakes for the US in the status-quo. It will not fight change as the Bush administration once did in 2005.

In the event of protests, the Obama administration will most probably try to maintain a delicate balance between protesters, which it could not avoid lending political, moral and diplomatic support, and the EPRDF, which it does not want to be perceived as abandoning hastily. US allies in the region after all would be watching closely. But doubt not that its sentiment and heart will be with protesters. There is little sympathy in Washington for the EPRDF after the last elections. Its peaceful departure would most probably be welcomed rather than lamented. The death of Osama bin Laden reinforces the sentiment.

Addressing the World Economic Forum in South Africa on Thursday, May 5, 2011, former UN Secretary General, Koffi Annan, predicated that mass protests may yet spread from the Arab world to black Africa. The independence of one African country inspired others to follow suit, he recalled of events in the early 60's. "I see no reason why people now won't want to do the same," he said. These are sober words from an experienced man. They carry considerable weight.

Annan was of course not speaking of his home country, Ghana. Democracy is irreversible there now. Nor could he have had Ghana's giant regional neighbor, Nigeria, in mind. There is finally hope for democracy in Africa's largest country. And democratic South Africa has transformed (by example) SADC. There is no danger of mass protests sweeping southern Africa.

It is rather Ethiopia, where an unpopular leader who has been in power for two decades is still recklessly maneuvering to stay in power indefinitely, which looms dominantly in the horizon when sub-Sahara Africa is mulled over. Annan did not need to single out countries.

The Obama administration knows this. And it sees no reason to resist change. This is good news to Ethiopians.

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Note to Readers:

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20. Reflections of a “Nech Lebash”(Eritrean Agent)

By [Eskinder Nega](#), April 29th, 2011

There was something in the air on Tuesday, April 14, 2011. Intrigued by news of Ethiopian protesters in North America against the frivolous and mechanically hyped GTP, the glee on the faces of Addis residents was transparently noticeable.

I could sense breaking news in the making. And I was determined to report it as soon as possible. This could not possibly wait up to Friday, the designated day for my weekly English articles. But first I had to finish an Amharic article about Ambassador Donald Booth, the US Ambassador to Ethiopia.

I had to struggle to finalize the Amharic commentary, the last of a two parts article. My heart was no more in to it in light of developments in North America over the weekend.

By 1 PM local time I was blissfully free to gauge popular mood in Addis and to surf the internet for news. Two hours later, I was typing the first lines of my “breaking news” to the Diaspora.

Here is what had I had written:

News of protests plagued GTP meetings in North America has stirred emotions in Addis Ababa. A curiously significant number of people are openly arguing and opinionating about the protests in public venues, where sports and the North African uprisings, rather than domestic politics, normally dominate conversations.

Estimated as only “a handful” by ETV, protesting Ethiopians in DC succeeded in compelling the University to cancel the GTP meeting on Sunday. ETV reported that a bomb threat had been made.

But in an apparent signal as to which side was prone to violence, it was a protester, Tewdros Kabtyimer, who was gratuitously beaten by EPRDF supporters. His crime: proposing a silent prayer in memory of those who had died by government violence. There were also death threats against protesters.

In sharp contrast, not a single government supporter was harmed. As noted by Professor Teodros Kiros, who attended the protest in Boston, “they (government supporters) thought (that with ample provocations) the protesters would be frustrated and enter into street fights. Instead the protesters remained cool.... The protest against tyranny in Cambridge, attended by an adequate number, was disciplined, well organized and qualitatively impressive.” The only incidence of violence in Boston, too, involved government supporters. A devotee of the EPRDF was arrested for attacking a photographer. Presumably, she was released after being fingerprinted.

And then I had to stop. It was time to see my mother. I had neither an inkling nor premonition about the tragedy that was to swiftly and unexpectedly strike several hours later. This was supposed to be a routine visit.

My cell phone rung as the mini-bus approached my mother’s home forty minutes later. It was veteran journalist Bezu Wendemagegnehu calling from Canada. Would I have a few minutes to confer online about the protests? Sure. This should take no more than fifteen minutes.

We explored what the number of people who had turned out for the meetings imply for the EPRDF. Where were the tens of thousands of supporters it claims in North America? Certainly, turn out was strikingly low.

This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, unlike 2005, when the EPRDF cunningly used the ethnic card to rally support, no particular ethnic group turned out in large numbers to the meetings. The allure of the TPLF no more appeals to the middle, only the irrelevant fringe remains. And second, the low numbers mean that even its dwindling supporters have lost hope in the future. They see a sinking ship in the EPRDF.

And then a personal descent to the abyss. The unexpected loss of my beloved mother, who had raised me as a single parent, is a shock I am not sure I will ever recover from. Our unique bond was that of a mother and her only child. I will not try to explain it here.

The EPRDF struck on the third day after my loss, a sacred day of mourning to Ethiopians. This is calculated timing to maximize pain and terror. That the timing was clearly an unprecedented breach of decency and tradition seemed not to have mattered.

“Nech lebashu(secret agent),” a friend teased me as he sat next me in the huge tent put up for the mourning period.

I stared back in utter bewilderment. Nech lebash is a term Meles Zenawi recently used to describe “opponents of the Ethiopian government who are allied with the Eritrean government.”

“Don’t tell me you haven’t read it yet,” he said, plainly surprised.

I hadn’t. Obviously, family members were doing their best to keep it a secret until the next day.

Taking up a full page of Chanel, a pro-EPRDF weekly noted for its “lumpen journalism”, I was accused of a long list of personal shortcomings. So be it. They do not merit a response. Slander is the least of my worries. But, alas, the central theme of the article was not the personal affronts. They were merely the side show. The thrust of the message was that I am “one of the opponents of the government who is effectively in alliance with Shabiya (Eritrea’s ruling party.)” And thus

the rational for the title of the article: Nech lebashu gazetengna! The same charge was repeated a week later, last Saturday.

And so, as I mourned the death of my cherished mother, the EPRDF has finally settled on my branding: Nech Lebashu gazetegna! An agent of Shabiya!

Congratulations Dilwenbru Nega! Your voice has been heard.

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THANK YOU FOR THE MESSAGES OF CONDOLENCES.

We are simply awed and humbled by the messages of condolences we received over the past two weeks. We intend to respond to all of them in due time. They have been a source of profound comfort. We are indented to your generosity.

God bless you all.

Eskinder Nega and Serkalem Fasil.

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21. Meles Zenawi's threat against Opposition Parties

By [Eskinder Nega](#), April 8th, 2011

A respectable crowd gathered to listen to him in a popular café in the middle of Piazza on Tuesday, March 15, 2011. They usually do, about once every three months, when he appears on televised sessions of Parliament.

But this is hardly an assemblage in anticipation of a grand or an important speech. The irremediable draw is the battle of wills that ensues with fleeting looks, embroidered smiles and exchanges of pained or delighted expressions between his supporters and detractors.

The unwritten law is that no words are to be exchanged in support or disapproval of his speech. This is strictly a duel by body language and facial expressions. If something particularly meaningful to either side is uttered, an intermittent grunt is tolerated. In the end, both sides settle their bills, get up and walk out manifestly pretending that nothing had happened.

Welcome to freedom of expression in the land of the oppressed: stressed Ethiopia, where this article could not be read.

The setting: Ethiopia's rubber-stump parliament, where the opposition has only one seat in a 547 seat chamber.

The chief actor: besieged Meles Zenawi, who has been in power for twenty years, and still has four more official years to go. (Beware: "I love this job!" he has told the nation at his last press conference.)

He was universally ignored when he read his prepared speech. At least in this regard his supporters and detractors blended in perfect harmony. The hush came with the start of the question and answer session.

Would the PM kindly comment on the imprisonment of opposition members and the Grand Millennium Dam? Has the government altered its policy on Eritrea? And more questions on the economy.

Mumbled conversations drown the responses on the economy. No excitement to be expected there. When he spoke of the recent arrest of opposition members, however, an uneasy tension hangs in the air. There was none of the usual glee of his supporters.

68 members of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) and 40 members of the Oromo People's Congress (OPC), both members of the largest legal opposition coalition,

Medrek, have been arrested since the beginning of March 2011. Amongst the detained, according to HRW, “are former members of Parliament and former candidates for election.”

The opposition claims 200 arrests but the government admits to only 121, which it insists are all being held under court orders. The detention of the remaining 79 under the notorious Anti-Terrorism Law may explain the government’s disquieting silence, which allows custody for up to four months without charge.

“They are members of the OLF,” said Meles. “They were using the legal opposition as a cover, perhaps with the complicity of the parties,” charged Meles ominously. “We will prove this in a court of law, which ought to provide the public with proof of how (the legal opposition) is at least being used as a cover,” he winded down somewhat pathetically. (Practically no one believes in the independence of the courts, including most government supporters.)

He also had harsh words for UDJ, another member of Medrek, whose two most visible leaders, Seye Abraha and Negasso Gidada, were once senior government officials who were purged (the former illegally) from the ruling party.

Meles, who savors nothing more than occasionally propping up his security services in public, had made it part of a calculated, primed statement this time. “I would like to warn members of Mederk,” he said with an intentional pause for effect here, “particularly Andinet (UDJ),” another pause, “to be very careful about inciting a hybrid of violence and terror. This is a government with many eyes and ears,” the words are now being delivered with marked pride, “it is able to see and hear thoroughly. Be very careful, you will pay the price,” a forceful finish.

There is creepy silence in the café now. There is no movement from either side. The tension is too much for the silent contest today. All eyes are rather transfixed on the TV.

His responses on Eritrea and the Grand Millennium Dam, two issues he is frantically promoting to deflect attention from sporadic but persistent calls for democracy, were followed with no less rapt attention.

On Eritrea there was an embarrassing retreat from the emotional bluff of a full fledged war. The new policy is “proportional response,” delivered with far less gusto than the “regime change with military action” he had vowed only three weeks ago. Common sense prevails, after all, perhaps with a lit bit of propping from the international community.

(I will address his response on the Grand Millennium Dam in a separate article.)

There is considerable credence to UDJ’s claim that it is the most plausible successor to the CUD, the star performer of the 2005 elections. The core of its influential leadership were at one point leading members of the CUD. Most of them were imprisoned in 2005, subsequently convicted of attempts to overthrow the government , sentenced to life imprisonment, and then released under a conditional Presidential pardon in late 2007. The qualification stipulates that the pardon will be revoked if they are “ever to act in contravention to the Constitutional order.”

In a premeditated move to discourage dissent, the government revoked the pardon of Birtukan Mideksa in 2009 under the filmiest of pretexts. The repercussion of Birtukan’s imprisonment on UDJ was simply devastating. The inability of the party to respond to EPRDF’s blatant provocation with mass protests, as many had predicated, went on to symbolize the weakness of the opposition. The beleaguered leaders of UDJ were soon disoriented. Moral plummeted amidst the grassroots. And thus the EPRDF eloquently underscored its intended message: its dominant position is unassailable!

But with the protests in the Middle East serving as a backdrop, EPRDF’s aura of invincibility is now unavoidably being questioned seriously. And Meles seems to be flirting with the possibility of refurbishing that image with more provocations against UDJ, perhaps calculating that the party is still not strong enough to trigger immediate protests.

I seriously doubt whether Meles’ Machiavellian design would have the same effect it once had. Ethiopians have changed forever since the North African uprisings, not only in how they perceive the EPRDF but also in how they will relate with their future governments. They have discovered new prospects to a peaceful transition to democracy. The thinking of the international community has also changed radically. The support of EPRDF’s international partners could not be taken for granted anymore. What has not changed is Meles’ thinking. He still romanticizes a

world which broadly tolerates repression, a world in which he is always the winner. He is destined to fail.

The future lies with the blackmailed opposition, however vulnerable to bullying they may seem now. And in the grand perspective of things, that is what really matters most.

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22. Meet Meles Zenawi: “World’s Poorest Leader!”

By [Eskinder Nega](#) April 1st, 2011

Sniff...sniff...sniff...you have to excuse me... I am fighting for tears here...come on, man!...you could do it!...lets see some tears!...squeeze..squeeze those eyes!oomph... oomph ... oomph ...oh, doggone it!..still no tears!!...

Here I am, in my small living room on a beautiful tenish Thursday morning, comfortably settled in front of the solitary window. In my hand, I hold a transcript our first lady’s (sorry, President Girma, she insists on the title) undated, and, to my knowledge, unaired TV interview.

It was recently posted on a little known pro-EPRDF blog.

I gather this is the loyal troops’ rejoinder to the recent news from Spain about an alleged shopping spree in Europe by first lady Azeb Mesfin, wife to Ethiopia’s PM Meles Zenawi; MP; Politburo member of the TPLF and EPRDF; board member of one of the largest business conglomerates in the country , EFFORT; and Czar of the anti-HIV/Aids campaign.

There are more titles, of course. But these will suffice to underscore an important point: Azeb Mesfin is to be taken seriously! Take her for granted only at the risk of THE GLARE, famously witnessed and written about by an American reporter.(Meles was at the receiving end.)

But there is also a version of her popularized by Addis' hyperactive, and apparently, at least as far she and her defenders are concerned, "delusional" grapevine: Azeb as a fabulously rich woman.

Indeed, no grapevine has ever demanded proof for its most sensational scoops, and in all fairness, Azeb's is no exception. But the image has lingered doggedly over the years, believed rather than disbelieved by most people (as bitterly noted by the pro-EPRDF blog.)

And Azeb had felt the need to speak about it.

"...it is with this paltry amount that we pay for the children's schooling...(inaudible)... (laughs)...I save for three months...and then I settle the (school) payment..."... way to go, first lady!...sacrificing for the children!...perfect role models!... "...Like I said earlier, both of us(Azeb an Meles) don't have (money)...this is how(by saving) we manage (to handle the financial pressure)..."...poor Azeb!...Poor Meles!...aren't you already feeling sorry for them?....I am!...sniff...sniff... "...One of our children, the eldest(Semahel), schooled at Sandford... She scored high marks in the SAT exams in the sixth grade..."...wonderful!...we are mighty proud of you, first daughter!...keep it up, gal!... "...She won a scholarship to a girl's boarding school in England...I refused to let her go at that age..."...good for you, Azeb...that was the right decision... "...I asked for the scholarship to be transferred to (Sandford)...so that it could help me..."...hold it there, Azeb...they rarely oblige such requests...what happened?...must have been turned down, eh?...the rascals!.... "...They transferred the scholarship (to Sandford)..."...what?...how did you do it, Azeb?... "...She finished school(with the scholarship)...She (Semehal) will finish this year..."...so six years of free schooling!...how many smart kids have the same chance, one wonders...."...I rarely carry money on me...If I do, I always give it away...I support 11 street children children in Addis. They live on Bole street. They are like my children..."...touching story, Azeb...I believe you..."...it (their bank accounts and assets) could be checked by all means..."...ummmmm... "...I think the world knows us...If you ask, America knows..."...ooooohhh...juicy!...Yamamoto, any comments?... "...any country with information knows...We are the worlds poorest leaders..."...Guinness book world records: take note..."...you know what they said to me in Sweden?...they said, (people say) you are dirt poor... But no...I am not poor...Meles is not poor..."...excuse me

,Azeb...but...but...but...this goes against every thing you had said so far... “...If we wanted money, we would not steal from the Ethiopian people... I would convince Meles to leave this job (the Premiership), because Meles’ smarts is enough to buy me a house...”...yep!...here comes the inevitable Meles is a genius speech...brace yourselves... “...Meles’ smarts is good enough to pay for our children’s schools....He could go anywhere, enter any labour market and be in demand for his brilliance....So I don’t steal...”...Azeb has finished now....great speech, Azeb!...Thanks!!...

Remember Imelda Marcos?

How could one forget the 3000 pairs of shoes? What you probably have not heard about are the 1000 handbags, over 500 gowns, and perfumes “no one has ever really tried to tally.” Her estimated net worth: 10 billion US dollars!

This works out to a cool half a billion for each of the 20 years her husband, Ferdinand Marcos, was in power. All good years to unabashed Imelda. “Ferdinand was good for the Philippines. He was responsible for the only real economic development the country has ever known,” she frequently reminds her fellow citizens. And indeed, the economy has suffered since he left power; the world’s first victim to people power. But this not where the real story is.

“I am poor!” Imelda, now 82 and still going strong, intones frequently.

Every time she utters these words, they climb right to the top of world headlines. Best of all, there is her outrageously bejeweled image to go along with the story. Journalists couldn’t have enough of it. Neither could an intrigued, fascinated world.

And there is Leila Trabelsi, wife of Tunisia’s Ben Ali. Though noted widely for her passion for racy cars, mansions(50 of them), and shopping sprees, it was her occasional impulse to fly in exotic foods from Europe that earned her world fame. Her husband, somewhat low key, preferred a private Tiger, which was fed prime beef.

“I am poor!” Lelia, too, has claimed repeatedly.

Tunisians seem less charmed with their first lady than Filipinos are with theirs. Unlike Filipinos, who consistently besiege Imelda for autographs, they normally demand Leila's hanging.

Fortunately, even Ethiopians, are graciously less harsh on Azeb. Anger is expressed in other ways. A facebook Azeb fan page, for example, boasts only 28 people. Her husband, on the other hand, has attracted over 3000 people on two pages. But a "Meles is a great leader" page has enlisted only 17 people. That is 11 less than Azeb's. All is not lost, after all.

Ethiopia's Federal Ethics and Anti- Corruption Commission defines corruption as "the offering, giving, soliciting or acceptance of an inducement, promise, or reward; the making of threats or the use of intimidation, in words or in behavior; exerting influence by the abuse of authority or its inconsistent application; which may improperly influence the actions subsequently taken, or not taken, by a body, its members, or its officers; for the benefit or competitive advantage of self or another."

How this exactly relates to the atypical scholarship of the Prime Minister's child (children?) demands more information. Foul play could not reasonably be assumed just because a PM is involved. He deserves the benefit of the doubt; the alternative being too crudely cynical But that the scholarship is also worthy of serious scrutiny is also beyond doubt. I seriously hope this serves as a reminder to Transparency International. Ethiopia patently lacks a potent anti-graft body.

How poor or rich Azeb and Meles exactly are may never be satisfactorily answered. What could rather be satisfactorily explained is why people, including passionate EPRDF supporters, are more inclined to believe than disbelieve the stories about hidden riches.

In the absence of the checks and balances of a democracy, a despot is at liberty to take at will. Such a person is Meles Zenawi. He has unlimited power. Whether he has succumbed to the temptation or not is secondary. It is the unlimited power he has that unnerves people and induces them to suspect.

The End.

A friend sent this (author not specified):

DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA= Program installation:

GUINEA: 100% Complete...

TUNISIA: 100% Complete...

EGYPT: 100% Complete...

LIBYA: Downloading...

ALGERIA: Downloading...

IVORY COAST: 60% [Alert: Virus-Gbagbo detected_Trojan Horse Ouattarra in Quarantine]

CONGO: Connection lost since 1997

ETHIOPIA: 404 Error – Server not found

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The writer could be reached at serk27@gmail.com

23. Meles Zenawi's war threat against Eritrea

By [Eskinder Nega](#), March 25th, 2011

Much to the amusement of Addis' increasingly politically astute public, peace-dove-on-Eritrea-Meles-Zenawi has abruptly vanished from the public arena. In place of this familiar persona has come the new war-drumming-on- Eritrea-Meles-Zenawi.

Speaking to journalists at his last press conference, Meles accused, for the umpteenth time, the Eritrean government of attempts to sabotage the latest AU leader's summit in Addis.

“Agents of Shabiya (the Eritrean government) were seized with explosives intended for disrupting the AU leader’s summit,” said Meles. And while he would have normally stopped here and moved on, visibly relishing the dependable competence of his security services, he opted to beat the war drum. “We will work towards changing Eritrea’s policies or its government. This could be done diplomatically, politically or through other means.” He clearly implied war.

But only a few days earlier he had categorically told an Eritrean opposition radio station that his government “would work in a military capacity” to oust the Eritrean government.

Consistently accused of being no more than EPRDF stooges by the Eritrean government, Eritrean opposition groups based in Addis were embarrassed almost beyond redemption. They immediately struck back with a public reprimand: it is for Eritreans to change their regime, they countered.

But whatever the political cost to the Eritrean opposition, Meles has clung firmly to an overt policy of regime change. “We will not sit idle and watch while Eritrea challenges our sovereignty,” the Foreign Ministry’s spokesman Dina Mufti told Reuters subsequently. “We will take all measures necessary to defend ourselves.”

Depending on the source, the total number of Ethiopia’s armed forces is anywhere between 200,000 and 250,000. Experts, no less the mighty CIA, are less sure about Eritrea. Figures vary wildly between 150,000 and 300,000.

There is less controversy about the number of tanks, though, which are crucial in modern warfare: between 300 and 500 for Ethiopia verses 100 to 200 for Eritrea. A limitation, so say analysts, which seriously hampers Eritrea’s offensive capability. Both sides, however, rely on the old Soviet T-55 models. Ethiopia has more of the T-60s version, but not enough to really make a difference.

But the most serious discrepancy lie in airpower. Here is where, by the reckoning of most experts, the most crucial battles were fought in the border war of the late 90s. They forecast the same for a future war.

And surprise of all surprises, the advantage lies fantastically with Eritrea.

Ethiopia's contemporary Air Force, according figures available on the internet (which could be outdated, but is unlikely in this case), is a ghost of what it used to be in the Derg years, when it was second only to that of South Africa's in black Africa. In active service are only 55 fighter and attack jets: 21 MIG 21s; 12 MIG 23s; 4 SU 25s; and 18 SU 27s. The ancient MIG 21s and MIG 23s have been upgraded by the Israelis in the late 90s, but are mostly dismissed as inadequate by experts. The Air Force will have to rely almost exclusively on its 22 SU 25s and SU 27s if war is ever to break out with Eritrea.

By contrast, Eritrea's Air Force has 100 advanced fighter and attack jets: 55 MIG 29s; 17 SU-25s; and 28 SU-27s. Blaming the loss of the border war on Ethiopia's then overwhelming air superiority, the Eritreans have gone overboard to close the gap. No nation the size of Eritrea, save Israel, boasts such colossal airpower.

In other words, there hangs a somewhat precarious parity on the ground, along with vivid Eritrean air superiority.

Where Ethiopia has clear advantage and Eritrea lacks notably is in potential. Ethiopia is not only overpoweringly larger, both in terms of population and resources, but the tiny Eritrean economy has endured debilitating structural failures for a decade. The Eritreans are in no position to engage in an expensive war. But no less, given the clear discrepancy in air power, which needs time to correct, neither is Ethiopia in a strategic position to pursue an offensive war any time soon, too.

This explains the current stalemate.

Meles knows all this. Look no further than the paltry defense budgets of the past half decade. He has seen no reason to arm. He is no doubt aware, too, that the Eritrean economy is finally on the mend as of this year. Buoyed by windfalls from a booming mining sector, the Eritrean treasury is now awash with new crisp US Dollars. And with Isayas' resolve to assert control over Badame not only as undiminished as ever, but also a clear national priority for him, the stalemate is in danger of being reversed.

But not any time soon. Both sides need time to prepare for what they have promised to be a final showdown. And they need to do it quietly.

So, then, why would Meles suddenly stir this uneasy status-quo? A premature war would most probably hurt him more than it would Isayas.

Moreover, both Meles and the international community are highly apprehensive about what could come after Isayas. The odds are that Isayas remains Eritrea's best shot for stability. The danger of political Islam overshadowing secularism in Eritrea has grown dramatically with the increasing radicalization of Middle Eastern politics. Only the strong hand of Isayas and the fall of Turabi in the Sudan have kept militants at bay. But they haven't given up, and crucially, are less fractious than secularists, who will be hard pressed to come up with a rallying figure in the absence of Isayas. Eritrea's future is at best complicated.

Thus Meles is in no position to deliver on his threat.

What has compelled Meles to draw the Eritrean card is the growing pressure for political reform. This is his way of deflecting attention from his internal problems. He is desperate to steal the thunder from the North African protests, and, given local history, nothing competes with the potential imbedded in the Eritrean issue.

But what ever his shortcoming, Meles is probably too smart to plunge the nation in to war to stave off change. It has been tried before elsewhere, and in most cases has hastened rather than delayed change. He would be foolhardy to repeat the mistake.

He is most probably bluffing.

Finally, a note to Eritrea's ruling party: while an attempt to bomb an AU leader's summit is no reason to start a war, Meles' accusation could not be dismissed outright either.

Beware: Ethiopians are more united than they are usually given credit for. Don't provoke them.

The end.

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The writer could be reached at serk27@gmail.com

24. Ethiopia: Protest and Addis Ababa University

By **Eskinder Nega**, March 18th, 2011

Imagine a student movement's hall of fame, and two countries in Africa, Ethiopia and South Africa, would be its uncontroversial inductees. But whereas rowdy, angry and not particularly ideological students dominated the South African movement, disciplined,

focused and highly ideological university students towered prominently over that of Ethiopia.

Their differences are best epitomized by the high points of their histories: south African students were ultimately overwhelmed by the powerful ANC and gently melted in to the wider anti-apartheid movement, while their Ethiopian counterparts not only charted the course of the nation's first revolution in 1974, but 17 years later, in 1991, went on to seize state power outright; an unprecedented feat anywhere in the world.

By African standards, Ethiopia's student movement was a late starter. What student movements other African countries had, which were all essentially anti-colonial engagements, were in their late stages by 1960, the year Ethiopia's hitherto largely depoliticized students burst on to the political scene with their surprise support of an attempted coup against Haile –Sealssie.

By the mid-60s, a ferocious student led rebellion against the Vietnam War was raging in much of the West, complementing and reinforcing the Ethiopian one.

In 1967, the publication of a new student union's paper, *Struggle*, heralded the advent of the militant rebelliousness which exemplified university students up to the late 70's, when it was finally overcome by the Red Terror.

Devastated by the double shock of the Red Terror and the exodus of top students and scholars to the West, Ethiopia's universities abruptly became dramatically transformed settings. In place of the student's once insatiable inquisitiveness and infectious optimism, an unremitting mania for blending in, pessimism and malice inundated campus sentiment.

About ten years after the Red Terror, however, in May 1990, when the bulk of senior General's rebelled against Mengistu Haile-Mariam by staging an unsuccessful coup attempt, outraged university students exploded in unison against the execution of 13 court-marshaled Generals. Classes were boycotted for the first time in a decade, and for three thrilling days students, not the government, had the upper hand on campus. The regime, no less shocked than mortified, was forced to resort to the army to wrestle back control.

Amazingly, Repression strengthened rather than undermined student resolve. Almost out of the blue, politics became less of a taboo than it had been for a long time.

Ten months later, the students were once again in an openly defiant mood, this time demonstrating without permit in the streets of Addis, ostensibly in support of the government's reluctant move towards a free market, but effectively against its dismal economic record. The government watched suspiciously and helplessly from the sidelines. Besieged by rapidly advancing rebels from the north, it could not help but suspect the invisible hand of its adversaries.

But many students were no less wary of the advancing rebels than they were of the government. Absent the great unifying objectives of the 60s and 70s, land to the tiller and Communism, the prospect of Eritrea's secession, which the insurgents supported, diminished the appetite for change of a sizeable number of students—large enough, in fact, to rule out the resurgence of the kind of cohesive student movement of the past.

The Derg had nothing to really worry about, after all The “right to session” continued to divide students over succeeding years. So stringent was this division that students were unable to stand in unity for their most basic rights. Thus, even after the emergence of political parties and private papers in the country in the 1990s, university students were unable to reclaim the free union and publication they had once enjoyed, if only intermittently, under Haile- Selassie’s regime.

It took them ten years before they were to acknowledge this shortcoming and move towards a concerted effort to overcome it.

It happened in 2001 when an unusually independent minded batch of AAU’s student union, led by a charismatic third year student, Tekle-Mariam Abebe, demanded that the university should immediately live up to its stated values: academic freedom, integrity, professionalism, diversity, tolerance and mutual respect.

To assert their independence, a new student paper, Hilina, was published off campus without the consent of the university’s authorities. It was almost a step by step repeat of Struggle’s saga.

The government was simply horrified. Worse, this defiance coincided with a dangerous rift at the core of the ruling party and government. Feeling that its will was being tested intentionally, the government reacted with deliberate heavy handedness when street protests in support of the student’s demands broke out in Addis.

Too many lives were cut short needlessly. Many more were wantonly wounded. But the government delivered its message. It amply demonstrated its heightened capacity beastly violence.

The budding student movement was crushed.

Note the time line: About 10 years between the advent of the student movement and its peak in the early 70s. About 10 years between the peak of the Red Terror and student protests in 1990. About 10 years between 1990 and 2001. And now 10 years between 2001 and 2011.

And mull over this: AAU has been closed for the past several weeks. Students were on a break when Mubarak fell. They will return to campus in large numbers as of this weekend to resume classes.

With the North African protests overlapping with the 10 years cyclical student uprisings, should we expect protests to break out at AAU anytime soon?

Maybe. Maybe not. Nothing is certain.

What is certain is the deep disdain of students about lack of freedoms both on and off campus. For many students, EPRDF's shocking 99.6 % "electoral victory" symbolizes its estrangement and isolation from the people. Soaring inflation and thinning employment prospects, rather than GDP growth, also dominate their thoughts. And the sense that high-level corruption is out of control pervades campus mood.

If these grievances do indeed translate in to protests, success for the nation, as I have written few weeks ago, will depend on whether the essential lessons of the Tunisian and Egyptian protests are embraced or not.

These are:

1. Non-Violence
2. Non-ethnic affiliation
3. Non-religious affiliation
4. Non-political affiliation.

And no less, on the part of the EPRDF, if protests do break out, a quick acknowledgment that the time for peaceful change has finally arrived. There are no losers in a democracy.

The End.

KEEP IT UP!

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Fight tyranny from your PC.

The writer could be reached at: serk27@gmail.com

25. Ethiopia: Protest and “danger of Military Government”

By **Eskinder Nega**, March 11th, 2011

The announcement of Mubarak’s fall was greeted with the loudest cheer in Egyptian history. People power had come and triumphed in the Arab world’s most important country. There was every reason to celebrate. And with their live images broadcast around the world,

celebrate they did for a whole night. Only the next day, a Saturday, did people take time to reflect on the people who had succeeded him.

Public opinion immediately diverged sharply on whether Egypt’s new rulers bode well for the nation’s democratic aspiration. And no where were these differences more pointed than in Tharir square, where tens of thousands of youthful protesters had camped for eighteen days to bring democracy to their country.

“Time to go home,” thousands chanted passionately in compliance with the new regime’s appeal for protesters to decamp from the square in a symbolic gesture to a return to normalcy. “No! The revolution has only begun,” roared back thousands of others. There is more to our cause than the departure of Mubarak, they argued.

To understand their wariness, meet Egypt's new rulers: Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the defense Minister; Lt. General Sami Hafez Enan, the military chief of staff; Vice Admiral Mohab Mamish, Commander of the navy; Air Marshal Rada Mahomed Hafez Mohame, Commander of the Air force; and Lt. General Abd El Aziz Seif-Eideen, Commander of the Air Defense.

As Chairperson of the council, Field Marshal Tantawi is now head of state. Trained by the Soviets when Gamal Abdul Nasser was in power in the mid 50s, Tantawi was commissioned as an officer in 1956; the year in which Egypt and Israel waged the second of the four wars they fought between the late 40s and early 70s.

Neither his role as a sub-lieutenant in this war, nor in the next two, in 1967 and 1973, have earned him the particular respect of peers. And that most probably is what had made him an ideal Defense Minister for two thirds of Mubarak's 30 years reign. A leaked wikileaks 2008 US embassy cable described Tantawi as "focused on regime stability and maintenance of the status-quo, who simply does not have the energy, inclination (for change)"

Both Tantawi's and the council's establishment credentials were evident in their first post-revolution statement in which they praised Mubarak for "resigning in the interests of the nation." (In actual fact, it took a revolution to dislodge him.) Not exactly the sentiment of the young revolutionaries who had made history in the streets of Egypt's cities.

So does this mean that the celebrations were premature? Should we conclude that people power has , after all, been subverted as it once was in Ethiopia in the mid-70s? Or,perhaps, should we at least suspect that the outcome of the Egyptian revolution is hanging in the balance ?

And most importantly, is the specter of a disingenuous military government the most likely outcome of a successful people power revolution in Ethiopia, as is privately, persistently and disparagingly predicted by senior EPRDF officials?

But consider that the Egyptian military council has already dissolved parliament, which is widely ridiculed as illegitimate; suspended the Constitution, which broadly restricts Presidential candidates; and promised to hold Egypt's first real multi-party elections within six months,

despite, to put it somewhat mildly, its less than revolutionary roots, and it becomes all too evident that the military brass are not dictating the pace or course of change.

By contrast, Ethiopia's military council, the Derg, which assumed power in September 1974, had boldly outlawed all opposition to its policies, deeming it a capital punishment offense, on the very day it dethroned Haile-Sellassie. Right or wrong, the Derg had moral clarity; a sense of mission. This afforded it with the critical will to rule, even if only by brute force.

Not so Egypt's new military rulers. Unlike the Derg, they have to contend with an assertive Council of Trustees, a broad coalition of protest organizers, which has been entrusted with the defense of the revolution. The moral clarity lies with the youthful Trustees not the old men of the military. And with the absence of clarity of purpose, any chance of the military emerging as a coherent political force is at best minimal.

The Egyptian revolution is in no danger of being subverted, at least not yet. The military will not pose real danger as long as it is incapable of tendering a credible alternative to the broad tenets of the people power revolution. This would have been possible in the bipolar world of the past, but we now live in an age of diminished ideological ambiguities, where, in light of recent events in the Arab world, even Samuel Huntington's well argued "clash of civilizations" is losing relevance. Democracy, as it is generally understood in the West, is really becoming the only way.

In the event that Ethiopian protests break out and eventuate in a temporary military takeover, as has happened in Egypt, the Ethiopian military will be in no different position than its Egyptian counterpart.

Unlike the Derg, whose suicidal exclusion of senior officers mostly explains its blunders and cataclysmic end, a new military government in Ethiopia will most probably be led by its most senior officers. This suggests that it will most probably be instinctively conservative not wildly radical, less prone to impulsiveness, and thus more predisposed to the sentiments and visions of the center.

Significantly, whether led by senior, middle or lower ranking officers, it will be in no position to offer a compelling *raison d'être* to explain a sustained presence in politics let alone a monopoly. Absent this crucial world-view, it will be devoid of the internal consensus and political momentum which had once made military governments possible not only in Africa, Latin America and Asia, but also in Europe—Spain, Portugal and Greece. It will really be a transitional government.

No people power revolution has been possible without co-opting the military. Only the confidence that its welfare will not be damaged drastically will convince it to tip the balance of power in favor of change. This has been the dominant experience in other countries so far, and if things move in similar direction in Ethiopia, it is highly unlikely that a new precedent will be set at the expense of the military.

Nor is it desirable. In context of the dangerous neighborhood that the horn of Africa is, the carry-over of the military with its command structure largely intact is an imperative that the nation cannot do without, even if only briefly. The experience of the late 70s militates against it. And this time, the nation may not be able to return from the abyss.

The interests of the military coincides more with the public than it does with the EPRDF. Nothing, including the top brass' thoroughly EPRDF origins, precludes the presence of a pragmatic leadership capable of recognizing where its real interests rest. And this is exactly where hope for both the people and the military lie.

The end

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Memo to the Diaspora.

Thanks to your relentless efforts social media is fast emerging as a potent political medium in Ethiopia. Posting of articles on your facebook pages is energizing thousands and demoralizing authoritarians.

Keep posting them. You are making a difference!

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The writer could be reached at serk27@gamil.com

26. Open letter to PM Meles Zenawi Message from the people

By Eskinder Nega March 4th, 2011

Dear Ato Meles Zenawi,

Perhaps it is the jinx of Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented 12 years in office. He had after all controversially breached the unwritten code scrupulously respected by all Presidents after George Washington,

America's first President, who had refrained, on grounds of principle, from serving more than two terms.

Of America's nine Presidents after Roosevelt, who have since been constitutionally restricted to a maximum of two terms, four, Eisenhower, Reagan, Clinton and Bush(the son), have succeeded in serving a second term, while another four, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Bush (the father), had to settle for a single term. The ninth, Obama, at this time serving his first term, is set to break the tie in about two years.

Roosevelt, who is widely rated as one of America's top three best Presidents (along with Washington and Lincoln), was plagued by ill health from the very beginning. He literally overworked himself to premature death. He would most probably have had few more good years ahead of him had he retired after a third term. Whatever may be said of its merits and demerits, the Constitutional cap on Presidential terms his four terms enthused has at least diminished the possibility of similar fate befalling subsequent American Presidents. Inadvertently, the eight years to which they have been limited to have over the years proved neither too short nor too long.

But this letter is by no means about the damage which two decades of overwork, which you have spoken of and I empathize with, has exacted on your health. Notwithstanding my conviction that you and your party have fundamentally marred Ethiopia's standing and potential, it is my duty as a Christian not to wish you ill-health. It is a responsibility I try to live up to by earnestly wishing you the long life I hanker for my family, friends and myself.

Whether the term served was one or two, American Presidents have time and again described life at the helm of their nation as profoundly lonely—almost depressingly so. Roosevelt, the only person to have served more than two terms, died before he had time to recount of his experience. But few doubt his experience was any different. Most historians, in fact, reckon that as his tenure elongated his solitude had deepened.

This is in a nation reputed not only for one of the most accessible Presidencies on the planet, but also, intriguingly, so unlike Ethiopia, celebrated for cabinet members and advisors who provide the President with honest, sound and frequent advice. Ethiopian monarchs literally believed in their divine sanction. Everything they did had heavenly design. There was no rational nor reason for doubt. The certainty of religious assurance completed them.

But the nation's last monarch, Haile- Sellassie, returned to his throne from half a decade exile in the UK with this world of absolutes shattered beyond redemption. Both the shock and resulting lonesomeness were inevitable. In his declining years, he was almost inconsolably lonely. Even his eldest daughter, Tengnework, with whom he had a unique bond, seldom shared the details of his very private world.

Mengistu is intuitively extroverted in a way that Haile-Sellase never was, but this was not enough to insulate him from the isolation the position ultimately entailed. The forced retirement he imposed on Fikre-Sellase Wegderse and Legesse Asfaw, his two closest friends and political allies, as the EPRDF closed in on Addis in mid- 1991, best illustrates his eventual predicament.

None of these leaders, however, whether Ethiopian or American, had to wrestle with the emotional anguish of a bitter break between irreplaceable friends the way Meles Zenawi had to. The lost friendships between Meles and Seye Abraha et al were forged over three decades under the most difficult circumstances. New friends could not possibly fill the void created by their

loss. A descent to the emotional wilderness, where it is undoubtedly lonesome, is the least that could have happened to Meles.

A decade has now elapsed, sir, since you had become a profoundly lonelier man than either Ethiopian or American leaders of yore. And perhaps this would not have really mattered, as could reasonably be said of American Presidents, if it was somehow tempered with a liberal flow of honest advice.

This being Ethiopia, though, leaders seldom enjoy the privilege of honest advice from subordinates. Much has changed in Ethiopia over the past four decades. But also much more remains intractably the same. And no where is this permanency more evident than in the realm of Ethiopia's bloated officialdom. By the power tradition, leaders are told what they want to hear not what they should.

The rule in this world is simple: Thrive with opportunism and sophistry. Perish with honesty and integrity. Play by the rule and reward will assuredly come even if only slowly. This is the dominant spirit of the times that has enabled your wife to suddenly ascend to the most senior ranks of the EPRDF. In her rise lies the climax of the decline of the "revolutionary generation that moved mountains", to use one of your favorite aphorisms.

With the attainment of status and privilege dominating the thoughts of your subordinates, here is what you are hearing from them: a grateful populace enthralled by fast economic growth; political stability; a happy, hopeful youth; and content farmers. In other words, a nation on the verge of take-off, boldly united under Meles' indispensable leadership.

Here is the gist of this letter, the real message from the grassroots: a nation outraged by high soaring inflation; a public scandalized by unprecedented corruption; rampant unemployment; political oppression; chronic shortage of land in rural areas. In sum, the nation is desperate for change.

You have essentially wasted the two decades with which you were blessed to affect change. In place of pragmatism dogma has prevailed, in place of transparency secrecy has taken root, in

place of democracy oppression has intensified, and in place of merit patronage has been rewarded.

Ato Meles Zenawi: the people want—no, need—you to leave office. The people are closely watching events in North Africa as I write this letter. They are debating the implications for Africa, including Ethiopia. And they have been inspired by the heroism of ordinary Libyans.

Listen to them before it's too late.

Thank you for your time.

The end.

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27. Libya's Gadhafi and Ethiopia's EPRDF

By **Eskinder Nega**, February 25th, 2011

Strange as this may sound, there is a mainstream in the unsanctioned confederacy of dictators. Whether of the present times or from the distant past, the mainstream dictator is usually decidedly understated, more often than not a loner,

eccentric in private habits, and almost as a trademark, lives in a complex world of paranoia.

Moammar Gadhafi indeed shares some of these traits, but also markedly stands out as part of a glitzy species much disdained by the cool mainstream: the buffoon dictators.

Hitler and Mussolini popularized the buffoon species. They also represent its two sub-species: the harmful and harmless genres.

History will remember Mussolini more for his absurd theatrics and blunders than the harm he caused. Hitler's outlandish public tantrums and speeches, on the other hand, are a footnote to the epic tale of moral and physical damage he wrought on humanity.

Until Tuesday, Gadhafi belonged more with Mussolini than Hitler. Aside from the Berlin and Lockerbie bombings in a 40 years reign, the world tolerated Gadhafi with bemused indifference. The international media, for their part, seemed permanently enthralled by his blonde Ukrainian female nurse and gun-totting female bodyguards.

Come February 22, 2011, a day after Libya was overwhelmed by people power, however, the world was suddenly confronted with a new, murderous Gadhafi that was much more than a buffoon. Speaking from the doorsteps of his Tripoli residence once bombed by US air-strikes in the 1980s, he was at times shouting, pounding his fists on a podium, and intermittently losing his stream of thought as he scolded his nation's democratic aspiration.

But his instruction to supporters, militiamen and thousands of mercenaries in his pay came out clearly. There was no haziness here. "You men and women who love Gadhafi....get out of your homes and fill the streets. Leave your homes and attack them (the protesters) in their lairs," he thundered.

In a nation where tribal loyalties figure prominently in politics, it was also a subtle call to his kins to defend him. But those who responded, according to eyewitnesses on Al-Jezzerah, were disproportionately his mercenaries.(Sorry EPRDF!)

Divide and rule has lost its magic. A new era has dawned in Libya.

The Libyan protests began on the evening of February 15 by about 2000 people. The number of protesters roughly doubled as passersby and activists joined them. The regime reacted with a firm determination to discourage further defiance of its demonstration ban. Up to ten percent of the demonstrators were seriously brutalized. Many more suffered lesser injuries.

As has recently happened elsewhere in the Middle East, state violence unexpectedly and unusually bred fierce public defiance. There were more outraged protesters in Benghazi, Libya's second city, the next day. And the protests spread to other cities.

As is the case in all authoritarian countries, including Ethiopia, Gadhafi's security networks, though one of the most far-reaching in Africa, were simply not large enough—nor could they ever be—to contain simultaneous uprisings in dozens of cities across the country. They lost half the country in 48 hours.

Poor Gadhafi was stunned beyond belief.

This is the scenario that will most probably confront the EPRDF if protests are to break out in Ethiopia. A parallel event, albeit on a smaller scale, had already happened in November 2005 when half a dozen cities exploded at almost the same time. The EPRDF was almost, but not quite, stretched to the limit.

Add a few more cities this time around, and crucially, unlike 2005, with a public that will no doubt be adamantly determined to prevail, EPRDF will be hard pressed to control Addis Ababa, Dire-Dawa and Baher Dar, the nation's three largest urban areas, at the same time.

With east Libya serving as the inspiring model, the specter of whole regions liberating themselves within 48 to 72 hours of protests breaking out is now entirely plausible. Ethiopians in Addis and across the regions are mesmerized by events in the Arab world as never before, and each dramatic twist of events seems to mischievously broaden the possibilities at home. More trouble than it could possibly handle is brewing for the EPRDF.

The reaction of Libya's professional military to the rise of people power has by now become conventional in North Africa. Faced with a choice between mass murder and continued loyalty to the regime, it opted, as had its Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts, to switch sides.

Unfortunately, the balance of power does not lie exclusively with the professional military in Libya. Much to the delight of Gadhafi, his disdain of a powerful professional military has finally been vindicated. Wary of a potential coup, he had for long pampered and better armed his

paramilitaries and mercenaries. He will only be convincingly beaten when they finally abandon him.(They most probably will.)

The military is all the EPRDF has in Ethiopia. There are no powerful paramilitaries or mercenaries to counterweigh the might of the army. Only its forceful intervention on either side in the event of protests, or its neutrality, as was the case in Egypt until the very last moments, will sway the balance of power. In the unlikely event that it will remain fiercely loyal to the EPRDF in the face of nation-wide mass protests, civilian fatalities that run in the low hundreds, as is officially the case for the 2005 post-election riots, will be too much for the international community. This is not 2005.

But whatever the casualty figures, perhaps no country will suggest the kind of military intervention which the British have proposed in Libya in recent days. Nonetheless, a belligerent EPRDF is doomed to a Pyrrhic victory, if that is indeed the final outcome, which will irremediably rupture its indispensable relationship with the West. And this will inevitably mark the beginning of the end for the historical enigma that is the EPRDF. There is no way for it to come out the winner from a violent clampdown.

Gadhafi used every means at his disposal to suppress the protests. Appallingly, artillery, helicopter gunship, and incredibly, even anti aircraft missiles were fired directly at protesters. But to no avail. In Benghazi, hundreds of thousands of defiant protesters turned on the regime. In smaller towns, the frenzy of the people was harsher.

As casualty figure reportedly climbed to around a thousand, the surge of defections by once Gadhafi loyalists, which started in the military, encroached with no less ferocity to the civilian sector. Fuming Ministers, Ambassadors and religious leaders were soon urging rebellion against the regime.

EPRDF could count on even less officials to stay faithful to it. This will be particularly true of its diplomats. “Ethiopian embassies representing the people” will most probably pop up around the globe. Perhaps the only faithful embassy left will be the one in Beijing. But nothing is certain even there. After all, it is Gadhafi’s most dependable comrade-in-arms of four decades who defected first in Benghazi.

All in all, the message to the EPRDF from Libya is crystal clear: don't fight change. You will not win.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

God willing, come Tuesday, my first article in Amharic will appear on this website. The Amharic articles are primarily intended for readers in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian public is more than ever desperate to hear from the people it knows and trusts. I need your help to connect with thousands who know and trust me.

Facebook is the ideal way to reach readers in Ethiopia at the moment. All Ethiopian websites, including, of course, this one, are blocked in Ethiopia.

I urge you to post my Amharic articles on your Facebook pages. Post it on newsfeeds, send it by message to friends in Ethiopia, do everything to get the message in to Ethiopia. Do the same for other articles you like.

Fight tyranny from your PC!

The writer could be reached at serk27@gmail.com

28. Ethiopia: Protest and “danger of ethnic conflict”

By Eskinder Nega, February 18th, 2011

Up to Friday, February 4, 2010, Egypt's people power revolution was by and large peaceful. But as dusk slowly overshadowed the designated “day of departure” for Mubarak with his steely determination to storm out the protests still intact, Egypt's youth snapped with rage.

Police stations were set ablaze, fire arms and ammunition seized, and hundreds of suspected criminals—not political prisoners— freed. Any police car within reach was torched.

The worst came the following day, though. Extensive looting and lawlessness paralyzed Cairo's 18 million plus residents. Egypt's enraged unemployed youth seized streets in affluent neighborhoods armed with guns, knives and sticks. Those who had the means fought back with firearms. But the majority clearly fell to the mercy of looters.

The television images shocked the world. Perilously, this sudden turn of events almost turned the tide of public opinion—both local and international—against the protests.

Mubarak suddenly had a smile on his face.

Fortunately, the backlash from the Egyptian public, which was adamantly for the protests and understood what was at stake, was swift and decisive. People organized neighborhood watches virtually overnight, and by Monday had reversed the threat of chaos forcefully. Best of all, the much predicted violence between Islamic militants and the Christian minority, which the ruling party had for years used to discourage protests, never came to pass.

The frown was back on Mubarak's face.

Those 48 hours dampened spirit in Addis no less than they did in Egypt. Suddenly, the content of public debate shifted from the prospect of the protests spreading beyond Egypt to the ominous danger it holds for Ethiopia: ethnic conflict.

Egypt and Tunisia are broadly perceived as homogeneous societies. (But Egypt is at least multi-religious.) Ethiopia, on the other hand, is famously the lone champion of ethnicity based federalism in Africa; a “nation of nations, nationalities and peoples,” as the official parlance depicts the country. There lies latent danger, many people fear.

In the seven decades since the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the mid-thirties, the issue of ethnicity has had a place in the national discourse with varying degree of intensity. It was the Italians who first introduced it, albeit as champions of what they described as the “disenfranchised non-Amhara majority.” And with the expulsion, at their behest, of thousands of

Amharas from what are now Oromo and Southern regions in 1936 and 1937, a new and dangerous precedent was set.

But even granted that the expulsions were an aberration, a consequence of Italian divide and conquer manipulation rather than natural outbursts, the pre-invasion land tenure in the south, the gebar system, was the ideal setting for an impending class conflict with ethnic overtones. The Italians were able to see that and use it to their advantage.

Fortunately for the nation, the restored monarch, Haile-Sellassie, resisted strong pressure from his nobility for reinstatement of the gebar system and opted for the relatively milder chesegna system.

However progressive the chesegna system looked in comparison to the geber system, though, it stood in sharp contrast to the egalitarian land tenure of the north, the rist system. By the mid-60's and early-70's, when the politicization of Ethiopia's youth expanded dramatically, this disparity, two geographically delineated land tenures in one country, arguably fueled the advent of identity politics more than any other factor; particularly amongst Oromo students, who hail from the nation's largest ethnic group.

Once the genie was out of the bottle, neither the Derg's revolutionary land to the tiller proclamation, which uprooted the economic foundation for identity politics, nor the rise to power of the EPRDF, one of its multitude of militant champions, has been enough to diminish its emotional appeal to a large number of people. It still thrives in Ethiopia's politics both as a powerful force and a favored means of divide and rule.

Does this pose a threat of ethnic strife in the event of Egypt-like protests? Would people really go as far as engaging in ethnic conflict, particularly in relatively sophisticated Addis Ababa, home to the nation's greatest diversity?

Even in these times of heightened ethnic consciousness, the melting-pot standing of the nation's capital has persisted virtually unchallenged. An established ethos encourages tolerance and co-existence for first generation settlers from the regions, who have always constituted a majority, and assimilation in to a hybrid culture for succeeding generations. Even the Amharic spoken in

Addis, which, like American English, has developed a distinctive accent, is evolving as it continues to assimilate increasing number of words from other languages.

Addis is uniquely one of those rare African cities with no ethnic ghettos. The few neighborhoods that started out as ethnic enclaves—Wello sefer, Gimira sefer, Wellega sefer etc— have all been overwhelmed. Amidst this diversity, all school instructions are by consensus in the lingua-franca, Amharic. There are no private or public ethnic schools in Addis. The protection and upkeep of ethnic identities, which is held dear by most Ethiopians, is understood to be the preserve of either their home regions or a private matter.

Naturally, with ethnically diverse neighborhoods the norm, the extent of inter-marriages is exceptionally high. An ethnically homogeneous extended family is virtually non-existent. The process of assimilation in this realm is as vibrant as ever.

This is the Addis Ababan reality which had enabled the CUD to score a sweeping electoral victory in 2005. For the entirety of the city's residents, heightened ethnicity, let alone conflict, militates against day-to-day life. A neighbor is rarely an ethnic kin. A family member is usually married to someone from a different ethnic group. A co-worker almost always comes from a different ethnicity. The same goes for a fellow worshiper. Unlike the US or parts of Africa, the concept of an ethnically exclusive church simply does not exist. The ties that bind Addis Ababans are extensive and deep.

It is also true that Addis Ababans argue about politics passionately. And, indeed, ethnicity is a factor for many people in taking sides. But their lifestyles serve as a deterrent against an outright outbreak of ethnic conflict. There is no better antidote.

Where then does the genesis of the public's apprehension about such possibility lie?

The answer: EPRDF generated half truths and propaganda.

There were no ethnically motivated attacks in the 2005 post-election riots. Some EPRDF members of all ethnicities, however, were illegally and reprehensibly attacked. There was no

rational for them. One house was burned. One man was knocked unconscious. But, thankfully, there was not a single fatality.

EPRDF members were not targeted indiscriminately. Those attacked were all allegedly directly or indirectly involved in the suppression of either the June or November protests. Omit this fact and the image is fundamentally distorted.

But when state media went on to relate of the attacks they deliberately highlighted only those victims with distinctly Tigrayan names. No mention was made of their alleged bond with the ruling party. No mention was made of their alleged role in quelling the protests. But these were exactly what motivated the attacks. Ethnicity was not a factor. And no less crucially, no mention was made of the attacks against non-Tigrayan EPRDF members.

By simple acts of omissions and half truths, actual events were twisted to fall in line with official propaganda, which for months had fantastically accused the opposition of genocidal predisposition.

It was a classic spin.

Nonetheless, this is no reason for complacency. If protests are ever to break out in Ethiopia, success will rely on whether the essential lessons of the Tunisian and Egyptian protests will be embraced or not.

These are:

1. Non-Violence

2. Non-ethnic affiliation

3. Non-religious affiliation

4. Non-political affiliation (I will elaborate these “four pillars of Tunisian and Egyptian peaceful protests” next week.)

If there is to be change in Ethiopia, it must be focused on the future. The mistakes of the 1974 and 1991 changes were in having been revolutions primarily against the past as opposed to being revolutions primarily for the future. In this way, they were doomed to fail from the very outset.

If the winds of change do reach Ethiopia, the future must dominate. It is time to undo the dominance of the past once and for all.

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29. Egypt's and General Tsadkan's lesson to Ethiopian Generals

By [Eskinder Nega](#), February 4th, 2011

What the world did not see was how hard Mubarak fought Egypt's youthful protesters before they attained critical mass last Friday. Arrayed against them in the first few days of the protests were a remarkably huge and mostly invisible complex

of police and security agencies; 1.4 million strong, according to wikileaks' leaked US diplomatic cables. Clad partly in civilian clothes, partly in the official uniform of the despised police, they were Mubarak's measure of first resort to quell the protests. Veterans of the fierce Islamic revolt of the 1990's, where the origin of their famed brutality lies, Mubarak had every reason to believe in their infallibility.

But it is exactly their feted brutality, long the perfect deterrent to mass dissent, which was to undo them in the space of less than a week. The sight of uniformed police or their civilian counterparts became magnets for hysterically fearless protesters brandishing rocks and sticks. Naturally, the police and security agencies fought back. But with the momentum on the side of the protesters, they rarely prevailed; promoting, not on few occasions, some of the rank and file to switch sides in the midst of pitched battles.

In some battles, however, the police did prevail. And when that happened, the reaction of the protesters has intrigued the world. “Where is the army?” cried one protester to foreign journalists. “Come and see what the police are doing to us. We want the army. We want the army.” Hardly the sentiment one would expect from citizens of a bona fide police-state.

Now imagine a hypothetical scenario in Ethiopia where protesters and the Federal Police (Ethiopia’s riot police) clash, and protesters, overwhelmed by the police’s superior fire-power, intuitively turn to the army for protection.

Plausible?....Of course not!

But in the event that protests erupt in Ethiopia, too(Sudan is teetering on the verge of an explosion), here is a perfect opportunity for the Ethiopian military to endear itself to the public the way the Egyptian military has endeared itself to the Egyptian people.

The Egyptian military staged a coup and overthrew the monarchy in 1952. In the person of the leader of the coup, Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Egyptian military inadvertently produced not only a populist in the mode of Argentina’s Peron, but even better, one with wide pan-Arabic appeal. And swiftly, many throughout the Arab world dared to dream about the possibility of a resurrected Caliphate; one that would stretch from the Atlantic in the West to the Indian Ocean in the East.

Since then, the Egyptian military has thrived on the windfalls of its association with Nasser; hero and champion of not only Egyptians but of all Arabs. Both subsequent leaders of Egypt after Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, the former a captain in the army, the later a General in the Air Force, inevitably came from the institution with the most prestige in the country.

Buttressed by billions of dollars of aid, first from the Soviet Union and then the US, the Egyptian military has over the decades grown in to a state within a state. But this is not the Egyptian example that Ethiopian Generals should be fancying. On the contrary, it is a cautionary tale of what should be avoided. Rather, it is the sensitivity of the Egyptian military to its place in the people’s heart that should inspire Ethiopian Generals “to be more than they could be,” as the American Marines would put it.

By Monday, February 1, 2010, Mubarak's ruling party, NDF, had tumbled to insignificance; the hated police had collapsed; but, predictably, the military was still standing tall and intact. With some effort, perhaps akin to something like an Egyptian version of Tiananmen Square, it could have put an end to the protests. But neither the possibility of saving one of its sons, Mubarak, nor the unsettling prospect of losing its privileged economic and political status if the protesters prevail compelled it to turn against the public.

Its first statement, issued as the crisis escalated to new heights at the beginning of the week, clearly placed it on the side of the public: "The armed forces will not resort to use of force against our great people. Your armed forces, which are aware of the legitimacy of your demands, are keen to assume their responsibility in protecting the nation and the citizens; and affirm that freedom of expression through peaceful means is guaranteed to every body." And thus, at the expense of its short term interest, it has opted for its historical integrity; a record untainted by the blood of the very people it is supposed to protect.

Is the Ethiopian Military capable of such heroism? Is it capable of overcoming its debased moral standing; stained by the needless blood it shed of the young and old, of women and men, the very people it is sworn to protect, in the post election riots of 2007?

Well, partially it is. Nothing it could do will bring back the dead; their blood will remain a permanent blemish. But a determination not to repeat this fatal error of judgment could reconcile it with the favor of the public; placing it squarely at the center of a forgiving public's heart.

The EPRDF army which marched in to Addis twenty years ago could paradoxically be said to exist and not exist at the same time. Estimated by experts to have been no more 80,000 at its peak, it was more than tripled during the Ethio-Eritrean war of the early 2000s. It now stands somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000. Between the ranks of Private and Captain, significant numbers of ex-EPRDF fighters exist only amongst NCOs. The rest have more or less been fully replaced by new recruits. In this sense, the old EPRDF army has either been phased out or overwhelmed by new recruits.

But above the rank of Captain, the dominance of EPRDF fighters-cum-professional soldiers is evident. At the rank of Colonel and above their presence is virtually absolute. In this sense, the

old guard, the veteran leadership which defeated the Derg remains intact. EPRDF leaders assume their loyalty as a given; a certainty that will categorically not fail.

But is that certainty warranted?

To a large extent, it is. But consider that General Tsadkan Gebre-Tesane, chief-of-staff of the armed forces between 1991 and 2001, and General Abebe Tekle-Haimanot, Commander of the Air-Force for the same period, were once ultimate prototypes of this genre, who chose to part ways with the EPRDF over questions of principle, and the possibility of new surprises is palpable.

What undid the two Generals and multitude of lesser officers was their resolve, as is the case with Egyptian Generals now, to maintain strict neutrality when the core EPRDF leadership was ruptured by an unprecedented internal split. But to Meles Zenawi, anyone who was not with him was against him. This was an implicit ultimatum to the military brass to which the alternative was possible civil war. Horrified by the rapidly unfolding specter, most of them gave in reluctantly. This is the real story. Needless to say, the popular impression of what had happened has been heavily prejudiced by the winning side.

Perhaps it is too early to expect a radical shift of attitudes and loyalties in Ethiopia right now. But if the protests do spread to Ethiopia, as the EPRDF fears, the least that history demands from Ethiopian Generals, particularly with the examples of Tunisia and Egypt in the picture, is a no repeat of the wanton, random, excessive shootings to the head and heart of unarmed protesters—even stone throwing ones!!—as in 2005.

Ethiopian Generals: history is watching; the people are watching; and the world is watching.

Most of all: Don't fight your conscience!

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30. Ethiopia: As Egypt and Yemen protest, wither Ethiopia's opposition?

By Eskinder Nega, January 28th, 2011

The news headlines are invariably dominated by the protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Egypt in particular is at the core of international suspense. If Mubarak is successfully ousted, the protests will most certainly spread to other countries.

But for many pundits, the surprising restraints of the security services also dominate their thoughts. Is what is happening in Egypt and Yemen a slow motion replay of what undid Ben Ali in Tunisia—that is, are the Generals refusing to fire on unarmed protesters? If so, what implications does this hold for Sudan, the next most probable country to which the protests could spread—and if Sudan explodes, inexorably, the next country in line, Ethiopia?

The Egyptian protests, which now dominate conversations here in Addis Ababa, started out as a gathering of a small number of people on Tuesday. No one really took them seriously at first. Demonstrations have been banned in Egypt since 1981, when Anwar Sadat was assassinated by Islamists and a state of emergency was declared. Opponents of the regime, ranging from the tiny Socialists to the menacingly massive Muslim Brotherhood, have intermittently tried to defy the ban over the 30 years since, but their efforts “had drawn no more than a few dozen or few hundred people in the past,” according to news reports. (There are some exceptions.) And until noon on Tuesday, when a small number of people convened outside Cairo’s Supreme Court building, the latest shot to brave the ban appeared to have been slated for the same fate. But two things surprised the authorities: the unusual intensity of the protesters and the speed with which their numbers swelled in to the hundreds. The demonstrators, however, were manifestly disenchanted by the turnout, “where are the Egyptian people?” they hollered, as they headed to Tahrir—liberation—square, Cairo’s equivalent to Addis’ Meskel square. Thousands responded by joining them.

Normally, the Egyptian security and police would be expected to move in quickly, cordon off the protestors, split heads and crack bones, and if the need arises, shoot at will, and ferry off as many people as possible—including passersby—to a detention center; where they could be held indefinitely under the state of emergency law still in effect.

Oddly, this was exactly what did not happen. The government's response was clearly mixed. The security forces moved to engage the demonstrators when they were small in number, but as their number and intensity increased, surprisingly backed off. Does this signal reluctance on the part of the Egyptian Generals, as had happened in Tunisia, not to fire on unarmed protesters? Have the Tunisian Generals triggered a domino effect that is set to sway Generals in authoritarian regimes? What happens in Egypt over the next few days will determine the fate of many countries.

If the answers to these questions are indeed what thousands of activists for democracy in authoritarian countries obviously wish they are, the implications for Ethiopia, while admittedly remote, could not be dismissed outright. No nation is immune to international trends these days. But the prevailing consensus for now, which I share, is that Ethiopian Generals would most probably not go the way of the Tunisian Generals— regardless of what happens in Egypt, Sudan or Yemen. The unique historical and psychological intricacies that bind the Ethiopian Generals and the EPRDF leadership have no parallel in North Africa and Yemen.

The similarities between the Ethiopian and Egyptian legal opposition, however, is remarkable. An intractable feature of Egypt's opposition is their partition in to secularists and Islamists; which had always prevented them from working together. In Ethiopia, the cluster runs between ethnic and multi-ethnic opposition groups, who also so far have been unable to forge a durable, potent and convincing alternative to the EPRDF. (Though there is some potential in Medrek.) But as of Wednesday, Egyptian secularists and Islamists, who had for decades loathed each other no less than they had detested the regime, were miraculously demanding change in perfect sync. No more were they obsessing with which side was posed to gain more.

Tuesday's protests were called by secular opposition groups through social media—Facebook and Twitter. Islamists hardly noticed. By mid-afternoon, when the protesters increased

dramatically, Islamists were joining sporadically, and by midnight, in large numbers (and doing their best to be inconspicuous.) On Wednesday, they had for all intents and purposes merged in the streets—propelling not only the sizable labor movement to join them as well, but crucially, the unaffiliated; who overwhelmed them all. And swiftly, what started out as yet another botched protest by the hapless opposition metamorphosed in to a leaderless people’s movement. Nothing symbolized this transformation more than the hundreds of lawyers who joined the protesters by breaking through a line of riot police who had cordoned off the demonstrators at Thir square.

The Egyptian government has almost helplessly looked on as the protests gained momentum. And here again is a question that begs an answer: could this because of an internal discord within the ruling establishment? Perhaps. There are wikileaks cables that point in that direction. But a definitive answer will have to wait. In the meantime, much to the delight of the protesters, Cairo is rife with rumors that Mubarak is set to go in to exile (which is discounted by most analysts.) And this is in large part fueling passion and reinforcing determination on the streets.

Could the legal Ethiopian opposition leaders try to replicate what the legal opposition triggered in Egypt? “No,” firmly answered an opposition official I queried. “There will be a massacre, and it will also be the end of us,” he said. I could have been Mistaken, but I thought I had sensed alarm in his tone. The specter of the 2007 treason trials all over again could have unnerved him. And emotions and fantasies aside, I must acknowledge the merits of his argument.

The horn has always been harsher, crueler, and colder than either North Africa or Yemen. Thus, with legal opposition parties unable to garner more than one seat in Parliament, let alone be an agent of change, they seem to have withered to irrelevance; their role no more expansive than providing a veneer of democratic process to the autocracy of the EPRDF. Their crisis of legitimacy is set to deepen.

The consensus is that both the Tunisian and Egyptian popular uprisings are leaderless. At their core, however, is astonishing cohesion, sagacity of direction and purpose—at least, as far as dislodging their Presidents are concerned. What has made this possible are the tens of thousands of tech-suave under-30 youth—politically unaffiliated and unideological— who have used social media—Facebook and Twitter—to plan, strategize, mobilize and sustain the protests. They have

upstaged established opposition groups—including the Muslim Brotherhood. “It’s the youth that knows how to use the media, Internet, Facebook, so they are (the most effective) players now (in Tunisia and Egypt),” said Emad Shahin, a prominent scholar in the US, to news outlets. And in both countries, while they loath the ruling parties, they have no faith in the ineffectual oppositions either.

Thus the protests are too important to be left to the leadership of the opposition. The youth have opted to take charge—peacefully but persistently. And it’s working. Every time the government responds with violence—however limited and restrained—more and more people are joining them. Their moral fortitude exemplified through their non-violence— is galvanizing not only their peoples but the world to their cause.

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31. Ethiopia: Ben Ali’s “advise” to Meles Zenawi

By Eskinder Nega, January 21st, 2011

NOTE: The inspiration for this “imagined conversation” between Tunisia’s exiled President Ben Ali and Ethiopian PM, Meles Zenawi, comes from Prof Al Mariam’s brilliant “Interview” With Birtukan Midekssa; which was written while she was in prison.

Like the Professor’s “imagined interview,” this “imagined conversation” is also mostly based— apart from the intended humor and dramatization— on credible news stories, legitimate economic reports and researched materials.

Hope you will be informed as well as entertained.

Place: Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Time: 7:27 PM,

Date: Thursday, January 20th 2011

Startled, Ben Ali instinctively flinched at the buzz of his cell phone. Trebesli, his wife, who is two decades younger than him, looked at him inquisitively as she walked in to the room briskly. He shrugged and picked up the cell phone from the table. Days have passed since anyone had called either one of them.

“Yes?....”he asked suspiciously.

“Who am I speaking to?” inquired a voice reluctantly.

“ I know this voice!” exclaimed Ben with obvious excitement. Trebelsi blushed. It must be Obama— FINALLY! Where are your friends when you need them? I am sure Michelle will ask to speak with me, thought Trebelsi as she flashed her husband a winning smile.

“ Waaahhhhtttsssss uuuupppp, Ben old boy?”

Ben Ali was literally shocked. Few seconds elapsed before he could muster a response.

“Are you already making fun of me?” replied Ben coldly.” I am NOT an American rapper, you know!” he added rather severely.

Intrigued, Trebesli sat next to him. “Is it Obama?” she lip-synched.

He shook his head. “Sarkozy?” she pressed eagerly—oh, boy! Has he got some APOLOGY to make! But again, Ben shook his head. “Cameron?” He shook his head and absentmindedly moved his eyes elsewhere. Furious, she stood up and met his eyes. “Who is it?” she implored quietly, waving her hands in exasperation.

“ No! No! No! Don’t get me wrong, Ben. I am trying to cheer an old pal. We are in this together. Protests have erupted in Egypt, Mauritania, Algeria; and, believe it or not, Ben, even in LIBYA. It’s like 1989 all over again. What’s this world coming to? FOOLS are self-immolating everywhere. I am outraged, Ben!” replied the voice over the cell.

“Glad to hear that, Meles,”Ben said, somewhat reassured. “Go light on the cheering part, though. Nothing will change my mood. I am so mad!”

Disappointed, Trebesli sat down. So it's not Obama. Nor is it Sarkozy. Nor the thousands of people around the world—Tunisians and non-Tunisians— that WE have done favors for, raged Trebesli on the inside. What a cruel, cruel world! And suddenly, tears were rolling down her cheeks. Luckily, Ben was staring out of the window as he spoke to Meles. Knowing that it breaks his heart to see her cry, she sneaked out of the room. Ben hardly noticed.

“ My Ambassador tells me you are contentedly lodged in an enormous palace. That's much better than a prison cell in Tunis,” teased Meles with a chuckle.

“Palace?! Palace?!” screamed Ben. A flustered Trebesli run in to the room. Only yesterday, a doctor had cautioned Ben against violent mood swings; raised the possibility of a stroke. “ You should see the pre-conditions they made me sign. It's a mile long. I tell you, Meles, a prisoner has more rights more than I do. I can't remember them all. But I think I need the Saudi's permission to breathe....”he stopped suddenly, too angry to go on. Trebesli sat next to him and squeezed his hand. Ben closed his eyes. Trebesli's calming effect never fails.

“Give me the word, Meles, and I will coming running to you,” continued Ben, suddenly meek more than provoked.

“Nothing would give me more pleasure,” responded Meles promptly. “But would the Saudi's allow you to board a plane?”

“I guess not,” replied Ben with resignation. ‘I am virtually a prisoner. NEVER, NEVER end up in my position, Meles.’

“Don't intend to,” answered Meles firmly. “But what went wrong, Ben? You did everything by the book. We looked up to you.”

“ By the book. Did everything by the book,” mused Ben shaking his head up and down. Concentrated on the economy like everyone said. Tripled per-capita GDP from 1201 dollars in 1986 to 3786 dollars in 2008. Hear that, Meles? TRIPLED! Only in twenty years. What Arab or African government has equaled that? Tell me, Meles, in the name of the almighty Allah, if you know of any?” asked Ben emotionally.

Meles coughed. Move on, he beseeched his friend in his heart.

“Well, do you?” pressed Ben belligerently.

“Not exactly,” Meles shot back irritably.

“I didn’t think so,” cried Ben triumphantly. Trebelsi’s eyes also glowed with pride. She squeezed his hand once more time and left the room.

“And that is not the end of it. I fought poverty tooth and nail. Reduced the poverty rate by 50 percent in fifteen years. But it’s going up everywhere—even in America. Tell me honestly, Brother Meles, I beg you in the name of Allah to tell me truth, has the Ethiopian poverty rate declined by ten percent—not my fifty percent—in the two decades you have been in power?” yelled Ben, apparently beset by the significance of his record.

“Ten percent?” asked Meles meekly.

“Yes, by Allah, a mere ten percent!”

“I did not call to discuss my record,” Meles complained bitterly.

“I am making a point. No offense intended,” said Ben, backing off.

Meles grunted. But an excited Ben was oblivious to Meles’ feeling.

“The 2010-2011 Global competitiveness Report ranked Tunisia first in Africa. If I remember correctly, Ethiopia was near the bottom. And I am the one who is stuck in veiled Saudi Arabia. Where is the justice in that, Meles? The IMF and World Bank couldn’t have enough of me. One of them, in fact, a world renowned Economist, wished 51 Ben Ali’s for the world—one for each African country. Ha! Ha! Ha!..... Gave the opposition more than fifty seats in Parliament. No offense, Meles, but that is more than the one sat you conceded. And the percentage of Tunisians online? 34%! Who could beat that? Why am I stuck in Saudi Arabia?” roared Ben Ali in a wounded voice.

Meles groaned with palpable pain. How many times have the IMF and the World Bank told him HE was their pet African leader?

“Did you get the message?” asked Ben suddenly.

“What message?” queried a bewildered Meles.

“Lesson number one: the more people eat, the more freedom they demand. Don’t lose sleep over the ten million plus hungry Ethiopians as long as they are not dying, buddy. They will turn against you the moment their bellies are full.”

“And lesson number two?” inquired Meles eagerly.

“Do you know who your true friends are?”

“Of course I do,” responded Meles confidently. “Samora Yonus tops the list...”

“Who is he?” Ben interrupted anxiously.

“My loyal chief of staff,” replied Meles happily.

Ben bolted upright.

“Water, water,” he gasped. Trebelsi came running. “Water, water,” he begged her. Terrified, she handed him the bottled water in her hand. He gulped a mouthful. “I am okay,” he reassured her and waved her off. Though calmed, she left the room halfheartedly.

“Ben, Ben, are you alright?” hollered a genuinely alarmed Meles.

“You almost bumped me off with distress,” said Ben seriously. “Do you know General Rachid Ammar?”

“A jerky Saudi General lording over you?” suggested Meles mischievously.

“No! No! No! Though, you are right about the jerky part. Rachid was my chief of staff. Allah created him. But I molded him in to what he is. No brains, no ambition. Absolutely safe! Perfect

way to keep the military under control, I thought. But he betrayed me. Refused to fire on illegal protesters. Said they were unarmed. Wouldn't listen when I told him they were unconstitutional. That was all it took to undo what I had built for two decades. One man! One imbecile of a man! Everything else was a house of cards after that. The hundreds of thousands of party members in almost every home in the country meant nothing. A ruling political party in Africa is the greatest of all ruses, Meles. Everything hinges on few key commanders for us," winded down Ben, his voice tinged with regret.

"All true. All true. But you must have forgotten the golden rule," said Meles, assuming the role of the wise man for a change.

"What golden rule?"

"The Enver Hoxha rule," said Meles impatiently. Ben should know this.

"Who is Enver Hoxha?" asked Ben.

"He died in office, Ben. That's all you need to know," said Meles edgily.

"He escaped the mob?" asked Ben with awe.

"Yep!" replied Meles with pride.

"What was his magic?"

"A loyal chief-of-staff minus a pack of bickering Generals is equal to an exiled or dead President," answered Meles authoritatively.

Ben Ali gasped.

"Meles! Meles! Meles! You should have told me this before," objected Ben.

"This is the ABC of stability. The best Generals are the ones who despise each other; and most importantly, hold each other in utter contempt. The upshot is assured stability. How could you not have known this? Must be the old age," said Meles with a tone of remorse.

“I am only 75 years,” screamed Ben.

“75 years young,” shot back Meles mockingly.

“I had ten good more years in front of me,” said Ben, with tears filling his eyes.

“Any more words of wisdom for me?” asked Meles.

“One more. You could call it golden rule number two,” said Ben mysteriously.

“I am all ears, Ben,” said Meles, ready to jot down notes.

“Don’t trust Swiss banks!” screeched Ben uncontrollably.

Meles was outraged.

“But they are every exiled President’s best friends. Everyone knows that. What would the world be like without them?” Meles objected sternly.

“Not anymore. I would understand if the accounts in my name were blocked. But they had to block the accounts of every member of my extended family! It’s now a crime to be related to me! Guilty until proven innocent, is what these banks are saying. Good old banking morals don’t hold water anymore. It’s a scandal, Meles. Allah save you from my fate.”

“Amen. You must be starving now,” said a saddened Meles. “Perhaps I could help.”

“No! No! No! Fortunately, Trebelsi had the foresight to make a large withdrawal of solid gold from the Tunisian National Bank before we left,” answered Ben. “I tell you, Meles, she is a genius, a gift from Allah to me. No one has ever believed me. But I know what I know. I would be on Saudi welfare if not for her,” said Ben with tears filling his eyes for the second time.

Both men laughed happily, and thanked their God for their faultless wives.

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32. Ethiopia: As Egypt and Yemen protest, wither Ethiopia's opposition?

By [Eskinder Nega](#), January 28th, 2011

The news headlines are invariably dominated by the protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Egypt in particular is at the core of international suspense. If Mubarak is successfully ousted, the protests will most certainly spread to other countries.

But for many pundits, the surprising restraints of the security services also dominate their thoughts. Is what is happening in Egypt and Yemen a slow motion replay of what undid Ben Ali in Tunisia—that is, are the Generals refusing to fire on unarmed protesters? If so, what implications does this hold for Sudan, the next most probable country to which the protests could spread—and if Sudan explodes, inexorably, the next country in line, Ethiopia?

The Egyptian protests, which now dominate conversations here in Addis Ababa, started out as a gathering of a small number of people on Tuesday. No one really took them seriously at first. Demonstrations have been banned in Egypt since 1981, when Anwar Sadat was assassinated by Islamists and a state of emergency was declared. Opponents of the regime, ranging from the tiny Socialists to the menacingly massive Muslim Brotherhood, have intermittently tried to defy the ban over the 30 years since, but their efforts “had drawn no more than a few dozen or few hundred people in the past,” according to news reports. (There are some exceptions.) And until noon on Tuesday, when a small number of people convened outside Cairo’s Supreme Court building, the latest shot to brave the ban appeared to have been slated for the same fate. But two things surprised the authorities: the unusual intensity of the protesters and the speed with which their numbers swelled in to the hundreds. The demonstrators, however, were manifestly disenchanted by the turnout, “where are the Egyptian people?” they hollered, as they headed to Tahrir—liberation—square, Cairo’s equivalent to Addis’ Meskel square. Thousands responded by joining them.

Normally, the Egyptian security and police would be expected to move in quickly, cordon off the protestors, split heads and crack bones, and if the need arises, shoot at will, and ferry off as many

people as possible—including passersby—to a detention center; where they could be held indefinitely under the state of emergency law still in effect.

Oddly, this was exactly what did not happen. The government's response was clearly mixed. The security forces moved to engage the demonstrators when they were small in number, but as their number and intensity increased, surprisingly backed off. Does this signal reluctance on the part of the Egyptian Generals, as had happened in Tunisia, not to fire on unarmed protesters? Have the Tunisian Generals triggered a domino effect that is set to sway Generals in authoritarian regimes? What happens in Egypt over the next few days will determine the fate of many countries.

If the answers to these questions are indeed what thousands of activists for democracy in authoritarian countries obviously wish they are, the implications for Ethiopia, while admittedly remote, could not be dismissed outright. No nation is immune to international trends these days. But the prevailing consensus for now, which I share, is that Ethiopian Generals would most probably not go the way of the Tunisian Generals— regardless of what happens in Egypt, Sudan or Yemen. The unique historical and psychological intricacies that bind the Ethiopian Generals and the EPRDF leadership have no parallel in North Africa and Yemen.

The similarities between the Ethiopian and Egyptian legal opposition, however, is remarkable. An intractable feature of Egypt's opposition is their partition in to secularists and Islamists; which had always prevented them from working together. In Ethiopia, the cluster runs between ethnic and multi-ethnic opposition groups, who also so far have been unable to forge a durable, potent and convincing alternative to the EPRDF. (Though there is some potential in Medrek.) But as of Wednesday, Egyptian secularists and Islamists, who had for decades loathed each other no less than they had detested the regime, were miraculously demanding change in perfect sync. No more were they obsessing with which side was posed to gain more.

Tuesday's protests were called by secular opposition groups through social media—Facebook and Twitter. Islamists hardly noticed. By mid-afternoon, when the protesters increased dramatically, Islamists were joining sporadically, and by midnight, in large numbers (and doing their best to be inconspicuous.) On Wednesday, they had for all intents and purposes merged in

the streets—propelling not only the sizable labor movement to join them as well, but crucially, the unaffiliated; who overwhelmed them all. And swiftly, what started out as yet another botched protest by the hapless opposition metamorphosed in to a leaderless people’s movement. Nothing symbolized this transformation more than the hundreds of lawyers who joined the protesters by breaking through a line of riot police who had cordoned off the demonstrators at Thir square.

The Egyptian government has almost helplessly looked on as the protests gained momentum. And here again is a question that begs an answer: could this because of an internal discord within the ruling establishment? Perhaps. There are wikileaks cables that point in that direction. But a definitive answer will have to wait. In the meantime, much to the delight of the protesters, Cairo is rife with rumors that Mubarak is set to go in to exile (which is discounted by most analysts.) And this is in large part fueling passion and reinforcing determination on the streets.

Could the legal Ethiopian opposition leaders try to replicate what the legal opposition triggered in Egypt? “No,” firmly answered an opposition official I queried. “There will be a massacre, and it will also be the end of us,” he said. I could have been Mistaken, but I thought I had sensed alarm in his tone. The specter of the 2007 treason trials all over again could have unnerved him. And emotions and fantasies aside, I must acknowledge the merits of his argument.

The horn has always been harsher, crueler, and colder than either North Africa or Yemen. Thus, with legal opposition parties unable to garner more than one seat in Parliament, let alone be an agent of change, they seem to have withered to irrelevance; their role no more expansive than providing a veneer of democratic process to the autocracy of the EPRDF. Their crisis of legitimacy is set to deepen.

The consensus is that both the Tunisian and Egyptian popular uprisings are leaderless. At their core, however, is astonishing cohesion, sagacity of direction and purpose—at least, as far as dislodging their Presidents are concerned. What has made this possible are the tens of thousands of tech-suave under-30 youth—politically unaffiliated and unideological— who have used social media—Facebook and Twitter—to plan, strategize, mobilize and sustain the protests. They have upstaged established opposition groups—including the Muslim Brotherhood. “It’s the youth that knows how to use the media, Internet, Facebook, so they are (the most effective) players now (in

Tunisia and Egypt),” said Emad Shatin, a prominent scholar in the US, to news outlets. And in both countries, while they loath the ruling parties, they have no faith in the ineffectual oppositions either.

Thus the protests are too important to be left to the leadership of the opposition. The youth have opted to take charge—peacefully but persistently. And it’s working. Every time the government responds with violence—however limited and restrained—more and more people are joining them. Their moral fortitude exemplified through their non-violence— is galvanizing not only their peoples but the world to their cause.

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33. Third anniversary of the suppression of Ethiopia’s free press

By [Eskinder Nega](#), October 31st, 2008

I am writing from the designated seat of the African Union, Addis Ababa; home to the headquarters of that prized ideal of ours: African Union

Because of the inimitable standing of Addis Ababa as the political capital of Africa, and thus a beacon of hope and all that is best in us as Africans, it will hardly be too much to expect this city to be a center of learning, culture, cosmopolitanism, tolerance, arts, innovation and creativity, equality, rule of law, democracy and freedom of expression. In other words, a city suited for the twenty first century that all Africans could like, live in, identify with and be proud of. But the bleak reality can be no more different, as November 1 2008 marks not only the third anniversary of the premeditated brutal crackdown against democracy in 2005, but also the continued triumph of EPRDF’s malice in Ethiopia.

Some two decades ago, at the end of the world wide epic struggle between totalitarian communism and liberal democracy, Africa stood in stark contrast to the rest of the world as the almost natural habitat of dysfunctional dictatorships; with a lone, or maybe two, small islands of democracies. The embarrassing and outrageous images of Idi Amin, Bokkasa, Mobutu, Botha

and plenty of others dominated the continent, implying for some—Africans and others—darkness in the soul of the people of the so-called Dark Continent. From east to west, north to south, in the great expanses of the continent, despair, hatred, malice and spite embedded themselves in place of the optimism, goodwill and fraternity that had only two decades earlier undone the shackles of colonial misrule.

Who indeed did not despair about Africa in 1988, one year before the almost magical crumble of the Berlin wall? But when The Wall fell, that grand moment in history abruptly changed not only Europe but all of humanity; and swiftly, confidence in humanity's ability for good things was back in full force. From the deserts of the north to the lush green lands of the south, from the low lands of the west to the high lands in the east, ordinary men and women held their heads up while the Big Men of Africa—the dictators—retreated behind the high walls of their obscenely luxurious palaces. And in less than a decade many of them were to be relegated to Ronald Reagan's famous dustbin of history. Today, twenty three African countries have met international standards for democracy in defiance of a chorus of cynical pronouncements that democracy for Africa is only possible by piecemeal, an ideal that we ordinary Africans could not possibly enjoy in our lifetime. Only in the North and in the Horn do we find multitude of dictatorships comfortably entrenched, ostensibly oblivious to the wind of change that has swept across the continent.

And at least as far as the horn is concerned, it is my country, Ethiopia, I am embarrassed and dejected to admit, which is holding the region back. But I am not entirely gloomy, for I know that the triumph of democracy elsewhere in Africa will in due course overwhelm us, too. It's only a question of time. In the mean time, however, the situation is dismal. In October 2005 the Ethiopian government closed down all independent publications in the country, following two days of low level street protests against election results (which was also disputed by credible international observers), to which the authorities deliberately and wantonly reacted with deadly vengeance. To date, three years later, none of those publications have yet been allowed to resume work. And almost all the journalists that worked for them are either in exile or remain unemployed. In fact, this year marked the illegal denial of new press licenses, in contravention of both the constitution and press law, to owners of the two largest publishers of private newspapers in the country before the crackdown in 2005. After fifteen years of unrestricted press licensing, PM Meles Zenawi's government, true its standing as Africa's star backslider, has this year

restricted press licensing for the first time. A press license, the only means to independent media the country has ever known, is no more a right exercised by all citizens but a privilege accorded to few.

But what bad news I have relayed to you can not raze the good news from our continent. We have ample reason to be optimistic, to look forward to the future we only need to look at the hope embodied in Africa's 23 democracies, no doubt prelude to a new epoch in the history of Africans, when we will at long last be full fledged partakers in the promotion of human civilization.

34. Letter from Ethiopia: Election 2010 Overview - Part I

By **Eskinder Nega**, February 19th, 2010

EPRDF's pending schism.

With the upcoming elections just around the corner, one discernable dissimilarity between the EPRDF, still clinging to incumbency after almost two decades in power, and the multitude of its electoral opponents, is in how they perceive, exercise and have thus structured power.

Scratch beyond the surface and the EPRDF is really not the monolithic dinosaur as it is most commonly stereotyped. If what defines an organization is the unique amalgam of its history, quality of leadership, cohesion, grass root presence, vision, and perhaps even its luck, then the EPRDF, fast approaching its twentieth year, has evolved in to a coalition of four distinct phenomenon: the increasing confusion of the dominant TPLF; the acute cynicism of the ANDM; the desperate nihilism of the OPDO and the inevitable irrelevance of the incongruent SEPM.

A nasty, but so far bloodless, backstage interplay of these dynamics in what is now a battle to succeed Meles Zenawi has inaudibly developed in to a real threat to the cohesion of the EPRDF, arguably more dangerous than the electoral threat posed by its opponents. We now know that disaster was only averted this year with the extension of Meles' term in office—something he had always counted on, according to diplomats—but this has yet to result in the much anticipated—or rather, hoped for—ceasefire between two bickering claimants to the throne—

OPDO and ANDM. What will be the spillover from this rivalry is hardly hard to predict in this election year, but the signs are already out there that both have calculated that a significant win by the opposition in their regions will undermine their claim; and are thus determined, by hook or crook, to garner as many seats as possible. The ANDM in particular, which was reluctantly forced to concede the most seats in 2005, seems bent on improving on its last performance. Not the best scenario for the opposition this year, though no serious pundit has yet written them off.

It is the vast power vested in the chair of the EPRDF that sets it in marked contrast to its opponents in general; but particularly its principal electoral opponent this year, Medrek, which has surprisingly employed the anarchic working ethos of decision making by consensus rather than majority vote. To operate by consensus, all issues are now being discussed until they are resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. The unsustainability of such an arrangement has already become all too evident, its open implosion only a question of time.

By contrast, the EPRDF is clearly a hierarchal organization with a singular power at the top in Meles Zenawi and subsequent levels of delegated power beneath him. Though collective leadership is formally acknowledged, it has no relevance in practice. And because of a complex matrix of history, socio-economy, politics and psychology, a hierarchal arrangement with a strong leader at the top is, I believe, best for Ethiopian political organizations; and, I would argue, the decisive advantage of the EPRDF over its opponents.

But the question remains if the prestige and power of EPRDF'S chairperson will endure after Meles. Both the OPDO and the ANDM are betting on it; but none of the EPRDF's four constituent members have been able to come up with a political heavyweight remotely capable of ensuring a seamless transition. The one figure that has appeal beyond his own party, OPDO's Girma Biru, who leads the important Commerce Ministry, is noted only for his managerial competence, not the grand vision and ruthlessness deemed crucial to keep the EPRDF vibrant and intact.

The ANDM head, Addisu Legesse, is famous for his subdued demeanor and is purportedly held in particular high esteem by Meles for refusing an offer of the Prime Ministership by Seye Abraha et al just before their expulsion from the party. But the ANDM's unanimous rally behind Meles under the leadership of Addisu had been widely interpreted as a Machiavellian maneuver

by Amharas to weaken the dominant TPLF, something that still seriously irks a significant number of strategically placed TPLF veterans. Aside from this obvious Achilles heel, Addisu is one of EPRDF's leaders who stir little passion for or against his name. He is a clear underdog in this race to succeed Meles, and he is already being seriously undermined by a campaign to quietly push him aside on health grounds.

His deputy, Bereket Simon, whose support is generally deemed critical to the eventual successor, was instrumental in marshalling pressure for Meles' term extension; but his considerable influence is expected to wane once Meles eventually leaves the limelight. His health notwithstanding, Bereket is still, along with Meles, EPRDF's dynamo, his clear genius for intrigue a cause of much resentment both inside and outside the EPRDF. His reputation with the opposition for arrogance, insincerity and rigidity was contemptuously set aside by his party and he has emerged, yet again, as the lead EPRDF negotiator for the upcoming elections, a clear message that the EPRDF intends to play rough. Those who had hoped that this would mean less of his time for EPRDF's intra-party politics have so far been profoundly disappointed; this is a man who has habitually worked overtime throughout his adult life.

The enigma of this drama is the role of Sebhat Nega, the king maker two of decades ago whose backing was vital for Meles' accession to the helm of the TPLF. The side he chose at the climax of the fallout between Meles and Seye Abraha et al was no less crucial for the final outcome. Sebaht has chosen to leave TPLF's politburo but remains a member of the CC. But both count for much less since the departure of Seys Abraha et al, his continued influence has more to do with his access and the propensity of Meles to listen to him. Most pundits are puzzled about his stance on the succession issue, but almost all agree that the side he chooses will be considerably emboldened.

The surprise of the last few years has been the performance of the OPDO chairman, Abadula Gemedo, whose dubious ethnicity, embarrassing weight problem and a somewhat comical intellectual pretension (he has written a book) has made him a favored subject of the city's political jokes. However, his management of the vast Oromo region, which is larger than many African countries, and the relatively restive OPDO has won him high marks both inside and outside the EPRDF. But few believe that this has propelled him in to a serious contender for

Meles' seat. Whether he will surprise again is an open question, particularly since no one contends that he has counted himself out.

So though the EPRDF enters this election season confident that its victory is assured, it is less united than it has ever been in its history. How the opposition utilizes the fault lines in the EPRDF to their advantage will test the acumen of their best leaders.

35. Letter from Ethiopia:Election 2010 overview - Part II

By **Eskinder Nega**, February 27th, 2010

The opposition in election 2010

Ask me what the distinctive trait of the opposition is in this year's election apart from the provocative imprisonment of Birtukan Mideksa, and my response would not be amidst the proverbial list: weak organization, lack of preparedness, appallingly low finance (pundits estimate that only slightly over half a million US dollars is available to the entire opposition this election season, excluding the miserly electoral board finance) and an assortment of other secondary factors. We know from the 2005 elections that these are handicaps that could be overcome in the space of a few short months. But that did not happen by chance, it took the combination of a public predisposed to change; the excitement generated by CUD's leaders, primarily by Birhanu Nega and Lidetu Ayalew, both of whom are for very different reasons no longer part of the opposition contesting in this election; and what is distinctively missing this year: the will to win.

It has been said copiously that the prime culprit for the pessimism that has overwhelmed the opposition's will to win lies squarely in the fold of repeated fallouts between CUD's leaders: first, between the AEUP and UDJ; and later, quite shockingly, between Professor Mesfin Welde-Mariam and UDJ's leadership; and no less, the loss of Birhanu Nega to the legal opposition, the one person that had transformative effect on politics in 2005.

All too true, but less deliberated upon, though of no less significance, is how the conviction of most opposition leaders that the CUD's choice in 2005 to boycott parliament was wrong has influenced this year's elections.

Their argument is that the CUD should have accepted the final tally and moved on as an acknowledgment, on the one hand, to the undeniable progress the opposition had unexpectedly made, which it should have consolidated and built on for the 2010 elections; and on the other, to the stubborn determination of the EPRDF not to hand over power, which the opposition had no prospect of changing either by force or persuasion

Whatever the merits of their conviction, its effect on this year's election is palpable in so far as it has shifted the opposition's strategy from winning to that of securing as many seats as possible; and subsequently, to joining parliament to prepare for the next battle five years hence. Barring the unlikely rise of unforeseen circumstances, expect not a repeat of the 2005 elections driven by an opposition and press intent on making history.

But this is not to say that this election is absolutely devoid of excitement. Nothing could be further from the truth. Take as an example the emergence of this year's most exciting political personality, Seye Abraha, and his decision to contest the election in Tigray. Herein lies not only the question of a free and fair election, but what an incensed TPLF leadership under Meles Zenawi is accusing Seye of fermenting: latent Tigrayan regionalism that threatens the cohesion of the entire Tigrayan national movement; in other words, the unity of the TPLF.

Hardly an accusation that matters the most to Seye now that he has turned his back on ethnic politics, but from the perspective of the TPLF leadership a battle they can not afford to lose. Exactly the setting for an epic political battle, if only Seye was backed by a functional party machine in Temben (where he will run), reasonable finance and a sympathetic press to relay his message. But all these are absent and this will have to be the mother of all David and Goliath battles; which will make it one of most watched election spots this year. And if in this specter too, David is to prevail over Goliath, the history of the TPLF will only be repeated; whose own crusade against the Derg mirrors the essence of the legend. But come what may in the election, Seye's challenge of the TPLF in Temben has inadvertently highlighted the question of Adwan

dominance; an issue that will ultimately have to be dealt with politically, unlike the tendency so far to dismiss it on grounds of conspiracies against Tigrayan unity.

But for now, the issue of Tigrayan unity is a powerful weapon that works in favor of the TPLF; and it will be interesting to see how Seye, with 35 years of political experience behind him, will tackle it.

If he chooses to ignore it, he will do so at his own peril. I for one believe that the most important speech of his political career will have to address this issue, with the whole of Tigray—indeed, the whole nation—tuned in. (He can use the air time allotted to the opposition on state radio and television.)

Seye's impact on UDJ is also worthy of note. He joined it at a critical moment, when the party was for all practical purposes paralyzed, and his healthy self confidence, recognition of the value of team work (an attribute of TPLF leaders in general) has boosted morale both in the leadership and rank and file. Seye has spread his intensity and desire to see at least some result from this election to others, and I can't imagine UDJ in its relatively robust standing these days without him.

There are other interesting contests around Tigray, too; Meles Zenawi, for example, is facing his party's most famous female fighter, Aregash Adane, whose legendary courage is striking in that it still remains undiminished. Few expect an upset, but the power of Aregash's personal odyssey will endure long after this election is over. But the absence of former TPLF heavyweights like Tewede Wolde- Mariam and Alemseged Gebre-Amlak is probably a sign that a more serious challenge to the TPLF's hegemony may be five years in the future.

The elections elsewhere are less thrilling, perhaps with the exception of what many say is unlikely now: the faceoff between Lidetu Ayalew, a.k.a. Kidetu, and Bereket Simon, who insists that only his mother is Eritrean, in Bugena, Lasta. Lidetu, shrewd as ever, has calculated quite rightly that he has no prospect in Addis and has opted for a try in his home town. (Bereket, on the other hand, according to the rumor in Addis, is to shift to Gonder, where he was born; and, he insists, where his father is from. But this is not confirmed yet. We will have to wait for the official announcement of the candidates to see if it's indeed true. But don't be surprised if the

EPRDF moves to save one its most valuable assets. Lidetu is maliciously inclined against the entire opposition and would rather see the EPRDF win rather than any of its opponents.)

In Addis Ababa, Engineer Hailu Shawel is to face Dr. Hailu Araya of Medrek in Wereda 23, where Hailu had won with an overwhelming majority in 2005. A split of the opposition vote is unavoidable, but if the crack will be large enough to enable the EPRDF to squeeze through with a third of the vote (the maximum it could reasonably expect in Addis) is an open question.

36. Letter from Ethiopia: Election 2010 Overview - Part III

By Eskinder Nega, March 5th, 2010

The Voter and “the Birtukan factor”

Here is the election form hell for the modern western pundit, journalist, commentator, politician and voter: an election without pre-election polling. Almost always halfheartedly dismissed by politicians, religiously studied by pundits and cited much too often by journalists, pre election polls gauge how voters are reacting to political parties and candidates in campaigns and what issues are important to them. Ever since the 1945 British elections, when the newly established subsidiary of Gallup accurately predicted a surprise Labor win over war-hero Winston Churchill, they have been generally accurate and indispensable. In short, no modern election should be without them. They are a legitimate and important source of information to voters, politicians, pundits and journalists alike.

But unlike the exhilarating 2005 elections, when the free press experimented with ingenuous polling, this year’s election, in perfect sync with its impassive tone (thanks to the election code of conduct, state media tells us) has yet to see its first poll. One reason is of course the absence of firms that are capable of neutral scientific polls, but a second, much more important– and menacing– threat has more to do with its total absence: the recognition by the EPRDF that polls conducted as an election proceeds work in favor of the party in lead, generating momentum and jolting the vote of its supporters to a new level of consequence. This is no mere paranoia. Polls

had boosted the moral of the opposition in 2005; and in a first for the EPRDF (the TPLF in particular) ,had badly demoralized its supporters.

Though we do not have polls to show us the preferences, leanings, differences and concerns of the Ethiopian voter, that does not necessarily preclude the mapping of voting patterns based on precedent, gender, ethnicity, income, etc; which are more often than not accurate.

The average Ethiopian voter is young; around 50 % of the electorate is under 30. The 18 to 24 age group by itself is more than 10 % of the voting public; but this is hardly surprising for a country whose median age is 17 barely years. It is the under 30 age group, conspicuously those between 15 and 25, that protested the election results in the streets in late 2005; and if there are to be street protests again this year, which is unlikely but not impossible, it will be this group again that will battle against the security forces. It is also the group that the EPRDF has invested most heavily on for the past four years; by and large through training schemes and public works programs. In addition to a newly constituted youth wing of the EPRDF, a youth organization funded Ethio- Saudi billionaire Al-Amoudin had been created to stir this group away from the opposition after the post-election riots; though its efforts have been hopelessly compromised by a series of debilitating scandals. Fortunately for the EPRDF , however, unlike 2005, when the urban youth openly identified with the CUD, that enthusiasm for party affiliation is visibly absent this year; the lack of patience for deciphering the complexities that led to the fallout between CUD leaders even more pronounced. But this is a volatile group, there is no certainty with it, and EPRDF has organized an elite strike force tasked to make sure, in the event of protests, that its control of the streets will be shorter than it was in 2005.

The great hyped hope of the EPRDF in Addis Ababa, which will inevitably be closely monitored by international observers, is the women vote this year. Kebele cadres have been instructed to do everything to sway them, and many of them are opting for a career boost by delivering them.. Women are supposedly not paying much attention to the campaign, are less disenchanted than men, and are most likely undecided about whom to vote for. They are in effect the swing vote. It is also counting on between a fourth and a third of the city's vote (calculating on the basis of the 2000 and 2005 election results), who will predictably come out in full force to vote come election day. This is the only section of the voting public that is thrilled about the election

(EPRDF's win is after all assured at the national level), is confident of its choice and is decidedly motivated by the opposition's disarray.

EPRDF's calculation is that with a split opposition, some of the women vote that went to the opposition in 2005, and a third of the vote that could be counted on, it will be viable in Addis.

But in all likelihood, the EPRDF is posed to lose the women vote in Addis because of what could be called "the Birtukan factor". Many women speak sympathetically about the plight of Bitukan Medeksa, the imprisoned leader of UDJ, and most pundits are convinced that many more (men as well women) will vote for her party as a gesture of empathy and solidarity. Neither have empirical researches shown that women voters are any more politically ignorant than their male counterparts. Ignorance of detailed political issues is a feature of the electorate in general, with no great gender bias. The bulk of the Ethiopian public usually benignly abstains from closely tracking political issues, and is content to respond to cues issued by political activists. (And I fear that this true of the Diaspora, too)

The fancy strategies of the EPRDF notwithstanding, Addis Ababa will not vote for the EPRDF; however uninspired voters may end up being by the opposition. (The opposition may yet inspire, by the way. Two and half months are a long, long time in politics.) Merkato, the city's business hub, in particular, is more, not less, anti-EPRDF, than it was in 2005. This is the section of the city that was brutally suppressed during the street protests in 2005, and the pain and bitterness still lingers.

EPRDF remains unpopular in the other major urban areas, too; the sympathy for Birtukan no less. But the EPRDF is not expected to concede all of them to the opposition as it did in 2005. Expect them to be the epicenters of controversy in the post-election period.

An astounding 85 % of the Ethiopian voter is rural based. This means roughly 25 million people this year, spread out over 1, 000, 000 sq. km; where every 50 households are now being monitored by new sub-level party and government structures set up after the 2005 election. (In an American or European context, this is equivalent to installing security cameras at every corner in the neighborhood for political surveillance.) Opposition presence had always been weak in the countryside, but their almost total absence so far, less than 90 days before election day, is truly disquieting.

Given the choice, rural voters will overwhelmingly turn against the EPRDF; who, from the perspective of the average farmer, has accomplished what everyone thought impossible: to be more intrusive in a farmer's life than even the Derg.

Who then, entangled in such a life, would not crave his freedom

37. Letter form Ethiopia: Election Overview - Part IV

By **Eskinder Nega**, March 19th, 2010

The Americans, the British and the 2010 elections

The US Embassy in Addis is adrift these days. Moral is down; interagency tension evident (between the State Dept and the Intelligence and Defense duo); leadership, both from Washington and within the embassy itself, plainly lacking; the resultant malice, therefore, a surprise only to few.

Not only have the Embassy's three top officials been in the country for less than a year, but rather revealingly of the times, are unfamiliar with the intricacies of Ethiopia's Byzantine history and politics, their area of expertise and interest laying squarely elsewhere.

The Embassy's top official, John Yates, who assumed the duties of Charge D'Affaires at the beginning of this year, is a likable former career diplomat (he retired in 2002 after several postings as Ambassador), whose academic achievements from the prestigious Fletcher School at Tufts University is impressive, but is at that stage in his life where cultivating expertise and passion for a new country is just not possible. But he is a Somalia expert, whose assignment in Ethiopia positions him to still dabble, if only at the periphery, in his area of interest.

The Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Tulinabo Mushingi, an African American alumni of Howard University in DC, is firmly and comfortably entrenched in the administrative track of the Foreign Service; where he is expected to be at his best in Ethiopia, too.

The Embassy's new third ranking official, Political and Economic Counselor Kirk McBride, replaced Michael Gonzales; who is still at the embassy, at the much lower ranking position of Information Officer and Spokesman, after being demoted by Jendayi Frazer, the Bush administration's Assistant Secretary of State for Africa.

Gonzales, whose calm exterior masks an intense belief that American foreign policy should overtly promote the core values of American democracy, irked the sensitivities of the much more forceful and well connected Frazer(a rare friend of two antagonist camps: the Rice and Rumsfeld groupings) by criticizing (internally) what he appraised to be a lopsided policy towards Ethiopia . Perhaps a bit petrified but certainly not dissuaded when he lost the debate, Gonzales defiantly filed for a continuation of his duties in Ethiopia ; which was not only curtly rejected by Frazer but was also capped with a demotion to his current position. Gonzales is now on his way to Zimbabwe as a Political and Economic Counselor, a restitution to his former position but it will be some time before he forgets Jendayi Frazer.

Things were different when Donald Yamamoto was in Addis Ababa. He was the envy of many Ambassadors for his weekly power breakfasts with PM Meles Zenawi, akin to the traditional weekly lunches between an American President and his Vice President. That gave him unprecedented access, but he constantly complained about his lack of influence over Meles; perhaps to protect him from criticism that the arrangement symbolized a co-partnership of the Americans and the EPRDF in running the country. But Yamamoto's departure is subject to much speculation, as his current position, that of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa, does not require a Senate confirmation, unlike his previous Ambassadorial position; raising the question of whether he, too, has been demoted.

By the reckoning of a credible source, the top Obama official intimately involved in running policy towards Ethiopia is Karl Wycoff, a career diplomat and currently one of three Deputy Assistant Secretaries for Africa; who, ever the cautious civil servant, is averse at rocking the boat; which has essentially meant a continuation of Bush administration policies well after a year in to the Obama administration. When he came to Addis Ababa to talk with Meles, he left without giving a press conference, as did his immediate boss, Johnnie Carson; because, so say pundits, both would have been at a loss to defend the continuation of Bush administration policies.

The Ambassador designate to Ethiopia, Donald E. Booth, is not expected to make it to Addis before the elections; but even if he does, and assuming that he favors a change of course, will not have enough time to fundamentally influence policy towards this year's elections.

The British, on the other hand, are hyper actively engaged, perhaps a bit too ambitiously vying to step in to the vacuum created by American inertia; but they have yet to be taken seriously by an opposition that is convinced that only the US has serious clout with the EPRDF. Two of this election season's notorious anonymous statements to Reuters; the first, which underplayed the significance of Birtukan's imprisonment by asserting that aid policy will not be tied to the fate of one individual; and the second, which revealed an alleged preference for Meles Zenawi over the opposition by Western countries, is generally credited to the British Embassy, and more specifically to one of its younger diplomats, Gavin Cook, by knowledgeable sources. But Baroness Kinnock, UK's Minister of State for Africa, obviously has other ideas, which she eloquently articulated in a press statement that triggered an immediate response from the Ethiopian government.

The government's response, most probably penned by Patrick Gilkes, a British historian credited with a respected book on Ethiopia, but now a rather unabashed intellectual mercenary in league with despotism, accused the Baroness of being an Eritrean stooge; and in crudely undiplomatic words summed up its response by telling her to "take a hike to Lima Limo(Gonder)"

The harshness of the response has no doubt been bolstered by the expectation of a Labor defeat in the upcoming British elections, and the certainty that a last minute reversal of policy by an outgoing government is untenable; whatever the intentions of the Baroness might be. The public posturing of the EPRDF aside, however, foreign aid is detrimental to Ethiopia's macro-economic stability, and the British contribution is an important, if not indispensable, component. Confronting a British government mandated to govern a full term will have dire consequences for the EPRDF; rest assured that it will tone down its rhetoric after the British elections.

Why Westerners in general, but the British in particular, continue to insist on giving huge amounts of aid to Ethiopia despite the outstanding authoritarian credentials of the EPRDF could best be illustrated by an old story, here recounted by Jacob Akol in the July 2004 issue of New African:

A Minister of Transport from a corrupt African country and a Minister of Transport from a corrupt European country got to know each other very well. The European entertained the African at his lavishly furnished villa on a hill overlooking the capital and the beach. “How can you, a mere Minister, afford such luxury in a relatively poor European country?” asked the African in amazement.

“Simple,” replied the European “Come over here and let me show you something.” He led his guest to a wide window overlooking the countryside around the city.

“Do you see those motorways down there?”

“Yes, yes,” said the African, “I see them wide and beautiful; but what have they got to do with your villa?”

“Ten per cent,” said the European with the smile of a man satisfied with his craftiness, and turned away from the window back to the luxury of his lounge.

A few month after the African’s visit, the European lost his job and went to prison for taking “10 per cent” off contract awarded by his Ministry. Many years later, when he had become relatively poor, the African was not only still doing his old job but had become notoriously rich. The European decided to pay him a visit and he was not disappointed as he was greeted at the door by his old friend with a glass of the best champagne, imported of course from Europe.

With open mouth and popping eyes, the European surveyed his surroundings with amazement. The African watched the European with a smile hovering over his lips. He knew the question was coming, slowly but surely. But the European was struck dumb by the affluence of the African and he was quiet for a long while he went from room to room, sipping the champagne absentmindedly. At last, he breathed: “I can’t imagine how you come about such wealth in a dirt poor country like yours! What is the secret?” “Come here,” said the African, leading his guest to a balcony overlooking the countryside around the city: “ Do you see those motorways down there?”

Look as hard as he could, the European could see nothing resembling anything that could be called a motorway. “ I see nothing,” he said at last, “those are dust tracks!”

“Precisely,” said the African, “one hundred per cent!”

“Of course!” said the European, “how else? Only in Africa !”(The End)

Of course it's not only 10 percent in Ethiopia. Everyone knows that. But at least, insist Westerners, it's better than elsewhere in the continent. But what is left unsaid is that much of Africa has changed for the better over the past two decades. The time to challenge the cliché is long over due.

Tidbit:

News from Ethiopia.

The Red Terror Memorial

The Red Terror memorial finally opened its door to the public last week, over fifteen years after its inception. The museum, the second of its kind in Africa, after the one in Rwanda, shocked its visitors by devoting at least a fourth of its space to a pictorial exhibition about the “tyranny of Haile Selassie”. Mengistu Neway, Tilahun Gizaw, Waleleign Mekonen, the 1974 famine, Haile Selassie's birthday amongst others were all absurdly deemed fit for prominent display in a museum specifically set up for the victims of Red Terror. But no where was there mention of the cruel end of Haile Selassie at the hands of his murderers, the very architects and executors of Red Terror.

Asked by this writer what Haile Selassie had to do with the extra-judicial killings of the Derg regime, a dumbfounded tour guide was unable to offer an explanation. This rare museum, which has displayed the skeletons of Red Terror victims recovered from mass graves in Addis, is expected to be a major tourist stop; as well as a must see for high school students from around the country. What right does it have to misrepresent history to them?

38. Message to Medrek: Boycott Parliament

By **Eskinder Nega**, June 25th, 2010

Barley a month after the nonsensical 99 % “win” by the EPRDF in this year’s election, gloom has set in stalwartly even in the midst EPRDF’s happy-go-lucky adherents.

The extremist’s dependably silly proclivity for melodrama is also considerably diminished. (EPRDF extremists constitute an amorphous entity unofficially steered by Berekt Simon.) And with federal police and kebele officials shamefully avoiding eye contact with Addis residents, the distressing impact of the election’s “results” seem to be more perceptible on EPRDF’s grassroots than either the opposition or the general public. “This is the first election that has delegitimized the EPRDF in the eyes of its grassroots members,” says a pundit. “No one is really trying to defend it. This is a significant and unforeseen development.” And with Ambassadorships around the world, as opposed to cabinet positions, transformed in to the most coveted postings for senior government and party leaders, the potency of the EPRDF, as many of its critics keenly contnd with increasing intensity, seem to be no more the eternal disarray of opposition groups. Alas, the morale of the opposition is in no superior standing; but at least they affably concede to that much. But the election “result” has triggered the underlying covet for change within the public—as many in the EPRDF feared and many in the opposition had yearned.

Take the case of Asefa ; a high school teacher in Addis. In his mid-30s, married and with one child, he struggles to support his family in a city ravaged by years of double digit inflation. He voted for CUD in 2005, his first vote in his lifetime. “I really thought they were going to win,” he says glumly. He settled on looking fretfully from the sidelines this year, convinced that the weakened opposition had no chance against the might (“for rigging,” he says) of the EPRDF. But as he sat in front of his 14 inch color TV a day after Election Day and listened to “the sweeping wins by the EPRDF”, regret about his failure to vote overwhelmed him. “It would have personalized the insult,’ he says, perhaps echoing the sentiment of millions of voters who feel that their individual votes that have been squandered. What should the opposition do, I ask him. “They ought to call a rally,’ he answers. But he envisages less people turning out than in 2005, when record number of people came out to shore up the opposition at Meskel square. “But more people will show up than the tens of thousands that turned out for the EPRDF last month,” he

added emphatically. And his thoughts on what Medrek should do with its one seat in parliament? “They must boycott parliament. Most of my colleagues and friends feel the same way.” He was—and still is—against a similar decision by the CUD in 2005, arguing that the gains were too significant historically to be nonchalantly cast aside.

But Girma Seifu, who won the opposition’s only seat in Merkato, hub of anti-EPRDF emotion and Addis’ business nucleus, has dismissed the prospect of a boycott in rather harsh words. “Our party’s commitment to engage the political process is not contingent on the number of seats won,” he said to local media. “The people who pushed us towards parliamentary boycott in 2005 are responsible for the subsequent mayhem that damaged our party. My joining parliament is not subject to negotiation.” But Dr Negaso Gidada refused to rule out a boycott. “It’s up to the party to decide,” he said prudently. Girma went on to relent a bit in due course, no doubt tempered by the chilly reaction of party activists, and now insists that he will join parliament only if the amount of time allotted to him to speak is reasonable.

Fired with the intriguing possibility of parliamentary boycott, I pursued the idea with scores of Addis residents. Ahmed, a 21 year old college student who aspires to be a politician someday, cast his first vote for Medrek this year. “I did it for Birtukan,” he says. There was some talk of protests on campus after the results were announced, he said. But the pressure of the approaching exams prevailed. Would he support a parliamentary boycott by Mederk? He is not sure. But with startling sophistication he explores both possibilities with me. And finally, he settles on boycott. “A complete absence of the opposition best highlights the narrowed political space,” he reasoned. Promising to discuss it further with his friends, he leaves somewhat energized by our chat. Three days later he calls: “Boycott wins. It’s 5 to 2.”

The enthusiasm for joining parliament amongst the youth is appreciably lower in Merkato, with many still speaking heatedly of the post election riots in 2005. “My child is not only dead, but he has been called a bank robber by the government,” said one mother I met in her one room home in Merkato, tears swelling in her eyes. “God will not take me before I see the day his name cleared.” The two young men who arranged the meeting nodded solemnly. Shocked by her unyielding trauma almost five years after the death of her child, I leave hastily without asking the questions I had gone to ask. Both young men were in 10th grade in 2005, too young to vote. One voted this year. “I told him it was a complete waste of time,” said the one who did not vote as we

sipped coffee in a neighborhood café. But both agreed that Medrek should boycott parliament when I raised the issue with them. “What could they do with one vote?” they ask.

A medical doctor who voted for Medrek is bolder: “Being part of a deceit will make an accomplice out of them.” But what should take precedence, I ask him: the conscience of Girma or the decision of the party, if Medrek is to settle on boycott but Girma remains unconvinced and still believes otherwise. For the liberal democrat conscience has precedence, he responds musingly. “Only for authoritarians is the party line more important than the conscience of the individual.”

But the issue Girma has to grapple with is much more complex than mere choice between conscience and the party line—if it comes to that eventuality. Indeed, his jibe at the leaders of CUD who were strong proponents of a boycott in 2005 reveal of a perception of politics as—in line with a popular dictum—“an art of the possible”, change coming only incrementally. The rival notion of politics, which tender stirring political parties and leaders as catalysts to overcome tyranny, is discredited as far as he is concerned. But no less significantly, this is his rendezvous with destiny. He has been abruptly catapulted from political obscurity. The next five years offer him an opportunity to construct a distinctive political identity for himself. This opening will not come again. Such thoughts will dominate his thinking in the coming months, and in fairness, particularly by the dismal moral standard of our times, one can only empathize with the impasse he will be entangled in if his personal interests collide with that of the party.

Medrek’s interest, on the other hand, is crystal clear. Clearly the majority of its supporters I spoke to want it to boycott parliament. Granted that this is no scientific survey and that serious political parties do not always accede to public opinion, the alternative is no more than the legitimization of the status-quo and the continued momentum of a one party state in the making. A viable opposition in the context of Ethiopia’s objective condition can not limit itself to mere electoral engagement, as is the case in normal democracies. It must out of necessity become an object of peaceful societal transformation, an agent of peaceful change. To be such a party Medrek must boycott the parliament.

39. Response to Meles Zenawi

By **Eskinder Nega**, May 28th, 2010

Imprinted in popular imagination is the image of Meles Zenawi quivering, focused; and clearly at one of his heights of oratory as he ranted against the Algiers Technical Arrangement in one of his most—he has several—press conferences.

“We will not relent until Shabiya(the Eritrean government) leaves our land without any precondition. No negotiation before then. We reject the Technical Arrangement put forth by the international community to avert war.”

Later, when his party’s leadership imploded, which pitted the core senior leadership against him, his ardent allies came to his defense by citing his brilliant performance at the press conference depicted above. “It tipped the balance of public opinion in favor of the war,” they said, refuting his opponents charge that he is intuitively inclined against patriotism.

What his defenders did not say, but which he was to admit at a future date, was that he did not believe in what he had said. He was on the record (secretly) in support of the Technical Arrangement. He was in effect lying when he passionately raged against it at the press conference. Of course, his narrative is slightly different, insisting that he did it as a “disciplined soldier” of his party; since his duty is to express his party’s, not his, perspective. That may very well be true; at least from the perspective of his Leninist roots. But what has lingered in the back of the public’s mind ever since has been the passion with which he spoke in favor of something he did not believe in—the power of his pretense.

Meles is unquestionably an intelligent man. It is unfathomable for anyone to seriously ponder whether he actually believes that the credibility of Ethiopia’s electoral process hangs only on the process and not the outcome—though admittedly that is the case in some other countries. The dynamics of Ethiopia’s history, and not merely its distant era but no less its violence ridden recent past, is dead against the one party dominated democracy in ethnically and religiously homogenous Japan that Meles oft cites to rationalize the dominance of his party. Or is Meles convinced, as Francis Fukuyama was immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, that history has ended with the triumph of the EPRDF ,and historical cleavages do not matter any more? That

they have—to borrow a renowned Marxist phrase—withered away, paving the way for one party to garner 99% of parliamentary seats in multi-ethnic and multi religious Ethiopia?

Very unlikely. Perhaps some in his party's top leadership may think so; but not sophisticated Meles. He is far too smart, far too well read; and more notably, far too cynical. The Meles Zenawi that was citing Japan and Sweden to journalists on Wednesday in support of his party's outrageous margin of victory is the same Meles that years ago publicly tore apart the merits of the Technical Arrangement that he cherished in secret. The only difference is that his power of speech is somewhat diminished this time. Asked by a journalist how he feels about the absence of the opposition in parliament, he replied offhandedly, unable to find words for the lengthy rhetoric that he is fond of: "I feel nothing"

But feel he does, as was evident when he responded to another journalist who had queried about an election related issue. "We thought we would get anything between 50 and 75 % of the vote," he said, with a tone that was less sure and firm than usual. "We neither projected nor expected to get 99%," he added, almost thinking out aloud about his overzealous cadres, who have now pushed him beyond the pale in the international arena; where he was until Monday—the day the "election results" were announced—a rising star.

And for the first time in two decades it seems that his relationship with one of the powerful actors in the international arena, the Americans, is poised to suffer—though it is not clear to what extent. Meles thinks he has the edge, though. "Ours is a two way relationship," he said at Wednesday's press conference, confident as ever. "Our relationship is not reliant on the interest of only one party." But he may be overestimating how much the Americans continue to value the information they acquire about Somalia from his—in the words of the Economist magazine—"bare knuckled security." Johnnie Carson, for example, the low key Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, acknowledged that the election was "calm and peaceful", but used uncharacteristically strong words to highlight his government's displeasure: "We note with some degree of remorse that the election were not up to international standards." The State Department was even bolder: "Steps to be taken to level the playing field(for the opposition) will influence the future direction of U.S.- Ethiopian relations." Not exactly the words of a party that is worried about the effects of a severed relationship. But Meles promised "not to grovel to get aid" on Wednesday; a message he delivered in exactly the same words to the EU, too.

“Our understanding was that EU Observers were here to report only on the raw facts of the election, which they did well,” said Meles to an Ethiopia journalist who asked about the observers’ preliminary report. “But like we feared they have transgressed their mandate, and are dabbling in politics.” And he went on to speculate about the mission’s motive. “They are trying to create room for political meddling in the future,” he said conspiratorially. Nonetheless, he is confident that his relationship with the EU, which, contrary to the precedent set over the past six decades all over Africa, believes that aid is crucial in reducing poverty, as opposed to rapid economic development, will not suffer. “The EU Foreign Minister has sent us a message, and she assures us the relationship will continue,” said Meles. Which way the relationship goes, however, is also reliant on how the opposition is perceived, say diplomats. “A strong and viable opposition is a strong incentive for us to consider change,” said one of them to me.

Meles’ legendary temper, while mostly subdued on Wednesday, flared briefly, ignited by a question about Anna Gomez, EU’s chief observer in the 2005 elections. “(Berman) and Anna Gomez are fundamentally different. Anna Gomez is a lair. I have some respect for this year’s observers. I have absolutely no respect for her,” he lashed out at her, his voiced slightly raised. “She is now openly advocating armed struggle as the only viable means to bring change to Ethiopia. She has become a war-monger.” Needless to say, a charge that is utterly fallacious.

Little noticed, but of significance, was the question he was asked about the opposition’s alleged result in Tigary. “They got more than I expected,” he said, no doubt a bit petrified. The non-EPRDF vote, allegedly about 17,000 out of a total of 116,000 in the preliminary results, is proportionately more than the opposition’s alleged results in Oromia and Amhara. Perhaps the clearest message from the electorate—suppressed though it is—that EPRDF’S hegemony is resented; and menacingly, brewing just below the surface.

But the bombshell of the press conference was to come when he was asked if he foresees the day when the EPRDF becomes an opposition party in his lifetime. (He is in his mid 50s, and expects to live several decades more.) “ I can’t be sure,” he said, calmly and seriously. I will spare you the absurd rhetoric that ensued. And here is where I think a citizen’s response to Meles, from me, one of tens of millions of Ethiopians who aspire to nothing more than see the day when our votes will not be stolen in our lifetime, is warranted: You will be mightily surprised in your lifetime, Sir!!! Mark my words!!!

40. Beyene Petros, Professor Mesfin W/Mariam and election 2010

By **Eskinder Nega**, April 30th, 2010

Many political leaders, big and small, have come and gone over the past two decades.

Few have remained a permanent fixture though, firmly placed in public consciousness as embodiments of the post-Derg years. Seyoum Mesfin, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister now for an unprecedented 18 years and still counting; Bereket Simon, the acclaimed Godfather of EPRDF's malice; Professor Mesfin WeldeMariam, high profile human rights activist-cum- controversial opposition politician; Haile GebreSelassie, an inspiring gold medalist turned successful business man have endured prominently in the spot light through the years.(This list excludes artists, about whom I confess almost complete ignorance; but which is not so with the public.) But there are two more public personalities whose name recognition looms even higher amongst rural and city folks alike, sustained by their consistent presence on state media over the years: Meles Zenawi, PM and leader of the EPRDF; and Beyene Petros, the only opposition figure who has been a Parliamentarian since the first days of the Transitional Government, established a mere month after the downfall of the Derg almost nineteen years ago.

Beyene was a content scientist in May 1991 when leaders of the EPRDF triumphantly led their army—much of it mobilized in the last 24 months of the conflict— in to Addis. He was reluctantly piloted in to the political arena by his ethnic kin, who insisted that he represent them in the national conference scheduled for June 1991; from which the Transitional Government was to emerge. His first year in politics was uneventful by the standard of subsequent years, though perhaps the best in his political career so far, having served in both the legislative and executive branches of government as a Parliamentarian and Vice Minister of Education. The withdrawal of the OLF from the Transitional Government was to end that honeymoon ; with an enraged Meles, responding to Beyene in parliament, once blurting “ I was not voted for(to be in parliament) because of my good looks”; a sarcastic allusion to the upper class persona of Beyene.(He hails form a humble background in actual fact.) But not even Meles, who is serene and calm at one moment and explosive and enraged the next, has ever accused him of wavering from the legal framework; Beyene being the one reliable politician, by universal consensus, that

sincerely abhors any prospect of violence. “He has been called a wimp for his commitment to non-violence,’ says a pundit.

It is with these particulars in mind that the public and pundits alike received news of his alleged incitement to violence with utter disbelief. “Overthrowing a government that fails to keep its promise to the people is not new; as it happens in different parts of the world. In fact it won’t last five years,” said Professor Beyene Petros at a public meeting held in Addis last Sunday, thundered a press release from the EPRDF on Monday. “Such statement is against the constitution, and is subtlety intended to provoke violence.” But the EPRDF did not stop there, as it would have been expected to do so at this point in the election season. “No party must expect to instigate violence and expect to operate within the legal framework at the same time. We call upon the NBEE to take measures against such anti-peace statements,” summed up the EPRDF. Beyene responded by insisting that all his remarks strictly adhere to the standards set by the constitution. “ I spoke of a public that votes in to and votes out of power, all through the ballot box. And that is mandated by the constitution. There was no incitement to violence,” said he to local media.

Since no one else, including the EPRDF, really suspect otherwise, the question that pundits are asking is: Why is the EPRDF rocking the boat when almost all things appear to be going its way? Of course there are still the minor tremors that it handles as a matter of routine. But that is to be expected. Consider, for example, these three minor tremors. The first: a report by Reuters, filed by its Addis based correspondent, Barry Malone, while on a trip to Nairobi, of an opposition member allegedly killed last week, this time in Oromia; citing Medrek as its source. Berket Simon responded with indignant fury, temporarily blocking Barry’s return to Addis. “Check with us before you (foreign correspondents) file a story,” instructed Berket’s office after refuting Medrek’s statement. But in the fast paced world of international news, securing the government’s prompt reply remains as allusive as ever. Both sides expect trouble as the election and its aftermath unfolds; with an expulsion or two in the event of street protests. And second: an IMF report that projected Ethiopia’s growth this year at only 4.6 percent, much lower than the double digit growth that the EPRDF has packaged its election campaign around. But a media monopoly (Ethiopia’s small private press has so far remained irrelevant) ensures that the majority will not hear from the IMF. Finally, and more seriously, a bomb blast in Adi Daero, Tigray, killed 5 people and injured 20 others on Saturday; days after EPRDF supported rebels

attacked a military camp inside Eritrea. “The Eritrean government is clearly behind it,” said an Ethiopian government statement a day later; and now popular sentiment in Tigray is growing for a military strike against Eritrea. “There is widespread belief that Meles habitually treats Shabiya with kid’s gloves. May be this will be the catalyst that will drive many voters in to the arms of Arena (Gebru’s party),” says a pundit. Such calculation on the part of the EPRDF leadership at the height of the election season could endanger the uneasy peace at the Ethio- Eritrean border. “I don’t think there will be war. But an Ethiopian response of some sort is inevitable after the elections,” said a Western diplomat upon my inquiry.

Thus all three events were of manageable proportions that did not risk to derail the elections from its almost scripted course. But there is an unpublicized element in EPRDF’s calculation that is clearly troubling it. “Their obsession with street protests borders on paranoia,” says an opposition leader “But they know that we are in no position to go down that road.” But scores of pundits cite the lessons of history and acknowledge the reason behind EPRDF’s unease. “The street protests of 1972 and 2005 were not instigated by political groups,” says a pundit, “It could happen all over again. And they know that.”

However, with the disarray in the opposition increasingly dominating the news, the prospect of mass street protest is diminishing if not disappearing. Disappointment and anger is rife amidst the public after a faction of UDJ, the party of Birtukan Medeksa, upped its challenge against the legal leadership of the party this week by instigating a brawl at the party’s head office in Addis. “Their timing is terrible. They could have waited until the elections are over,” says a prominent member of the opposition. “At stake is the image of not only UDJ but the entire opposition.” The faction convened what it said was a congress/convention of UDJ two weeks ago and elected Professor Mesfin WeldeMariam to the position of First Deputy President. A ten point statement released after the meeting declared the suspension of UDJ’s leadership, which includes Seye Abraha and Negasso Giddaa;; upheld the party’s original program; and refuted the rationale for UDJ’s membership in Medrek. Proceedings of the meeting has already been submitted to the electoral board, which registers political parties, according to sources; raising the prospect of an awkward legal snag for the eight parties coalition, Medrek. “I don’t expect them (the EPRDF) to do any thing before the elections,” says a political pundit, “but this will be useful to break the will of Medrek after the elections.” But ten people ,including Professor Mesfin, were detained by the police yesterday after fist fights broke between the two sides, outraging the public; and, say

pundits, damaging the image of the opposition. “What effect this will have on the opposition’s prospect in the elections this year is an open question. But a political backlash against the Professor is easy to predict,” said a pundit as he watched images of bloodied heads and broken car windows on satellite television. UDJ has condemned the move by Professor Mesfin WeldeMariam et al, and is insisting that the meeting had nothing to do with it. “We have confirmed that the permit issued for the meeting was not in the name of UDJ,” said Asrat Tase, an executive committee member, a day after the meeting. “We have seen the permit issued.” Few expect Professor Mesfin’s minority to garner much public support for what has been viewed as a last minute nihilistic spoil-sport effort, but pundits still expect it to forge ahead; blinded by fury against the majority that expelled it—unfairly, it says— from the party. In yet another contentious move, Professor Mesfin accused the American spy agency, CIA, of being one of three principal actors responsible for CUD’s post-election breakup in his recently published book, Aguteni. “He makes the assertion,” says a high school teacher, “but offers no explanation.”

Indeed. But that is only because there is no plausible explanation.

BRIEF NEWS FROM ETHIOPIA.

Compromising National Security?

Two high-flying journalists from state media were imprisoned at the end of last week, allegedly caught while negotiating to sell film footages from the archives of ETV to the Qatari based Al Jazeera television. Haile Yesus Werku and Abdulsemed Mohammed, both of ETV, now face the specter of long prison sentences under a stiff anti-corruption statute. The case is being handled by the Anti-Corruption Commission, whose oversight was controversially transferred from parliament to the PM; after, according to sources, it pried too aggressively on senior EPRDF members. Since then the PM’s significant action has been to sack and demote its naively independent minded female head, herself a veteran of the armed struggle against the Derg, to head an obscure government housing agency; shattering institutional credibility and morale of employees. ETV spokesperson Tesfaye Mengiste’s remarks against the journalists, whom he accused of “compromising national security”, has been widely derided as hysterical and symptomatic of the politicization of state media. “The state media are now more than news

organization to them now,” says a ETV journalist. “The mere act of independent thought is now actively discouraged and penalized as it is in the EPRDF.”

41. On Meles Zenawi, Lidetu Ayalew and election 2010

By Eskinder Nega, April 23rd, 2010

Meles Zenawi’s mother first encounter with the media was on the day of Eritrea ’s referendum in 1993, when she was confronted by a BBC journalist in Adwa as she came out of a polling station after casting her vote.

She spoke in measured words, praising the process but giving no clue as to which way she had voted. Government officials reacted with panic to her interview, giving strict instructions that it should not be translated and relayed in local languages on state media. It would be many years before her second encounter with journalists; but when she finally did so, it was to be with friendly one; and, it was said at the time, had to be approved by Meles himself. She mostly spoke in guarded words, quite obviously aware that her words could damage Meles; whom, she said, “has always been my favorite child.” She spoke as all parents do about their children; and in the end, the interview did go some way in revamping the tattered public image of Meles Zenawi as aloof and alienated; its intended target.

But less said was about the troubling tendency of Meles, who left Adaw for Addis when he was only in his mid-teens, to pick up and throw the nearest object within his reach when provoked even only in jest. Several decades later, Meles’ still irrepressible rage lay bare during a press conference, suddenly provoked by a question about the jamming of the VOA, as he lashed out with incomprehensible rancor about alleged incitements to genocide.

Meles Zenawi is now in his mid 50s, two decades at the helm of the nation, at the peak of his prestige and power, and only few weeks short of presiding over a sensitive election that he insists with increased intensity is vulnerable to conspiracies against its peaceful outcome.

Few buy in to his conspiracy theory, this being only the latest in a long series, but many seriously ponder if Meles will ever be able to temper his rage, and how it will affect a post election crisis.

How likely is a post election crisis that Meles repeatedly speaks about? The answer of many pundits : Very likely. The opposition are adamant that a fair and free election is an impossibility this year; save, in the words of Merera Gudina, “a miracle.” The EPRDF insists otherwise, vaguely blaming the opposition in general—but Medrek in actual fact—of a creeping incitement (akin to the creeping coup against Haile Seallise’s government in the early 70s) that would end in riots in the immediate aftermath of the elections. The essential ingredients are all there for an inevitable political crisis.

But does this really mean that it will have to eventuate in riots as Meles mysteriously implies? Not necessarily; but only if the sense of proportion of the principal actors is well balanced. And that is exactly where the danger of Meles Zenawi, with his life long predicament of controlling his emotions, lies menacingly. Even if his oft cited conspiracies are true, he poses no less danger, temperamentally prone as he is, to impelling a minor event in to full blown national crisis.

And there is also the new side of Meles in play that was absent from his early days, shaped as the years progressed by the rigors of almost forty years in the Byzantine world of Ethiopian politics. Many of those who had worked with him closely speak of the sophistry and vanity he developed after his ascendancy to power. “He gets offended when you disagree with him,” says a source who knew him intimately of his vanity. “He sees it as a personal challenge.” Even a friend becomes an adversary then, to be defeated at any cost. “If you don’t relent fast, he will conjure fantastic diversions,” says the source. Bonapartism being the most famous example. “He is always convinced that he is the smartest person in the room. He expects you to be awed, not outraged, by his wild statements and assertions.”

Ideally the person sitting in Meles’ position would be self assured, acutely aware of the power of his words(which Meles is notoriously incapable of understanding), with the humility to consider other people’s opinion even if he disagrees with them, and finally, neither too quick not to slow to make decisions.

Such is a leader that will stir a nation out of a crisis. And such a man is not Meles. Be very worried about him.

In the meantime though, election season is approaching closure, now with only fifteen days remaining for active campaigning. And news of an interesting development in the North(in Lasta)

is slowly trickling down to Addis. Rumors about Lidetu Ayalew's past and present have seriously endangered his electoral prospects in Lalibela; his birth place and one of the epicenters of Ethiopia's Orthodox Christianity. Lidetu, who maliciously betrayed the opposition in 2005 and is now a rather unconvincing champion of a "third way", which he says is adopted from Europe's anti-establishment ritual, has generally earned high marks for his oratory in this year's election debates. But few pundits believe that this has translated in to any significant support for his party in the cities, where his "credibility deficit" is deemed to be too large to be overcome even by his considerable oratorical prowess. But the country side, where most of his constituency lie, is subject to much debate, with some pundits convinced that his performance in the debate will propel him to victory in light of the token competition he faces from the EPRDF (which wants him to win) and no significant alternative from the opposition.

But an unexpected issue has loomed, seriously jeopardizing his chances; according to locals. Many of his devoutly Orthodox Christians constituents (who constitute almost 100 percent) are incensed by rumors of his conversion to Protestantism (Pente), which is still taboo in the Amhara region as a whole. Lidetu has denied the allegation, but considerable damage has already been done by the rumors, and reversing his fortunes seems to be an up hill battle for him and his EPRDF allies.

"He could lose," said a local I met in Addis.

If he does, his numerous critics around the country will at least have one reason to celebrate.

42. The Past of Seye Abraha et al in Perspective

By **Eskinder Nega**, April 16th, 2010

Seye Abraha's commanding presence and well delivered speech on foreign affairs in last week's televised debate between political parties has vexed EPRDF leaders, say sources.

Their only solace is Seye's rather brash characterization of the recent row between the EPRDF and the Obama administration as "staged drama"; which went down well with the public but will hardly endear the opposition with the diplomatic community in Addis. "The row between the

Ethiopian government and the US,” said Seye in the debate, “is really a staged drama. America has outsourced its war in Somalia to Ethiopia, saving American lives. That is what matters to them the most. The jamming of the VOA and the consequent row are no more than a staged drama. Ethiopians have not only died in Somalia for a war that is not theirs but our national security has been endangered as well. There are reports, for example, that the Ethiopian Airlines that crashed in Lebanon was bombed by terrorists.”(Abridged.)But of course Seye could not offer real evidence that the spate was faked as he had alleged, and it will remain a stain on his otherwise impressive performance; the best so far, reckon many pundits, by the opposition.

Seye’s criticism of the Algiers agreement and the subsequent Boundary commission ruling are popular themes, particularly in Tigray; where he and many of his friends are challenging the EPRDF. The EPRDF’s muted response is indicative of a divided leadership over the issue; with Meles and his allies in favor of a closure of the issue largely—but not exclusively—on the basis of the ruling; and the rest, part half heartedly part vehemently, against any change of the reality on the ground. And this division cuts across the whole spectrum of the governing elite, which is why the threat of Seye Abraha et al—bounded to the governing elite by a common history at its finest hour—is menacing to Meles Zenawi. Arkebe Ekubay’s brazenly opportunistic attempt to drive a wedge between Seye and the military by charging that Seye had characterized the Ethiopian army “as a mercenary force in Somalia” in last week’s debate, which Seye made a point of refuting, amply demonstrates the anxiety that pervades in the midst of Meles Zenawi and his allies.

No other political personalities but Seye Abraha et al bring in to opposition politics this kind of dynamism, blurring the argument that their past undercuts their present importance to the democratic cause as has been suggested by some people in Seattle last weekend. “Some speakers mistook Negasso and Gebru perhaps for Meles Zenawi and Bereket Simon and tormented them like they were convicted criminals,” said an Ethiomedia news report on the meeting held in Seattle over the weekend, “It has been over ten years since we quit EPRDF, but some folks never get that; and keep asking questions as if we are still active government officials, the former EPRDF leaders said with a tone of remorse. Others accused them that the reason they have joined the opposition is because they are power thirsty.”

The importance of this issue to a post-EPRDF national road map can not be under stated. The broad consensus for a plural democratic order is beyond doubt now, but if there is ever to be a chance for its realization, how Seye Abraha et al will be treated as they venture in to opposition politics will either foster trust and confidence or entail a continuation of the abhorred legacy of vendetta and victimization. Of crucial point here is that none amongst Seye Abraha et al is being asked to account for substantiated and specific violation of human rights; as was the case, for example, with Kelbessa Negawo from the Derg era, who was unsympathetically deported from the US to Ethiopia to serve a life sentence; but are being decried for serving a regime with broad shortcomings, including of course extensive human rights violation. But almost all of them have at one time or the other addressed the issue, publicly expressed regret and are now challenging their former party at the height of its power. Only two days before the meeting in Seattle, Seye Abraha had acknowledged his share of responsibility for what he termed as EPRDF's fiasco on the Eritrean issue in the nationally broadcasted debate between political parties: " Medrek will peacefully opt for Ethiopia's outlet to the sea; this is one of our national security objectives. The EPRDF has committed a grave mistake in handling the Eritrean issue, and I concede my share of personal responsibility."

And so the questions loom: Is there room for redemption in the political space? Could there be a moral imperative to deprive the capacity to forgive and reconcile? And on a more practical level, would the nation be able to bear the human and emotional cost of the alternative? The answers are too obvious to merit detailing here. They have also been thoroughly addressed on numerous occasions by others and to entertain them further here will be to merely repeat the same arguments. What is of importance is that Seye Abraha et al are test cases, carefully being watched by all political actors, and how they fare will for a long time determine which way the nation goes.

The fall of the EPRDF is not an end by itself. It is desirable only in so far as it is a means to an end; in this case, a means to a pluralistic democratic order. The quest for such a political setting in Ethiopia has to date not closed its door on ex-WPE(Derg) officials and members untainted by personal violation of human rights; it can not fairly do so against ex- officials and members of the EPRDF held to the same standard.

43. Notes from an Interstate Bus: A Farmer on Election 2010

By **Eskinder Nega**, April 9th, 2010

I arrived at Addis' Awtores Tera (interstate bus station) at 6:00 AM but it was already teeming with thousands of would be travelers.

This was last Tuesday, the 28th in Ethiopian calendar, a day of pilgrimage to Metak Ammanuel, a revered church in the vicinity of Debre Birhan, an old sleepy town with medieval roots on the southern tip of the Amhara region, where I will be passing through on my way to the border of Welo and Shewa for a two days sojourn.

I sat between a farmer and a chubby light skinned woman on the back seat; not too happy at the prospect of spending no less than seven hours on a rickety bus on a partially dug up(now for two straight years) highway. The bus slowly made its way out of the crowded bus station at 6:30, an hour before the morning rush hour that is dreaded by interstate bus drivers. I prayed for good conversation as the bus left Addis, but not daring to hope for the rare bus rider that will risk a frank political discussion in the police state that Ethiopia is evolving in to after the 2005 elections.

But, Thank God, I was to be pleasantly surprised.

"Getaw, what time is it?" inquired the farmer as the bus finally made it on to the tarred highway after almost forty-five minutes on a rough detour. His booming voice broke the silence, and we drifted in to small talk as the bus accelerated to make up for lost time. The farmer, 28, slim, short, from Menz, told me he had been in and out prison, his last stint for three years which he recently completed.

My curiosity stirred, I couldn't resist asking him "why the state is in love with him"; which elicited a hearty laugh from him. "Possession of Kalashnikov," he replied in that booming voice of his; attracting the attention of two passengers sitting to the right in front of us. I could also sense the two sitting to my left on the back seat, the chubby lady and another farmer, stretching to catch a glimpse of him. "EHADEG(the EPRDF) took four guns from me," he said with a deep breath and laid back, as if he wanted to give us time to digest the significance of what he had

said. We apparently wanted more, and after what seemed a rather long pause he continued. “The first time they imprisoned me I gave it up without a fight. The torture was so severe, two of our cellmates threw themselves over a cliff. After seeing that I simply led them to where I had hidden a brand new Kalashnikov.”

One of the two who were sitting in front of us, both of whom had by now turned and were facing us, suddenly twitched his face. “But I know of that case,” he protested, “the two that threw themselves over the cliff were suspected of stealing Tabots. That had nothing to do with guns.” The reply came instantly. “Yeah, I know,” said the farmer dismissively, “But we were in the same holding cell. It was obvious that what they did to them they would have done next to us. My God! It was really atrocious. They tricked them by telling them that the Tabot was hidden near an edge of a cliff, and when they got there they went over the cliff.” No proof was ever found that the two had ever stolen Tabots. But there was little sympathy for them, no crime is greater in Menz than that associated with Tabots; the taint of suspicion being sufficient to relegate a person to utter social banishment.

The farmer told us that he sold his oxen to buy Kalashnikov as soon as he was freed; which, much to the irritant of the others, propped me to interrupt with a question. “But why would you do that? Selling your oxen to...” he did not let me finish. “But everyone does it,” came the reply with haven’t- you- ever- heard –of – Menz expression. And seeing that the two were nodding as he answered, I had to let him ensue with his tale. “Once they heard that I had sold my oxen, they came right after me. No questions asked; it was straight to prison. But this time I resisted despite the torture, and only gave up when any chance of release solely depended on giving them what they wanted. The third and fourth times, I was handed prison sentences.” But a court of law came in to the picture only after evidence had been secured through torture, a norm for petty crimes but with much more intensity and frequency if guns and politics are being investigated.

“So this means that you will not be voting for the EPRDF this year” I said smiling as he winded down, not at all expecting a serious reply. “But what choice do we have? We will be voting with their guns virtually held to our heads,” blurted out the farmer, not in the least bit worried who was listening nor bothered by who we might be. Intrigued, I pressed him a bit daringly as the conversation ventured in to dangerous territory. “But surely you will be voting in private. How would they know whom you voted for?” He reminded us that names will be on the voting cards.

“They will know if they want to,” he said firmly. The others neither acknowledged nor disputed what he said, cautiously preferring to leave the conversation to the two of us though they were clearly engrossed. Nor was I particularly seeking attention on this trip, and I hesitated before pressing on. But the temptation was too much.

“So what if they were to know. What could they do? There is no law that says that you have to vote for them,” I insisted. He grinned; perhaps amused by what he thought was my naiveté. “Addis Ababa will not vote for Meles,” he abruptly declared somewhat gleefully, (a message that that he will surely take to his village) “But in our area,” he continued but now in a subdued tone, “if they find out that you are a member of the opposition, if they know beyond doubt, they will hit you.(Yematalu.)They will imprison you, shoot you and claim that you died while attempting to escape.”

That jolted me up. Here is a farmer from Menz sitting next to me, recounting almost word to word what many say had happened to Teklu Hawaz; once chief of TPLF’s Security (intelligence) who was relieved from his duties after being accused(falsely, say his friends and defenders) of trying to defect to the Derg, subsequently imprisoned and shot dead while allegedly attempting to escape. Time to take the farmer seriously. I asked him if an election had been held in his area to elect observers, to which he replied in the negative. “No, not in our area,” he said taken aback by my question.(The electoral board claims otherwise, maintaining that such elections had been held throughout the country. Independent reports, however, attest to many election observers being capriciously selected by local officials rather than being elected by voters as mandated by law.)

Assuming a free and fair election, whom do you think will the majority will vote for, I asked him as we approached Debre Birhan where he was to disembark and catch another bus to his home. “We voted for Kinijit the last time. If not for the campaign of terror, we will vote for the opposition again,” he told us, and cheerfully melted in to the Debre Birhan crowd way before we heard enough from him.

“Mark my words” remarked one of those who had been listening to him, “he will not last long. They will get him again.”

TIDBITS:

FROM YOUR E-MAILS

I would like to thank you all for your emails. I am grateful that you had taken time to write to me. They are always useful, providing me with new insights. Keep them coming. I will from time to time share some of them with my readers.

ON BEREKET SIMON

Sir:

I was born and raised in the same area (Kebele) as Bereket Simon (Birth name: Mebratu G/Hiwot). BOTH of his parents were indeed from Eritrea. And that could be the very reason why he opted to run across the country in Wollo, as an Amhara mind you. The fact is people in that part of Gondar knew what his REAL back ground is. All this would've not mattered one iota if it wasn't directly contradictory to TPLF's way of running business, i.e. tribal/killil politics. In fact, I would care less if Sebhat Ephrem pledges his allegiance to Ethiopia and decides to run in Gojam, for instance. A reader.

ON THE LEFT IN ETHIOPIAN POLITICS

Sir:

Many pundits often pontificate and even go as far as scapegoat the complex Ethiopian politics on the "left" Marxist-Leninist ideology. This kind of political argument is not new. It started what seemed a long time. However, the role of the "left" or the introduction of Marxist-Leninist thought in the Ethiopian body politics should be examined dispassionately and objectively. It should not be reduced to a very simplistic and opportunistic often dubious review of its role. It is still being debated among advanced and well instituted forums. For your information, even the Catholic church has revised its long standing outright condemnation of KARL MARX. Finally, you have not yet given up on the perennial ritual or farce so called "election". Good luck. No pleading, no tech talk ain't gonna change the brutal and violent reality of the Woyane regime.

A reader.

ON SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS

Sir,

So you want to unseat the government through twitter? Let us wait and see how you are going to do this. On no man. Do not waste your time. We will clean the stumbling stones on our way to the 2010 election, and show the world Ethiopia can make a democratic election. Regarding the surveillance camera you decried, yes we already have installed them and we will further. They already have fed us a lot about people like you sworn to cause havoc in Ethiopia. Yes it is high time that Ethiopia possesses this technology to tackle its ‘nocturnal enemies’. Eski hulunm lemayet behiwet enkoy.

A reader.

44. Letter from Ethiopia. Welcome to Ethiopia’s election 2010: The case of Adwa

By Eskinder Nega, April 2nd, 2010

Here is an impossibility for all but the exceptionally wealthy in Addis these days: schooling all your three children at the remarkably expensive Sandford English community school in Addis Ababa;

where the landed gentry of Haile Selassie’s era easily schooled their children but which the top officials of the Derg shunned for financial and ideological reasons. But PM Meles Zenawi, who officially lives on a miserly government salary, and whose father had famously insisted that “he(Meles) does not even know what a 100 birr note looks like”, not only has schooled all his three children there, but is also now sending his eldest daughter to Britain’s most exclusive school, Oxford University. And my first instinct was to pose to the woman sitting in front of me, Aregash Adane, who is contesting for Meles’ parliamentary seat in Adwa, and was briefly his adviser, what I thought would be a witty question: Is Meles Zenawi a multi-millionaire? But most interviews rarely go according to script, particularly the interesting ones; and when we parted I had not inquired about her thoughts on Meles Zenawi’s whooping deficit between his official income and his children’s astronomical school expenses.

But all is not lost. She had in fact provided me with a crystal clear response, albeit indirectly, when the issue of transparency had come: “We had nothing, and I mean literally nothing, when we captured Addis,” she had said unblinking, sure, and intense. “But it did not take long before some officials started living way way beyond their means. We were on the verge of establishing a committee (in the CC of the TPLF) with broad probing mandate just before we left the party.”

Fast forward almost ten years to 2010, and the committee has yet to see the light of day.

The meeting in Adwa a little over a week ago was summoned in the name of Medrek, a coalition of eight parties that pundits say is the main challenger of the EPRDF this year, so Seye Abraha was legitimately part of the ensemble that faced between 1000 to 1500 residents of Adwa at city hall. I met with Aregash to talk with her about this meeting, her thoughts about Meles Zenawi and her prospect of wining.

The plan in Adwa called for a speech by each member of the ensemble, which consisted of Ambassador Awalom Weldu, Ethiopia’s first and only Ambassador to Eritrea, whose younger brother, Abay Weldu, is slated to take over the presidency of Tigray after the elections; Gebru Asrat; Aregash and Seye; and then time for a questions and answers session. But the EPRDF (most probably Meles Zenawi himself, since no obscure official in Adwa would risk a scandal in his constituency) had other ideas. “They were about seven or eight of them,” told me Aregash, “quite young, obviously confident and, we were to be told later, overtly backed by the authorities who were standing outside aiding and abating them to break up the meeting.” But at least each of them had time for short introductory speeches; quite liberally interposed by calls for order by the young thugs. “We had to stop the meeting prematurely, much to the consternation of the people who had come to listen to us, to quiz us. But we had no choice. They did not want the questions and answers session to take place. We only had time for short introductory speeches. We were forced to stop.”

Welcome to Ethiopia’s election 2010, the reality behind the rhetoric. But Aregash has not given up. “We will go back again,” she promised me. “The people want their freedom.”

Aregash was a rare university graduate amongst TPLF’s leaders, with a first degree in social work from what was in 1973 Haile Selassie University, a year before the popular revolution that brought the Derg to power. “I was a member of Abeyot(Revolution)” she said, surprising me.

And when I inquired if that was the same Abeyot that merged with the EPRP, she nodded. “Getachew Maru et al decided on the merger. When we objected, we were told that the decision had already been made. Abeyot had a distinct identity, and the question of nations and nationalities was an important part of it; something that the EPRP frowned upon.” This was in the mid 70’s when political activism was at its peak, and Aregash, hearing of the establishment of the TPLF, left Addis for Tigray. But a year was to pass before the organization was ready to accept female fighters. Once in though, she was to rise rapidly, eventually joining the most important decision making body, the Central Committee.

I reminded her how Redwan Hussien , an EPRDF executive member and its star debater, had recently gone on the offensive against Gebru in a nationally televised debate about human rights.”As to Gebru Asrat,” had said Redwan, inducting his punch line, “didn’t you and your friends leave the EPRDF by proclaiming “death to imperialism, we should be building Socialism, our democracy is more perfect than Clinton’s”, who at that time was President of the US?”

She leaned forward when she answered this time, her emotion clearly stirred. “Where in the world was he when we left? Certainly not in the EPRDF. He is merely parroting what he has been told.” And on she went to explain how Eritrea was at the core of the controversy. “We had internally conceded that we had made mistakes about Eritrea. Shabiya(the EPLF) was kidnapping, even assassinating, people all over Ethiopia. It was manipulating the foreign currency market with impunity. The only thing that was left was to go public with our findings.” But the issue of Bonapartism, suddenly introduced by Meles Zenawi, fought for center stage, eventuating in the split.” Bonapartism is a relic of 19th century Europe,” she said, contempt visible on her face. ” It has no relevance to our experience.”

So what kind of a person is Meles Zenawi? I asked for her personal impression about her electoral opponent. She took time to respond, taking time to think. “He leads the EPRDF, and the EPRDF insists on winning all the time, no matter what. What the people want seems to have no relevance.” And here suddenly props up a question in mind: “ Does the EPRDF love power?” Her answer is prompt, startling me. “All this clamor is for power. What else could it be for? There is nothing wrong with seeking power as long as it’s sought to serve a higher cause, as long

as it's people centered. But it's a problem when it becomes an end by itself, and I fear that is where the EPRDF is. That is why we are having all these problems."

But why should voters in Adwa choose you over Meles, I ask her. And suddenly her face relaxes, a woman spoke to me from the heart: "Because people know what I have been through, what I have given up for the truth. They know that power had not corrupted me. These are the values that appeal to people. They have seen that too many have succumbed to the trapping of power, and they are disgusted by it. I could defeat him given a playing field. And though my party is seriously under funded and is allotted a very limited time on state media, we shall prod to the end. We had overcome the impossible before. And we could very well do it once again."

TIDBITS:

BRIEF NEWS FROM ADDIS

PRO EPRDF COALITION'S MANDATE ROUSE CONCERN

The decision by the electoral board to recognize a coalition of pro-ten civil organizations to observe the elections has raised eye brows in Addis. The ten member coalition, which includes the pro-EPRDF Ethiopian Youth Federation, Ethiopian Women Federation, Ethiopian Lawyers Association(not to be confused with the older and independent Ethiopian Bar Association), Ye-Ethiopia Hidase Mahber, as well as the tooth less Ethiopian Employer's Federation is the first to be granted official recognition. The coalition is being criticized for allegedly being mandated to endorse, not observe, the election; no matter what is to happen. The electoral board, on the other hand, has sung its praise, asserting that "its independence has been verified." Reports that election observers which were supposed to have been elected by rural kebeles few months ago have instead been arbitrarily assigned by local officials has raised serious concerns. But how exactly widespread the abuse is has not been established, according to diplomats who have monitored the process.

The EU will observe this year's election, too; but with the visible absence of its leader of five years ago, Anna Gomez, who adamantly insists that a free and fair election is not possible as long as Birtukan Medeksa remains imprisoned on trumped up charges. The EU's high profile Anglo Saxon Ambassador in 2005, Timothy Clark, scion of a prominent family in Britain, has

been replaced with a low profile Ambassador from continental Europe whose interest in the election has so far been minimal.

45. Letter from Ethiopia: election overview: What the Diaspora could do in election 2010

By **Eskinder Nega**, March 26th, 2010

Even I sense it from the great distance I am at from America; home to the largest, richest and most vocal Ethiopian Diaspora in the world.

Call it what you think is best: disillusionment; disappointment; withdrawal; anger; or even, on an optimistic note, the calm before the storm. But there is no dispute that a considerable element of the Diaspora, many of the very people who came out screaming enthusiastically to welcome CUD's leaders at Reagan National airport in 2007, are now visibly smaller at political gatherings, less generous in their contribution, are harder to mobilize, and generally exhibit all the signs of atigue.

Regardless of the diversity of opinion in the Diaspora, a consensus of unambiguous support for the democratization of Ethiopia as it is understood in the West has been a superseding facet for the past two decades. And that is no small feat. Between the mid 60s and the fall of the Derg at the beginning of the 90s, what was then a small Diaspora, but with a disproportionately powerful voice in politics, had mitigated the rhetoric of public discourse to the far left of Marxist thought. I still remember reading, in total amazement, old Ethiopian publications from the 60s and 70s, pioneered by intelligent young people like Hagos GebreYesus, Desalegn Rahemato and Endrias Eshete , as they ranted against perceived exploitation of innocent Ethiopians by Western capitalists; how vital Ethiopia was as a dumping ground for the excess goods produced by imperialists; and how great dictatorship of the proletariat really is. (Endrias Eshete's passion for dictatorship—though not that of the working class anymore—still endures, by the way.) It took about two decades before the Diaspora was able to move beyond this false start; and it took the infusion of a new generation in the 80s, more decisively in the 90s, for the long delayed overhaul in both methodology and substance to take hold. The intellectual rebirth is now best embodied by

the weekly articles of the brilliant Professor from LA, Almeayehu GebreMariam. In short, the Diaspora is now positively ingrained in mainstream political thought; far away from—to borrow a phrase from Lenin—infantile extremism.

The 2005 elections was the culmination of the Diaspora's renaissance in the 90's and 2000's, when it was able to entrench itself as a strong and united voice in the CUD; both before and after the elections. It is implausible to envisage the success of the CUD's last minute offensive in the countryside without the financial backing of the Diaspora; which impacted heavily on the outcome of the election.

Ethiopian political dynamics is now very different than it was in 2005 of course, but there is an important last minute role for the Diaspora to play; yes, even at this late stage of the elections.

Here are some possibilities:

1: ENDORSEMENTS:

Endorsements are an integral part of modern elections throughout the world. Whatever pundits may say about their power to sway votes, they are passionately sought by politicians; which is a mark of their symbolic power. And in politics image is half the bankable asset.

Swaying votes by mere endorsement is too ambitious an undertaking, but doubt not that endorsements will not only help to strengthen the beleaguered opposition in this difficult election year(just how difficult is amply shown by the new HRW report) but will also help to single out the viable ones(or the viable one) in a crowded field where up to twelve candidates are competing for a single seat in Addis.

Not too many people may have been swayed by Oprah's endorsement of Obama, but the amount of news and excitement it generated was a huge boost for his campaign. And the pundits who seriously wonder if his presidency would at all have been possible without the stirring effect of her endorsement are not few in numbers. But celebrity endorsements are not possible for those who live in Ethiopia for obvious reasons, yet is something that should be considered seriously by those who have opted for exile. Exiled artists have a large following in Ethiopia, and their predominantly young followers—who constitute the majority in Ethiopia—are predisposed to at

least listen to their views. This is power that must not be abused, taken for granted; nor, at a time when the national issue is as important as it is now, must it be wasted.

The kind of endorsement common to Iranian politics, in which exiled groups of academics, scientists and public figures publicly endorse the party or candidate of their choice, could potentially be important in the Ethiopian context, too. The Diaspora has an ample reservoir from Ethiopia's Who's Who in every conceivable field, and many voters in Ethiopia—including the undecided ones—would be fascinated to learn of their endorsements.

The idea of civic responsibility will hardly be new to this group, nor the fact that in this wired world their access to voters in Ethiopia seriously curtailed by place of residence. What is probably lacking so far is someone who will take the initiative.

2: CYBER ACTIVISM— The court of world opinion.

Few people know what Twitter is in Ethiopia. But those tasked by the government to make sure that what information goes out to the world is highly regulated, particularly in the event of street protests (which are unlikely and not desirable), have nightmares about the possibilities of Twitter. What was casually launched as one more addition to social media by three innovative Americans in 2006, less than a year after the 2005 elections in Ethiopia, has been inadvertently catapulted by the last Iranian election in to a powerful weapon of peaceful political activism.

Tweets go over two networks, the cyber world and text messages of mobiles (cell phones). They are charmingly easy to use, are specifically designed to spread fast because they are apt to be picked and retransmitted by other Twitters; unlike other social medias, like email, which are neither public nor broadcast like Twitter does. In other words, Twitter is within reach of the vast majority of the Diaspora, and for the first time ever will directly link it with tens of millions of people throughout the world—the court of world opinion. The monopoly of media organizations, who habitually ignore most stories about Ethiopia, could now be overturned for the first time.

Potential Twitters from Ethiopia during the elections, who will be few in numbers but could easily overcome their disadvantage in numbers by sheer force of will, face an overpowering predicament. The government will most probably tamper with the internet and SMS during the elections, as did the Iranian government, which will severely limit their ability to transmit. But

the evidence is that the mass of Tweets came from Diaspora Iranians who relayed information they collected from family, friends, embassies, NGOs and political organizations. A similar mass of information, in case the need arises, by the Ethiopian Diaspora that overwhelms the cyber world will reinforce the confidence of Ethiopians that they are not alone and involve tens of millions around the world in an intimate, urgent way with events in Ethiopia. A sufficiently outraged Westerners—if there is due cause—will instinctively reach out to their elected representatives in large numbers; which could change—at long last—Western policy towards Ethiopia by bringing forth the issue of human rights; something the Diaspora had fought for almost two decades now.

But none of these will be possible without a determined minority taking the lead; some working in groups, others alone in the cyber world—the new weapon of the oppressed.

Tidbits:

BRIEF NEWS FROM ETHIOPIA

Azeb Mesfin to face Welay Aschalew.

PM Meles Zenawi's wife will face an electoral opponent fielded by Medrek in this year's elections. Medrek's candidate is Welay Aschalew, who is broadly thought to be sufficiently credible to make this at least an interesting contest; assuming of course a level playing field. Azeb is running as an incumbent in her Welqaiyt constituency, where many residents are apprehensive of a settlement scheme by the regional government which they fear will eventually alter the demographics of the area. Azeb is chair of an important parliamentary committee, which was supposed to have pushed her out of her husband's shadow; but which has not happened so far. Gebru Asrat is challenging Addisalem Balema(PhD), a long time Ethiopian Ambassador to China who returned from Beijing to Mekele to work in EFFORT, the mysterious business empire of the TPLF. Addisalem is not the grassroots campaigner type, and foreign observers are expected to be visibly present in Mekele, an opening that Gebru is apt to maximize.

Security cameras to be installed on main roads.

The installation of federal police commissioned security cameras is underway on Addis Ababa's main thoroughfares. The cameras are being installed as part of the government's extensive preparation against possible post election riots after the May elections.

An undisclosed amount of cameras have been imported from China; much to the irritant of some countries that had hoped (not for commercial reasons) to provide the hardware as well as the expertise to run and maintain them; according to sources.

The cameras have so far been installed on Bole road; but because they will be too provocative few expect them to be installed in Merkato, hub of post election protests in 2005. It will be interesting to see if the government thinks otherwise.

46. Few Minutes with Birtukan Mideksa

By **Eskinder Nega**, October 8th, 2010

Birtukan shook her head sideways as I spoke: "We are proud of you, "I told her." You are our hero." There was pained expression on her face. Something is visibly bottled up in her, pushing to explode.

But there were too many people in her living room for an intimate conversation. She nodded when I finished, her head slightly inclined downwards to avoid eye contact." Thank you," she finally said faintly. I could barely hear her.

And suddenly I felt guilty. Though I meant what I said, I worried whether I was making things worse by sounding patronizing. This is not what Birtukan needs right now. Sitting next to me is a woman at what is one of her worst moments in her life. A woman suffering profoundly on the inside—exactly what coldhearted aging men, addicted to unaccountable power after two decades at the helm of a nation they have persistently pushed towards dysfunction (so far unsuccessfully), intended in their pitiless drive to destroy their "enemies."

Birtukan is happy to be with us—her mother, to whom she is an only daughter; her beautiful daughter, Hale, who is just beginning to understand what has happened to her mother over the

past two years; her friends, who cherish and admire her openly; and her supporters, who number in the millions—but it’s easy to see that she feels she has wretchedly fallen below expectation.

But the staggeringly vulgar wording of the “pardon” says more about the kind of people this undying ancient nation has fallen to rather than Birtukan. Here is an irremediable proof—if more is needed—of their petty cruelty. Here they stand not only at their normally diminished height but stooped even lower. What kind of heartless men would threaten a woman with indefinite imprisonment until their demise unless she admits to “deceiving the nation and the government?” Where is their moral compass?

For the record, this is no pardon. This is self-incrimination under duress—a bald-faced human rights violation.

The essence of pardon is forgiveness. By so obviously seeking to inflict emotional pain—by humiliating her—the EPRDF has made it clear that it does not seek forgiveness. There is no spite in the act of forgiveness—a standard that the wording of Birtukan’s “pardon” does not meet. EPRDF’s durable rancor sticks out like a sore thumb. This is why it could reasonably be said that the “pardon” granted to Birtukan is no more than the outcome of the international campaign to free her. In reality, she has not been pardoned—forgiven— but let go grudgingly. And obviously the price the EPRDF demanded was an illegal act of self-incrimination—the alleged act of deceit— in breach of the law; which protects citizens against self-incrimination. Clearly, the illegal party here has never been Birtukan from the very beginning up to the very end. To paraphrase Castro, history will absolve her— very loudly!

The EPRDF will fail when it is denied what it seeks:

- 1— Break Birtukan’s will.
- 2—Create a gulf between Birtukan and her supporters.
- 3—Demoralize the democratic camp

**Citizens have an obligation to see to it that none of these things come to pass. Beware
Citizens!**

47. New Year wishes for Ethiopia: Release Birtukan Mideksa

By Eskinder Nega, September 10th, 2010

Some readers have wondered if a reasonable array of New Year wishes representing the collective aspiration of a nation could be formulated.

Why not? It's perfectly feasible; though only the input of varied people, and not the reflection of only one person, would make a complete list. And thus, in deference to the last month of the Ethiopian year (Pagume, only five or six days long), it's amply fitting that I delay the second part of last week's article and pitch in my list of New Year's wishes. Part 2 of Re-writing TPLF's history will appear next week.

THE RELEASE OF BIRTUKAN MIDEKSA

On December 28, 2008, Birtukan Mideksa, the lone female head of a major opposition party in Ethiopia, was taken in to custody in mid-afternoon as she approached her car. Almost two years later, she remains in prison despite numerous pleas for her release. Neither public opinion, nor donors, or a sense of fairness and decency have prevailed over the intransigence of EPRDF's leaders. Posing defiantly before probing journalists after a universally mocked "election victory", Meles Zenawi, PM, whose party "won" 99.6% of parliamentary seats, spoke about her harshly, but noticeably absent the typical ardor: "This (her release) is a purely legal issue, and it is between her and the law. No one can come between the two. No one. Not opposition parties, not our friends abroad."

Much to the relief of the public, long attuned to reading between the lines of its official's doublespeak, her release is not a "dead issue," as has been land privatization for the entirety of his party's existence. And by the dismal standards of the times, when the dominance of the EPRDF is overbearing, this is cause for optimism. There is room for her release short of a revolutionary overhaul. The law does not proscribe a second pardon.

One of the hallmarks of a reputable relationship is an occasional acquiescing to the counsel of friends. Usually, this is a mark of maturity not weakness. It is the nation's New Year wish that

EPRDF's leaders come to realize this sooner rather than later, and act upon her long awaited release.

Birtukan: The whole nation wishes you a Happy New Year. God bless.

THE RISE OF A STRONG OPPOSITION

The 99.6% “election victory” is a clear favorite for “surprise of the decade.” For the decade before this, the triumph of the EPRDF-EPLF duo over the Derg is virtually everyone's pick.

But the “election victory” was more than a simple surprise. The nation had yearned for leadership to defy it peacefully and legally, even if ultimately only futile as the one in Iran. A moral, political and historical statement could and should have been made firmly. It was plainly time for the opposition to lead the people to peaceful action.

But, alas, it was not meant to be. In the mildest of possible words, the opposition has “failed to demonstrate sufficient robustness in the face of a challenge,” in the words of a dictionary describing a popular adjective. (Which adjective does not really matter.) EPRDF's strength is a function of the opposition's weakness. Thus it still stands tall despite its epic blunders. Tragically, this explains two wasted decades; not merely one election season.

It is the nation's New Year wish that the two-decade legacy of opposition inertia, failure, malaise, pettiness and corruption come to an end. The nation yearns for the rise of a strong opposition.

RETURN TO MORAL CLARITY

The erection of Abune Paulos' statue in Addis symbolizes the moral crisis, lack of direction, and confused purpose that has afflicted Ethiopia at the national level now for a third of a century—ever since the collapse of Haile Selassie's regime. The foundation of a distinctive civilization was uprooted with the fall of the monarchy, and what then looked like the wave of the future, scientific socialism, seemed the logical choice for a nation in search of a new creed to embrace with passion.

But the deceit and hollowness of Marxism- Leninism did not survive the Red Terror. And it was then only inevitable that moral relativism should rise and dominate the national psyche subsequently, chiefly challenging the moral clarity of Ethiopia's dominant culture and religion.

But not everything that has long held sway is prejudice and ignorance, or necessarily in need of a revamp. However, Ethiopia certainly needs an updated national purpose—a return to moral clarity, though not an exact replica of the past—that is much more than Meles Zenawi's reductionist understanding of the nation as nothing more than an economic imperative.

It is the nation's New Year wish that Ethiopian intellectuals re-engage in public discourse to this end—as they once did with passion in the 60s and 70s and Professor Al Mariam is inspirationally doing now. Nothing is possible without them.

RETURN OF ESAT, VOA, ETHIOPIAN WEBSITES AND THE FREE PRESS

“The waiter wouldn't look at us to take an order,” marveled an American friend of his experience in Lailbela, northern Ethiopia. “He was hypnotized by the TV, totally absorbed.” Intrigued, he inquired about the show: a political comedy on ESAT. If not for the rude interruption by an Ethiopian government jamming, the emergence of ESAT, Ethiopia's first non-governmental TV, promised to herald a new chapter in the media revolution; one no less significant than the demystification of the Ethiopian state by the print press in the 90s. It was no surprise the EPRDF reacted with vengeance.

VOA, for decades an esteemed presence in many Ethiopian homes, was ironically tolerated more by the Derg, an impeccable enemy of the US, than the EPRDF, America's best friend in the horn. The VOA's recent sustained jamming has deprived millions of a dependable medium of news and opinions.

The closure of the totality of Ethiopia's independent press in 2005, and its continued plight as highlighted by the closure of Addis Neger, is still a visible reminder of the 2005 post-election repressions.

The blocking of Ethiopian websites in 2005 is meant to cut off Ethiopia's vocal Diaspora from its home base. Nothing gives the EPRDF more pleasure than this flagrant abuse of its power. But

it is paying a stiff price. The blockage has become a powerful symbol of the suppression of freedom of expression in the international community.

It is the New Year wish of the people to watch ESAT, their favorite TV station; to listen to the VOA, their reliable source of news; read the free press, fierce defenders of their rights; and access Ethiopian websites, their window to the world.

There is much more, but I will have to stop here for lack of space.

Happy New Year to all of you.

The End.

Brief News from Ethiopia:

Azeb Mesfin's accession widely derided.

48. Seyoum Mesfin leaves FM, Haile-Mariam new DPM

By Eskinder Nega, October 5, 2010

In a comical prelude to what “Parliament” will be like for the next five years that visibly embarrassed its speaker, Abadula Gameda (whose reversed Kafkan metamorphosis from a hapless POW to Speaker of “parliament” illustrates the lie that is at the core of the EPRDF) Ethiopia’s lower house of “Parliament” approved PM Meles Zenawi’s new cabinet in world record time.

An amazed nation watched a live broadcast from “Parliament” as Meles Zenawi placidly introduced his prospective cabinet Ministers for deliberation, but who were neither commended nor disputed by the new “Parliamentarians”, and then sworn in, all in world record time of ELEVEN MINUTES (Between 10:30 am and 10: 41 am local time. Will someone please inform Guinness!) “The floor is open for queries and opinions,” said Abadula, the Speaker, after Meles completed his presentation. He was met with utter silence, provoking an embarrassed smile from

Abadula. In the café where I watched the proceedings on TV, viewers, including those who were apparently pro-EPRDF, laughed in unison when Abadula moved on to the swearing ceremony. Haile-Mairam Desalign replaced Seyoum Mesfin at the Foreign Ministry. And in a clear blow to the ANDM, he was also designated as the sole Deputy Prime Minister. If Meles keeps his word, Haile-Mariam is now his most likely successor. Seyoum Mesfin, who is only in his late 50s, reportedly favors a cushy job in the UN system (in the spirit of the new adage about age: “the 60s is the new 40s”), but rumor also places him in Washington as the new Ethiopian Ambassador.

Girma Biru, OPDO’s best prospective PM, has left the cabinet after an unusually long tenure. The OPDO, much like the ANDM, now has no high-flying star to compete with Haile-Mariam. Soft-spoken Suffian Ahmed, the long-serving Minister of Finance, and formally a member of OPDO’s leadership but more of a grey-technocrat in practice, has surprisingly retained his position. “(The macroeconomic stability) attests to his competence,” Meles said. Of the five key Ministries— Foreign, Defense, Federal, Finance and Justice— three have been allotted to Ministers from the South: Haile-Mariam at Foreign; Siraj Forsedin at Defense; and Shiferaw Tekle-Mariam at Federal. One each has gone to the OPDO and ANDM: Suffian Ahmed of OPDO at Finance and Haile-Birhan of ANDM at Justice. The head of ANDM, Demeke Mekonen, has retained his junior Ministerial position at the helm of the Ministry of Education. Putting a brave face to Haile-Mariam’s unexpected rise to the post of EPRDF’s deputy, which many had assumed was ANDM’s by default, Demeke has said, “It’s division of labor within the party. I am not in the least bit disappointed.” Few, however, are inclined to take his words at their face value. The disappointment both to him personally and his party is palpable.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry, long Girma Biru’s turf, has now been split, and the position of Minister of Industry has gone to Manyazewal Mekonnen, the only non-EPRDF member of the Cabinet.

Veteran of Ethiopia’s KGB, Debre-Tsion Gebre

49. Azeb Mesfin and EPRDF's eighth congress

By **Eskinder Nega**, October 1st, 2010

Pronouncing himself a “TPLF/EPRDF supporter”, Zegye (last name not given), could not help exploding over the internet: “First, I would like to declare that I was a strong supporter of the TPLF/EPRDF. If I were Meles, I would have blocked her (Azeb Mesfin, Meles’ wife) ascendance to such high power (the Executive Committee of the TPLF) for the simple reason that it damages his image.” Another supporter was harsher: “ Is Azeb competent(much has been said about her behavior which is almost all negative and less reassuring) or is she there owing to her connection, as wife of PM Meles Zenawi?”

Few days after such rare utterances of dissent were daringly posted on pro-EPRDF websites, it was time for the eighth congress of the EPRDF; this time scheduled to be held in long booming Nazareth(when has Nazareth not been booming?), a hundred kilometers to the east of Addis Ababa.

The night before the opening of the congress, as one thousand and six hundred delegates were wined and dined at a lavish dinner hosted by the OPDO, Azeb’s ascendancy dominated whispered conversations between friends. The judgment: A major public relations disaster for the EPRDF. Luckily, many mused, the absence of an “aggressive press” has meant that it’s less than an open scandal.

But Azeb’s divisive ascendancy is more than mere public relations debacle for the EPRDF. At issue is whether opportunism, the debilitating culture that has always left three of EPRDF’s four constituent members in a permanent state of paralysis—a major factor for the enduring stability of the EPRDF— has gone mainstream in the TPLF, too—thus threatening the viability of the EPRDF in the cut-throat competition between Ethiopia’s political actors.

In a major reshuffle few weeks ago, the since the early 2000s , when the TPLF lost most of its veteran leaders, including its deputy, Tewlde Welde-Mairiam, the Executive Committee (EC), the party’s highest body, dropped one of its most trendy and experienced leaders, Arkebe Ekubay. With the departure of Seyoum Mesfin and Abay Tsehaye as well, presumably at their request (Abay’s tenure at the top since the early 2000s has openly relied on Meles’ goodwill rather than his popularity; the same is true of most of the others, but much less blatantly), Meles

has become the last of the veteran leadership (above CC during the insurgency) still in the Executive Committee.

The three new members of TPLF's EC—in place of Seyoum, Abay and Arkebe—are Azeb Mesfin, voted in unanimously (sigh!); Beyene Mikru, a political non-entity; and Debre-Tsion Gebre-Mikael, a mysterious—and controversial—veteran of Ethiopia's KGB (secret police.) The person widely expected to ascend to the Executive Committee, Getachew Belay, who made his name as a competent Minister of Revenues in Meles' cabinet, was surprisingly sidelined. Whisked from his position as Minister and tasked with what many say is almost impossible, salvaging the troubled EFFORT, the unofficial—and haphazardly audited—business empire of the TPLF, Getachew's relegation to toil in obscurity now seems more like an effort to ebb his rising popularity than a concern for EFFORT.

Abay Woldu, who replaced Seyoum Mesfin as Meles Zenawi's deputy in the TPLF, is the presumed heir of Meles in the party; that is, if Meles keeps his word and resigns from his position in 2015. (But only if his party agrees to let him go—wink! wink! “I will not break with the party in which I have invested a lifetime,” he has said hotly.)

Abay Woldu is one of the middle-rankers of the insurgency who were catapulted to prominence after the expulsion of Seye Abraha et al from the party, and now constitute the majority in the EC. Their track record in Tigray, where they have dominated the regional government for the past decade under the leadership of Tsegaye Berhe, is at best mediocre. Tigray's trend setting days had quite come to an end after the dissolution of Gebru Asrat's administration. (Addis Ababa, for the duration of Arkebe Ekubay's mayoralty, had briefly assumed that position. There is no trendsetting region now. Everything radiates from Meles.) Whether Abay Woldu et al will have the acumen to uphold the dominance of the TPLF is now a hotly disputed subject—mostly because almost no one believes that they owe their positions to merit.

This does not mean that the TPLF EC is wholly devoid of competent people. The Health Minister, Tewedros Adhanom, is broadly credited with sharp technocratic skills and a pleasant personality. But he is also instinctively apolitical, representing the genre that make up most of TPLF's supporters—the silent (vast) majority that are enamored more by the spectacular successes of the party rather than the power of its message.

Overall though, the sweeping neglect of the broad reservoir of really qualified people that the TPLF has at its disposal is breathtaking. And nothing embodies the resultant malaise—which breeds opportunism—more than the ascendancy of Azeb to the EC. While Azeb’s determination to break free from the anachronistic traditional Ethiopian first-lady role is no doubt commendable (and admirable), her bubbling enthusiasm also betrays a palpable lack of intellectual complexity. Her evident obliviousness to the damage she is causing her husband damns her even more in the eyes of her numerous critics—particularly those who admire him. And one can not help but wonder whether their relationship will eventually suffer under the pressure. (I hope not. And I mean it.) The awkwardness of the new setup was evident at the congress, where Azeb, in breach of protocol for a new member of the EC, but in deference to her status as a spouse, sat next to Meles; a seat usually reserved for more senior members of the EC.

Azeb now has multiple responsibilities as head of the Social Affairs Committee in Parliament; as EC member of both the TPLF and the EPRDF; and as the most-feared board member of EFFORT. However, there is nothing in her intellectual and job-related background to indicate that she is qualified and prepared to undertake these tasks. Meles most probably knows this. But maybe he needs time to realize that he is clearly failing in the delicate act of balancing his duties as a party leader and a supportive progressive husband.

In the meantime, we are at least treated to a spectacle akin to the best soap that TV could offer. Enjoy!

50. Re-writing TPLF’s history - Part I

By **Eskinder Nega**, September 5th, 2010

The much anticipated book about Meles Zenawi, *Meles Zenawi and the Voyage of the TPLF (Meles Zenawi ena YeHewat Yetegel Gezo)*, hit the main thoroughfares of Addis early Monday morning, with vendors confidently displaying dozens of copies for passersby to pickup.

(Up to 5% of EPRDF’s 5.6 million “members” are Addis Ababans.) It was officially launched on Saturday, at a gala event in one of the upscale hotels in Addis, presided over by no less a figure

than the nation's almost centenarian President, Lt. Girma Welde-Giorgis. An assortment of Cabinet Ministers with sober expressions, and a who's who list of Meles' wide-eyed "admirers" sat throughout the ceremony mesmerized by the expectation of tales that will establish their Prime Minister's god-like status. They left disappointed, though. Most were jaded rather than inspired. The culprit: unimaginative organizers, many said.

But this is not to say excitement was totally absent. In a deed worthy of the Guinness world book of records, for example, one of Meles' "admirers" bought 40,000 thousand copies, according to media reports. At 60 birr apiece, that comes out to a cool 240,000 birr; a fortune, needless to say, not only to most of the nation's citizens, but also to many Westerners teetering on the verge of a double-dip recession.

And thus the question: Is Meles really worth it?

Eyasu Mengesha, the author, an ex-Colonel turned business-man, who tells us in the opening pages of the book, "(the TPLF) is everything I am," indubitably thinks so: "Meles is a great and respected leader of our country," he informs us with evident conviction. But he is mute as to exactly how great he is in relation to the more than 300 hundred leaders of Ethiopia's past; perhaps, saving it for one of his two upcoming books under the same title. (He has written more than a thousand pages, but will wisely release it in three parts. This is the first book.)

For now, he tells us what has for long troubled him. " I am alarmed by the belief of some of the youth which diminishes (the historical significance of) Meles to "a post-victory pseudo-hero," confides Eyasu. Thus the need to redeem a misjudged leader; a crusade really, to absolve a messiah in his own time.

Meles' story lies within the history of the TPLF, begins Eyasu reasonably. So be prepared for an elaborate account of TPLF's history. But his undeclared intention, part of a complex scheme to create Meles' personality cult, is also clear from the first pages: a classic revisionist re-interpretation of history.

This venture to re-write TPLF's history, while droll for its cerebral and literary pretensions (but respectable for an Ethiopian Colonel), is a serious reminder of EPRDF's slide towards the

politics of personality cult; which had its initiation in the post 2005 elections repressions, and is now gaining momentum in the aftermath of the 2010 elections.

And somehow, for reasons that are utterly incomprehensible, the re-invention of Meles starts with his ethnicity. The story starts in Adwa, northern Ethiopia, 20 kilometers from Ethiopia's spiritual epicenter, Axum, where Meles was born, "some say in 1954, others in 1955, but according to the authoritative account of his father, 1953," writes Eyasu. And then he goes on to tell us of his grandfather, Mr Asres Tesema, a feudal lord, Dejazmatch, and a loyal functionary in Haile-Selassie's government; and of his father, Mr Zenawi, "a noted progressive both in attire and outlook(in a small town.)" So far so good. His mother, Mrs Alemash Gebre-Leul, appears next. But not a word of her personal particulars, which is a page long for her husband. Nothing about where she was born, of her parents, her upbringing, her education, all things we learn about her husband in the preceding two pages. Her Eritrean ethnicity and origin is obviously taboo in the mythologized version of Meles. A "pure" Meles has apparently been reckoned necessary. Why not then create a new him by the power of collective amnesia? Eyasu, for one, has already dutifully expunged all thoughts about her ethnicity. Others need only follow his example.

Then follows the fairy-tale of Meles' early years; the superb marriage of his dotting parents, and Meles as the ideal child growing up: incapable of doing wrong; lovable; innocently playful; intelligent, and (get ready for this) religiously devout. But no mention of the irrepressible rages his mother publicly spoke about. In short, as Eyasu describes him, Meles was the faultless child that every parent dreams about. Not even North Korea's "Dear Leader" Kim Jond-il , a certified child prodigy in his early years, according the nation's Communist party, had a more perfect childhood and adolescence. But deprived of the eccentricities and shortcomings that are essential human attributes, the portrait of Meles that emerges is jarringly mechanical and unhuman. It is impossible to emotionally connect to this romanticized Meles. He has been stripped of his humanity.

TPLF's genesis lies in the Tigrayan Natioanl Organiztion (Mahbere Gesgesti Behere Tigray ,Magbet), established by Addis Ababa University students in 1974. Eyasu grudgingly acknowledges that Meles was not one of the broadly admired founders. Nor was he one of the renowned eleven, almost all of them members of the Tigrayan Natioanl Organiztion, who

formally launched the TPLF and its armed struggle on 18 February 1975 (Yekatit 11 1967 by the Ethiopian calendar) in Dedebit, 900 kilometers north of Addis, the seat of government. Accorded official recognition as the birth-date of the organization, Yekatit 11 (February 18) has been colorfully celebrated every year since 1976; and since 1991, for the past twenty years, is a regional holiday in Tigray.

“A SERIOUS MISTAKE!” shrieks Eyasu.

This is no cry of an irrational man. He has a perfectly plausible reason. The idealized Meles must somehow be brought to center stage in the saga of TPLF’s genesis. His legacy—his myth—could not be complete otherwise. History must be re-written.

Eyasu concedes that the armed struggle had indeed began on Yekatit 11 (February 18), “but the mere launching of an armed struggle does not make an organization,” he argues. TPLF was really established four months later, he contends, when Meles and Abay finally make it to Dedebit, and are entrusted with the task of formulating a program and rules and regulations, which were subsequently all adopted by the organization. “An organization without a program is an absurdity,” he insists. TPLF came in to being the day it espoused a clearly defined program. History needs be revisited and revised, he advises thoughtfully. Not only was Meles a founding member, but, unbeknownst to the public, he was the one who had charted the original course. Of course, Meles and a select few others know how the true course of events had actually transpired, Eyasu implies, but are too modest to go against the convention. Someone needs to tell the truth! (“Students (in school) must read this book,” earnest commentators had said at the launching ceremony.)

How then do members reward the genius of Meles when the organization’s first leaders were elected? Inexplicably (for Eyasu), they ignore him and opt for the leadership of Gesese Ayele, who was one of the eleven; Seyoum Mesfin, who was also one of the eleven; and Mehari Tekle, who was not one of the eleven but had just left the EPLF(in Eritrea) to be one of the founders of the TPLF(He assumed the Chairmanship.) A year later, when the founding congress of the party elected the first batch of CC members, Meles was still absent. And Aregawi Berhe, Giday ZeraTzion, Seyoum Mesfin, Sebhat Nega and Abay Teshaye become his superiors.

Evidently, even thirty five years ago people had problem recognizing the genius that is so palpable for Eyasu.

Brief news from Addis Ababa:

Printing press turns back popular magazine

Berana printing press, a holding of the Ministry of Defense, this week turned back a popular monthly magazine, Enku, for the “irredeemable crime” of carrying the New Year messages of two opposition politicians, Negaso Gidada and Seye Abraha. Both spoke of the imprisoned leader of UDJ, Birtukan Mideksa. Ironically, Ethiopia was hosting an international freedom of press conference as this was happening.

The EPRDF led government still refuses to grant press licenses to independent journalists, despite the absence of a vibrant political press after the closure of the nation’s major newspapers after the 2005 elections.

51. Re-writing TPLF’s history - Part II

By Eskinder Nega, September 17th, 2010

She was sitting at the corner of Mexico square in downtown Addis, intensely engrossed in a thin book dangling between her delicate fingers. A book worm myself, I couldn’t resist the temptation to pop the question.

“Good book, eh?” I inquired. She looked up, and smiled.

“A collection of poems,” she responded, and held up the cover.

“Think I should buy it?” I asked her. One of Addis’ proliferating book vendors, she told me that poems are popular and sell reasonably well.

“How about those over there?” I queried, pointing to three books displayed next to each other: Mengistu Haile-Mariam speaks, by Genet Ayele ;Liberty and the dispensation of justice in

Ethiopia, by Seye Abraha; and Meles Zenawi and the voyage of the TPLF, by Col Eyasu Mengesha.

“They sell well,” she replied cautiously, no doubt her alarm bells ringing. This is Ethiopia after all, and who knows what danger lurks behind a stranger boldly venturing in to politics.

“But which one sells the best?” I persisted. She wasn’t smiling anymore. She looked at me suspiciously. I looked back with the most innocent look I could muster.

“Those sell best,” she said, pointing to Mengistu’s and Seye’s. My laughter caught her off guard.

“How about that one?” I asked, pointing to the book about Meles. She stared back at me, too afraid to respond. “You know it’s not a crime to tell the truth,” I pressed on. She stood up. And suddenly, with a daring look, she exploded.

“It doesn’t sell as much as the other two,” she blurted out. “I don’t know who you are. And I don’t care what happens to me. It’s the truth.” Bemused and delighted by her defiance and courage, I bought a book of poems she recommended.

Other vendors confirmed what she said (which indicates how unpopular the EPRDF really is), and I couldn’t help but wonder how the “admirer” of Meles who bought 40,000 copies (which comes out to 2.4 million birr, not 240,000 birr as I erroneously calculated in the first part of this article) would dispense of his sizable holdings.

Anyhow, back to the book: Meles Zenawi and the Voyage of the TPLF(Meles Zenawi ena Yehewehat Yetegel Gezo) by Col. Eyasu Mengesh

MURDER IN THE MOUNTAINS OF TIGRAY.

Six months after the birth of the TPLF, contact is established with the other, slightly older, Tigrayan organization, the Tigrayan Liberation Front (TLF.) Inspired and encouraged by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the TLF was founded a year before the revolution in 1974; aspiring, according to Eyasu(the author of this book), “ to liberate Tigray from Ethiopian colonialism.” But it looked to Ras Mengesha, governor of Tigray in the early 70s, and scion of the Tigrayan aristocracy, for leadership, writes Eyasu contemptuously. (Ras Mengesha, for the

record, had no contact with the TLF, nor has he ever sympathized with its cause.) “TLF’s activities were restricted to Agame(a region in Tigray) and few other cities.”

Wary of the armed conflict between the ELF and its offshoot, the EPLF, both fighting for independence in Eritrea, merging—not merely forging an alliance—the two Tigrayan organizations was keenly agreed upon by both sides to avoid a potential catastrophe—armed conflict between two fragile analogous organizations. (Most Tigrayan students and intellectuals favored the far more potent EPRP, a pan-Ethiopian grouping, at this time.)

But the sentiment was not unanimous. “Meles strongly objected to the merger,” notes Eyasu, quoting a book, Tsenat, which also dwells on TPLF’s history. In fact, so belligerently did Meles speak out, Seyoum Mesfin, back then his superior but now his cowed junior as Foreign Minister, was compelled discipline him. (The punishment is not specified.) The reason behind Meles’ strident objection? (Prepare for a hearty laugh!) “He insisted that a democratic organization (the TPLF) and an anti-democratic organization (the TLF) could not successfully merge.”

Put to a vote, in which all members of the TPLF participated, the majority opts for union. Meles, obviously ambitious, but still a middle ranker at this stage, suffered his first political setback. And damingly, his aggressive discourse singled him out in the wrong way to his peers and superiors alike, and they were not willing to let it pass. They punished him. Sadly, the penalty was to have no effect. Apparently, here lies the genesis of an intolerant politician that will one day derail the nation’s sensitive transition to pluralism.

And had it not been for the failure of the merger, with its tragic and homicidal ending, redeeming those who had been against it, the trajectory of Meles in the TPLF was in the wrong direction. The leadership was not happy with him.

Having agreed on a merger, a date was set to consecrate the communion in the presence of all members of both organizations. On the set date, however, when the totality of both organizations’ members convened at Zegebela, TPLF members were suddenly inundated with news of a split within the TLF that had a bloody ending. Allegedly, unbeknownst to the TPLF leaders who had negotiated the merger, the TLF leadership had been ravaged by a split that eventuated in scores of people being executed.

Infuriated, TPLF leaders demand a written confession. TLF leaders, of course, reject the ultimatum, but still hope for the merger. “What happened next is wrong,” says even Eyasu. TLF members were disarmed while they slept, and the leadership summarily executed. They were not tried—they were simply shot in cold blood.

Meles’ part in this tale of treachery and homicide is unclear. Eyasu, to little surprise, stirs clear from it. As a prominent dissenter to the merger, however, Meles could have hardly been indifferent to the climax that had suddenly gone his way. But he was not a member of the transitional CC that run the TPLF at the time. By 1991, when the EPRDF assumed power with the TPLF at its core, only two members of the transitional CC, Seyoum Mesfin and Abay Tesahye, remained in the organization. The others had either died or left the party.

With TLF eliminated, the next step for the TPLF was to increase the ranks of its armed fighters; then still barely over a hundred strong. Thirty people, including the physically frail Meles, were dispatched to Eritrea as the third batch of trainees. Fifteen difficult days later, they finally make it to EPLF territory. “And this is where the first strain in the long and difficult relationship between the EPLF and TPLF occurred,” recounts Eyasu. The training that was sought was refused, “most probably to please the EPRP,” speculates Eyasu. Outraged and shocked, the TPLF contingent hurriedly treads back home with the devastating news. EPLF support was crucial to jumpstart an insurrection in Tigray.

Reading between the lines, it’s clear where Eyasu is heading: The relationship between Meles and the EPLF suffered at first contact, permanently scarring Meles’ impression. The new Meles has an anti-EPLF credential deeper and longer than many of his critics!

ETHIOPIAN NATIONALISM AND THE NEW MELES

And then comes what will most probably be one of the most contentious parts of the book. The setting is the founding congress of the TPLF, held a year after the launch of the organization, where a leadership was to be elected and the transitional party program, drawn by Abay and Meles a year earlier, ratified either in its original format or in a revised version.

“A revised version was read to the congress,” says Eyasu, “and it set the goal as the secession of Tigray from Ethiopia.” A huge controversy erupts. Meles couldn’t have known about the

revision, argues Eyasu, because he was not a member of the leadership. His critics, however, maintain otherwise. “On the contrary, “ goes on Eyasu, ‘ Meles spoke passionately against secession at the congress and was instrumental in its reversal.” Aregawi Berhe at this time being the dominant personality in the party, Eyasu insists, must have known about the revision. “What has been propagated is contrary to what had happened,” counters Eyasu.(Aregawi Berhe, who has left the party and now lives in Europe, allegedly attributes the secession clause to Meles.) In other words, not only has Meles never flirted with secession, as his critics and rivals disingenuously charge, but has in fact always been a strong Ethiopian nationalist.

The new Meles is draped in the Ethiopian flag. Ready made hero for all Ethiopians!!!

The end. (Last part of this article will appear the week after next.)

Next week: The EPRDF CONGRESS: AN ASSESSMENT.

52. Seye Abraha and the Ethio-Eritrean war

By Eskinder Nega, August 27, 2010

“I never thought that the war (the Ethio-Eritrean war) would lead me to permanent fallout with my lifelong friends,” ponders Seye Abraha of his lost camaraderie with Meles Zenawi and his allies in a book that was released in Addis on Tuesday. “But so apprehensive was I to become of the ideas they promoted, I lost hope in them in due course.”

“Liberty and the dispensation of justice in Ethiopia” is a 440-page book that Seye wrote after his release from seven years of imprisonment, accused of corruption during his four years stint as Defense Minister in the '90s. This is his shot at absolution, the silver bullet that is meant to clear his name once and for all. He has magnanimously donated the proceeds from the book to his party, UDJ. Mercifully, the book has been skillfully edited for syntax, punctuation and clarity, a norm in most parts of the world, but which is mysteriously (and annoyingly) absent from most Amharic books. At least the copies that I and friends bought are US prints, the quality of the cover and inside pages, much to our delight, far superior to the local norm. We gladly paid the asking price: 70 birr.

As Seye tells it, the crack in the fêted harmony that long prevailed between TPLF leaders first occurred immediately after the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war. “But it was strictly between Meles and the rest of us,” recounts Seye. Two months after the Eritreans occupied Badme, the unlikely epicenter of the dispute, leaders of the TPLF sulkily acknowledged the inevitability of war the nation was ill-prepared for. The Eritreans were clearly the dominant military power in the horn. “They were vying for political, economic and diplomatic concessions from their neighbors,” observes Seye. The imperative to regain Ethiopia’s military preeminence, a dominant heritage of the region, was quickly agreed upon by all the leaders of the TPLF—save one. “Only Meles took exception to defining our (the nation’s) purpose as that of totally crushing Shabiya’s (the ruling party in Eritrea) military prowess,” writes Seye. The plan, in other words, was for regime change. (Some had even grandeur ambitions in private.) But Meles worried about Eritrea’s independence, then only five years old, and the diplomatic fallout from occupying a sovereign nation partially or fully. “We went to great length to convince him, and he finally relented,” narrates Seye. The hard part being over, the next step was merely routine: rubber-stamping the decision by the broader EPRDF leadership.

A Central Command was set up—ostensibly entrusted with the responsibility of co-ordinating the war effort but in reality to monitor Meles. Seye Abraha, Tewelde Welde-Mariam (both from the party), Tefera Walewa (Defense Minister), Tsadkan Welde-Tensay (Chief of Staff), Abadula Gameda (Chief of the Army), Abebe Tekle-Haymanot (Chief of the Air force) and Meles Zenawi became members of the Command. In time, the Command was to become more prestigious and powerful than Meles; who, as PM, was the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. But Meles was not really convinced. As Seye sees it, he had only chosen to play the part of saboteur from inside. And he details how the purchase of Suk-27 planes, which were to play a crucial part in the war, was almost derailed by a stonewalling Meles. “First, he said there was no money (to buy the planes.) When it was ascertained otherwise, it was untouchable because the IMF said so,” writes Seye with apparent exasperation. The relationship that was once strained, but which improved markedly when Meles gave in, was now visibly poisoned. “It undermined our trust in each other,” maintains Seye. But a showdown was not in the cards. “We slowly swayed Meles in favor of the purchase. Tewelde did most of the convincing,” says Seye. (Tewelde was Meles’ deputy in the TPLF.)

The war went splendidly. What the Americans said was impossible, the dislodging of the well dug-in Eritreans by military means from Badme, was accomplished with lightening speed and limited casualty to the Ethiopian side. The army was on a roll, highly motivated for more success on the Central and Eastern fronts.

And this is where, for Seye, the straw that was to break the camel's back surfaced: the Algiers Technical Arrangement.

"The Technical Arrangement did not only fail to meet our demand for a return to status-quo-ante, but accorded partial recognition to the Eritrean's claim over Badme, the very area we had just liberated by force of arms," relates Seye. But Meles, much to the fury of Seye, was in favor of accepting it. He warned of devastating sanctions contemplated by the international community. When that failed to make an impression, "he brought up Lenin, Tewedros and Menelik." The socialist revolution was possible in Russia because Lenin had the foresight to accept the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, argued Meles. (Russia had to surrender land to the Germans.) Eritrea is no Germany, nor is Ethiopia Russia, retorted his opponents. But citing Ethiopia's past, he persisted. "Tewedros blundered when he fought the super power of his time, the British, and he paid with his life. Menelik, on the other hand, had the wisdom to concede part of his country (Eritrea) to save the far larger part (what is Ethiopia minus Eritrea)," argued Meles. We should learn from history, he insisted.

But none in his party, the TPLF, and only one from the coalition, Kassu Ilala, an MD turned politician, was to be swayed by the power of his argument. It was a devastating blow for him, the clear low point of his political career. He was ready to leave, but his opponents opted (fatefully) to wait for the end of the war. On a personal level, Seye and Meles could barely tolerate each other anymore. "This is when we stopped greeting each other," discloses Seye. It was open war in all but name. "The climax of our differences had to await the finality of the war. In context of a nation mobilized for war, publicizing our disagreements would have been disastrous," writes Seye. "But while we were fully engaged in the war effort, he (Meles) was plotting our downfall," concludes Seye bitterly.

And there is no better way to neutralize your opponents than to accuse them of corruption, asserts Seye. "This is the genesis of the corruption charges against me," says Seye.

Rumors of corruption exasperate the division within the TPLF leadership. Absurdly, and perhaps as a sign of its politicization, it abruptly dominates the internal debate only within the TPLF. The other EPRDF organizations remain totally immune to the allegations and counter-allegations of corruption that wrecks the TPLF. Upping the challenge, Meles' opponents propose the establishment of a committee to investigate. "We proposed that our personal assets and that of our immediate relatives be registered and their origins investigated," says Seye. The response of Meles is bizarre: "We reject your proposal because we believe in fighting corruption not by trivializing it to police work and investigations but at the level of the perception that enables it."

The preposterousness and obvious implication of this response will haunt not only Meles' legacy but also all those who had sided with him.

53. The Great Controversy: Abune Paulos' Statue

By **Eskinder Nega**, August 20th, 2010

Clad in the distinctive black robe of the Orthodox clergy, Abune Petros, one of Ethiopia's four native-born Abuns (equivalent to Bishops) under an Egyptian Copt Patriarch, stood in a manifestly noble pose before an Italian military tribunal in 1936, the year that Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia.

A preposterously pompous Colonel presided over the proceedings. He was visibly relishing his moment in the spotlight. "The Patriarch has acceded to Italian rule," began the Colonel darting his eyes dramatically between the hushed audience and the towering Abun. "Why then do you alone,"—a deliberate stop here for effect— "choose to disagree? Why did you rebel?"

Though tall, slim and markedly handsome, the Abun dominated the trial with the overpowering— and reassuring—calmness of his bearing. Nothing disturbed his peace. He responded in the deliberately restrained tone of a Church elder: "As a Church leader, I have responsibilities. I owe an allegiance to my Church and country. This is all I have to say to this court. I will tell the rest to my creator. Do as you please."

Speechless, the judges froze in their seats. A higher authority was affirmed with such confidence, their skepticism was momentarily shaken. So pervasive was the silence that the drop of a pin would have been heard.

But few moments later, a death sentence, to be carried out that very same day, was briskly read out by the Colonel; who was suddenly noticeably dispirited. The other two judges could not even bear to look up. But as soon as the Colonel finished, Abune Petros compassionately held his cross high, blessed the judges, and proceeded to pray for them in Geez; once Ethiopia's dominant language, now spoken by no community, but dutifully conserved from extinction by the Church. They did not dare stop him.

Eight Italian army privates awaited him to pull the trigger simultaneously. He stood facing a wall, to be struck by a hail of bullets from the rear. As is customary, an Italian Officer approached him to read the death sentence (absurdly, in Italian) one last time. His legs and hands trembled as he did so. When he finished, the Abun, calm as ever, kissed the Bible he was carrying; blessed the crowd that had assembled to witness the execution; and then, with an expression serene more than ever, took out a watch from his pocket, noted the time, and placed it back in his pocket. He was ready to meet his creator.

The soldiers stood twenty feet behind him, and were kneeling when the order to fire came. Not a single bullet missed him. No one doubted that his end had come to pass. But the medical doctor who had to ascertain death looked up with stunned expression. Eight bullets had not killed the Abun. He was still alive. The crowd stirred. A soldier stepped in hastily, and fired three more bullets. Each one struck the skull.

Five years later, Ethiopia was free from the pagan Fascists. A grateful Church and nation revered no one more the martyred Abun. But however much he was held in high esteem, there were no calls to erect his statue by the Church or its followers. When his statue was finally built, it was at the site of his execution and was commissioned by the government. In deference to Orthodox tradition and the sensibilities of adherents, no statue of his has ever been built near a Church.

Three and a half decades later, a ferocious social revolution raged in Ethiopia. It was time for the theocracy that had endured for 1600 years to unravel. No mission, after land to the tiller, was held with more fervor by revolutionaries than the total subservience of the Church to the new

order. But, to few surprises, the prospect of subservience to a hostile state was roundly unpopular in the Church. The consensus was for political neutrality and Church independence. And the Patriarch, Abune Teweflos, was fully prepared to be martyred for the cause. As such, in a deliberate move to assert the Church's independence, he appointed five Abuns; one of whom was the present Patriarch, Abune Paulos, without consulting the government.

For the Derg, this amounted to nothing less than open rebellion. The dismissal and imprisonment followed in quick succession. Both were unprecedented in a nation where the person of the Patriarch had always been inviolable. The Patriarch's arrival in prison is here recounted in an autobiography by a prisoner, Abera Jembere, a high official in Haile Sellase's government held under preventive detention for over seven years:

"It was past midday when he came. Bare footed and handcuffed, the Patriarch was being pushed and shoved by soldiers as they steered him to a solitary confinement cell. Inside the tiny room, they ordered him to lie down, chained both his hands and legs to a bed, and locked the door from outside. "Keep a close eye on this devilish priest," barked an Officer as he headed back to his office. Shocked by the spectacle, prisoners had frozen in their tracks.

He would neither eat nor drink. He persisted for seven days despite numerous pleas by prison officials. Finally relenting to his determination, his door was flung open on the eighth day, was unchained from the bed, and prisoners were urged to prevail upon him. His solitary confinement came to an abrupt end. But weeks were to pass before he was to eat again. He sustained his fast. Spirit had clearly prevailed over body. (THE END)"

The next twenty eight months passed with his continued incarceration in a maximum security prison on the grounds of the Great Palace, few hundred feet away from the very seat of power. And then, out of the blue, at the peak of Mengistu's prestige and power in late 1982, and when the revolution had finally stabilized, he was moved to a secret prison in north Addis Ababa for his final rendezvous with death. He was never tried in a court of law.

His end was tragically malicious. He did not see his murderers. As had happened to Abune Petros, they chose to strike from behind. They used barbed wires to choke him to death. It was a slow, brutal and painful death. He was buried in a mass grave. And thus came to pass the most horrifying murder of a Patriarch in the annals of Christianity. His story is one of the Church's

most cherished, and the power of its message resonates with all religions. But in line with Orthodox tradition no statue of his has been erected, nor has there ever been a proposal to do so.

Then, just what exactly did Abune Paulos, the current Patriarch, do more than the two martyred Abuns to deserve a statue, with the obvious consent of the Church bureaucracy he leads, and contrary to Orthodox tradition, at the largest church in the country?

Statuary was rejected by Orthodox Christianity because the dimensional representations were considered to glorify the human flesh rather than the divine spirit. Orthodox iconography, which has a rich history in Ethiopia, was alternatively developed to emphasize the spiritual holiness of figures rather than their humanity. And thus, no statues have ever been built for Abune Selema, who brought Christianity to Ethiopia; Yared, who developed the Church's sacred gospel music; Lalibela, who built the Church's greatest relic, the rock-hewn Churches in Lasta; and Abune Tekle-Haymanot, Ethiopia's greatest native-born Saint. But they have all been amply represented by Ethiopian iconography.

Why is Orthodox tradition being uprooted?

THE END.

A reminder:

Ideally, politics should be debated civilly. It rarely happens though, both in Ethiopia and the rest of the world. But when the same coarseness trespasses into the realm of religion it becomes blasphemous. Please let's keep it civil at least when religion is involved.

54. Mission impossible: Repackaging Meles Zenawi

By Eskinder Nega, August 13th, 2010

"There are times when I have to flutter an eyelid several times to make sure that all this is not a dream," says Meles Zenawi, marveling at the miracle of EPRDF's successful insurgency that propelled him to the helm of the nation. "In milieu of the Derg's superiority in arms and

numbers, and the distressing poverty of the people we mobilized to fight it, I am amazed that we prevailed,” ponders Meles in a new book.

The first of two books about Meles Zenawi slated for release before the New Year came out in Addis on Tuesday. “Meles Zenawi: Childhood to Maturity” is a clever 150 pages long anthology of Meles’ select interviews — some widely publicized, others much less so — over the past two decades. “In the fifteen years I spent as a (government) journalist, I was unable to come across a single writing that dwells exclusively on who Meles is as a person,” laments Teku Baheta, the author, in the prologue to the book. This is his attempt “to fill a small part of the void.” The second book, at over a thousand pages, is much more extravagantly ambitious than Teku’s modest taking and is authored by a Colonel in the army, who will also attempt to tell us, as he sees it, who the real Meles is. It is scheduled to come out just before the New Year. Both books are part of a semi-official drive to repackage the public profile of Meles Zenawi, long tattered by his public tantrums. This promises to be the ultimate Mission Impossible task; particularly in light of EPRDF’s ludicrous 99.6% “win” in this year’s elections. (The Harari regional government and Ethiopian Telecommunications covered part of the printing costs of Teku’s book. No doubt many more have clamored to ease the Colonel’s “financial burden.” Will he reveal their identities in his book?)

The book starts with Meles’ rather feeble attempt to undo damage unleashed by his mother’s innocent slip of tongue. (“He threw whatever lay in front of him when provoked,” she had told Aser, an EPRDF controlled magazine, of Meles’ younger years. How this passed the sharp eyes of party censors is one of the great mysteries of the EPRDF. Many suspect party infighting.) An unnamed journalist asks him to comment about his mother’s remark: “Very rarely do I lose my temper,” says a clearly flabbergasted Meles. Alas! All this is on page three. Not the best of starts for a revamping effort.

She reappears on page thirty-nine, again courtesy of the same interview with Aser. What she uttered in motherly innocence is already dodging his legacy: “God save him from repeating the mistakes of past leaders.” She passed away four years before the 2005 elections. Asked to comment, Meles stands powerless before the penetrating insight of her common sense: “One person alone could not live up to those words,” he replies rather meekly. And desperate, he runs to hide behind his party: “Only the party could ensure that,” he winds up.

“In a skirmish with Derg soldiers in the vicinity of Adi Daro, a bullet scratched my head,” says Meles of his extraordinary brush with death during the insurgency. In the same breath though, he underplays the significance of the event, “the wound was not deep. My life was never in danger.” Is this false modesty? Or is it the words of a brave man? Take your pick.

Four pages later, a sensational admission suddenly surfaces. “We (the EPRDF) passed multitude of wrong decisions,” he says. But a surprise is in store. “I have no regrets (about the wrong decisions.) None of them were intentional. We thought we were doing the right thing.” Obviously, the conceit of a privileged person who has never been held accountable for his decisions. A privilege, needless to say, that is absent in democracies.

In subsequent pages, Meles speaks of the downside of life at the top(as they all say, its lonely up there), of his advent in to politics, and how he really is not indispensable to the EPRDF. “There is no scientific explanation for the indispensable person,” says Meles. (Aigaforum’s old guards: How do you respond?)

Then a jerk twenty years back in time, to 1990, when Meles was visiting Washington for the first time. “Most of the time I listen to the Amharic service of the VOA,” Meles tells Paul Henze, who interviewed him at the newly purchased EPRDF office in NW Washington D.C. Fast forward to the present, and Meles tells us somewhere in the book that he has time only for satellite television. Radio is no more part of his world; no doubt simplifying his decision to jam his once favorite station. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of the rest of the nation.

The bombshell comes roughly half way in to the book, on page sixty-two to be exact. Positioned to the left at the top, five bold words dominate the page: What is democracy to Meles? He responds in three crunchy sentences, neatly summed up in five lines. “To me democracy is the people’s partaking in shaping the policies that affect their welfare,” says Meles in the first sentence, eerily echoing the sentiment of left-leaning authoritarianism. “Whether this is facilitated by 50, or 5, or even 1 party is secondary to me,” he asserts in the second sentence, denying (a change of heart after the 2005 elections) the irrevocable linkage between pluralism and democracy. “So democracy to me is essentially enabling the people to have meaningful participation in the fundamental issues that matter to them.” This apparently is a very different person to the one Paul Henze spoke with twenty years ago. His sentiments and loyalties are

visibly changed. He thinks democracy is possible without pluralism. (It would be too cynical to assume that his pose was a ruse from the very beginning.)

But he himself dreads the possibility of living under a dictatorship. (That is, one he is not leading.) Here is a journalist raising the possibility with him: If you have to choose between democracy and bread (in other words, rapid economic growth), what would be your pick, he asks him. “Death is preferable to total submission. That is why we fought (the Derg.) Whatever the (intellectual) rationalization, there are some things I can not tolerate,” says a self assured Meles. Admirable!! Would it be too bold to assume that a 99.6% electoral victory by any party other than the EPRDF is one of them, sir?

And his thoughts on Mengistu, the man he replaced? “From my perspective, he is effectively in prison. He hasn’t really escaped.” Would he ever forgive Mengistu? No. But he is not blunt about it. This time he hides behind lofty words. The impassioned Meles is no where in sight.

And finally, the people he likes and loathes: “Good or bad, I have high opinion of a person who has principles. I am not comfortable with an unprincipled person, one who vacillates; even if that person is our (EPRDF) supporter. A person who knows what he likes and dislikes, and doggedly stands up for things he believes in carries weight with me. That is the kind of person I call a good person.”

Hope that the many sycophants in Addis (and the cyberworld) will buy and read the book.

55. EPRDF’s Myth of Invincibility

By **Eskinder Nega**, August 7th, 2010

Medrek announced plans to transform its loose coalition to the elevated status of a “front” at the end of last week. Its constituent members dipped to six from the original eight, after dropping one of its two Pan-Ethiopian groupings and its lone Somali based organization. The rotating presidency has now gone to UDJ’s deputy, Gizatchew Shiferaw; a position he will hold for four months.

Few of the opposition's even most ardent supporters clamored to celebrate, though. The painful delay notwithstanding, the public was still aching to hear about plans for resistance against this year's vile "election results." Anything else was unavoidably an anti-climax.

But the announcement was deliberate for the leaders of Medrek. Having decided against resistance, news of an impending restructured alliance, which the public has long supported, seemed a fitting surrogate to placate public mood. "The election was stolen. But we will not engage in a scuffle with (the) muggers," said Dr Beyene Petros, Medrek's new spokesperson. The opposition's response is to acquiesce to the new reality, not lead a peaceful heroic resistance as many of its supporters— and some in the international community, too— had anticipated and hoped. The opposition is in fact already looking ahead. As one of the leaders of Medrek informed local media this week: "We would like to negotiate with the EPRDF about the upcoming election." (Local elections are due in about two years time. The last time they were held, the EPRDF "won" 100 % of the seats.) And thus, the spirit of resistance, which attained its apex in 2005 when the CUD, Press and Diaspora trio challenged the election results, has been bluntly rejected by all political parties in 2010. Not a single party has opted—and dared— to carry the mantle of resistance.

What happened? Is this really a strategic retreat warranted by lack of preparedness? Or does it denote a state of psychological vulnerability that is incapacitating Ethiopia's opposition?

Ethiopia's opposition is no match to the EPRDF. Even absent the opposition's conspicuous military muscle deficit, EPRDF's discipline, grassroots presence, and quality of middle rankers gives it a decided advantage. In sharp contrast, the opposition is undermined by a variety of inadequacies: lax discipline, weak grassroots, lack of finance, and more seriously, the stigma of recurring failures. But it is exactly the need to beat these shortfalls and save the legal opposition that the inspiring weight of its leaders is now much in demand. Only one election season has elapsed since the inspirational power of few opposition leaders was able to score a seemingly impossible electoral victory. They were constrained by the very same limitations that hamper the opposition now. Resisting a fraudulent election by the same means is no more difficult nor any less achievable.

No mass mobilization relies exclusively—or even mostly—on party machine in modern times. As has become of modern politics itself, mass mobilizations are focally media driven in this age of satellite radio and television and the internet. It is the preserve of the best politicians to know how to use them. The tide of Nazi victory at the beginning of the Second World War, for example, was reversed by the ardor of Churchill's rhetoric and the allure of Roosevelt's fire-side chats, both conveyed to the people over the radio, not by the military prowess of the UK, the US or any of the other democracies. None of them were prepared for the brutal efficiency of the Nazi war machine. Resistance seemed futile, and the cries to give up were strident and seemed more attune to the rapidly unraveling reality. But Roosevelt and Churchill eloquently differed, and went on to famously win the century for democracy. The lesson they left behind for future generations reverberates till the end of time: An inspired people will always beat the odds. Lack of preparedness is an obvious disadvantage but it does not necessarily have to be an incapacitating one.

We know from the 2005 election that a sizable segment of the opposition—even within the CUD, including some who were imprisoned—had already been rendered motionless by a state of psychological defeat. To this group, any altercation with the EPRDF is perceived as an overwhelming encumbrance. In its mythologized world the EPRDF is invincible, positioned always to win. All attempts to successfully face up to it is deemed as impractical and emotional. The imprisonment and subsequent implosion of CUD's leaders is the irrefutable evidence for the veracity its conviction. Such helplessness dominates its every calculation. And in its state of psychological melancholy, it is temperamentally unable to comprehend the merits of resistance. Its despondency is hostile to every precept of resistance. There is, in other words, a discernable class within the Ethiopian opposition that has internalized helplessness. That much is certain. The question is: has it been allowed to hold Medrek—whose working ethos is the impractical consensus rather than the practical majority vote—hostage?

One could not help but suspect so. There is no other plausible explanation for the paralysis that has afflicted the opposition. It is high time to address the problem of defeatism within the opposition.

Such defeatism has cloaked the EPRDF with a myth of invincibility. Such myth is already being energetically expressed by many of EPRDF's supporters amidst the public. The series of events

in which “the EPRDF triumphed over the Derg, defeated the Eritreans in the border war, and cleverly maneuvered the collapse of the CUD” are promoted as confirmation of EPRDF’s irrefutable superiority. And when the opposition demanded re-run of the election, EPRDF supporters could not help but mock it for daring to flirt with resistance when all evidences, as they see it, caution against it. But what is troubling is not that gullible grassroots believe the myth, but that its leaders have also come to believe in it. Their intransigence is now intertwined with this self-perception.

At the end of the day, myth will not get the EPRDF very far. Its potency is limited to the extent that it is believed by the opposition and the public. This is where the role of opposition leaders becomes critical. The admixture of the opposition’s perceived helplessness and the EPRDF’s aura of invincibility has suddenly crowded public discourse after this year’s election. And it is threatening to grow in to a mortal threat to the legal opposition. This is no problem for a party machine. It could only be overcome by a lucid inspirational display of will to resist—peacefully and legally— by the opposition. It is necessary and possible.

56. Mengistu Haile-Mariam Speaks

By **Eskinder Nega**, July 30th, 2010

Ethiopia’s impenitent ex-dictator, Mengistu Haile-Mariam, is back in the limelight—nineteen years after his ouster and just before the publication of his much anticipated memoir in the US.

The second series of interviews between him and Genet Ayele, daughter and ex- wife of soldiers in the army he had once transformed in to one of the best and largest in Africa, but now married to a Frenchman and comfortably settled in Paris, came out to little fanfare in Addis last weekend.

The astounding triumph of the EPRDF in acquiring the publishing rights of the first series of interviews, some eight years ago, had been significant not only as an obvious public relations bonanza, but no less for the damage to the power of the message when it was dismissively published by the chief culprit of its content. Genet’s rather insensitive(and ill-advised) attempt to dismiss the controversy this generated to “old retarded journalists” (Yedero ajuza gazetenoch, as she rowdily calls them) is at best inane, but most probably signifies her increasing proximity to

people in power; one of whom, Endrias Eshete, she unabashedly lauds in flowery words in the first pages of her new book.

Why then would Mengistu receive her at his residence in Harare several more times and oblige her with interviews for a second book? Perhaps he is telling the EPRDF that they had not succeeded in thwarting him, that it was he who had in fact outmaneuvered them by making them think that they would steal his thunder by publishing him, and used them to relay his message to the people. Or maybe not. And he could just be too isolated and confused to keep abreast of current events. We will have to wait for his memoir, and hopefully he will provide us with an unambiguous (and truthful) answer there.

This is a far thinner book than the first, which is several hundred pages more. Of the hundred and ninety pages of the new book, less than ninety carry Mengistu's words. The rest—in effect more than half the book—are interviews with an array of unnamed officials of his regime. Amazingly, almost twenty years after the collapse of the regime, all but one, Dawit Welde-Giorgis, still insist on speaking anonymously. Priced sensibly at 35 birr, it falls reasonably within the reach of the urban elite. Vendors have displayed it prominently, and cheerfully affirm that sales are robust.

Few are surprised that sales are strong. The Ethiopian public has frequently adored its strong leaders. And when they are visibly absent from the public domain in confusing times (as is the current aftermath of EPRDF's outlandish 99.6% “win”), nostalgia for them—even those of the wrong genre—becomes overpowering.

Perhaps it is instinctive, implanted in Mengistu's genes; or it could be his most cherished lesson from his training as an Officer; or it could even be the most enduring mark of his seventeen years in politics; but whatever its origins, doubt not that he lives by the adage that pronounces: “the best defense is the best offensive.” Reading his words, it's easy to imagine him speaking with his head held up, his eyes intense as ever, his tone habitually defiant, and his charisma still dangerous, infectious and intact.

But it is also confidence that is at times direly overplayed. A case in point is when he is confronted with calls for his act of contrition; the need for him to publicly seek for the nation's absolution. He stubbornly refuses to budge: “We fought them (his opponents) when they sought

to dismember the nation. Is this why I should seek exoneration?” he asks defiantly. But it was not only armed separatists that had lost their lives, nor were they only the ones to be tortured, imprisoned and forced in to exile during his years in power. Many others became victims needlessly. How, for example, could the bombing of Hawazen be explained? Or the wanton destruction of Massswa? Or the Red Terror, which demanded “the death of a thousand anarchists (EPRP members) for every life of a revolutionary?” His ornate rhetoric notwithstanding, he clearly falls short here. He will have ample room to correct himself in his memoir.

“If I had resigned on my own accord, to whom would I have transferred the reigns of power?” he inquires rhetorically at one point, musing over the reluctance of African leaders to give up power. “To Weyane?(Laughs!)” Even nineteen years later, his eloquent criticism of the diminished patriotism of EPRDF leaders remain forcefully (and disturbingly) biting as ever. And his contempt for his successor is more palpable. “We did not even know his (Meles’) name,” says Mengistu. He criticizes him personally for “petitioning the UN to dismember his own country.” No leader in history has ever done that, Mengistu insists; clearly implying that the judgment of history will be far harsher on Meles than it will be on him.

His anti-Americanism remains livid as ever. “We thought that the proletariat would eventually run the world. But it is the Americans who have assumed that position,” he tells Genet remorsefully. “The American people have changed,” he says, and speaks of their opposition to the war in Vietnam. He criticizes them for supporting the invasion of Iraq. “Is there no (international) law? (to protect the weak from the strong)” he asks. Of Africa, he speaks of a crippling culture of corruption. “Ethiopia did not have the same problem. African leaders looked at us with envy.”

Mengistu spoke of a web of conspiracies that had always plagued his regime. “There were nine assassination attempts against me,” he maintains, “but people know of only one.” And he details of an alleged plot hatched by a General, Gezmu(last name not given), in which his deputy, Fikre-Selassie Wegderese, and his security chief, Tesfaye Welde-Selassie, are possibly (but not definitely) implicated “I heard about it after I left Ethiopia,” he reveals, a bit menacingly.

With his benefactor, Robert Mugabe, now over eighty years old and most probably serving his last term in office, isn’t Mengistu worried about extradition? “ Mugabe fought and liberated his

country from colonists. But I am here as a guest of the Zimbabwe people. I am not a personal guest of Mugabe. And veterans of the liberation struggle are well aware of this fact.”

Finally, his book. “We (his regime) have been likened to Mussolini and Hitler and sullied,” says Mengistu of those who write of his legacy. “Repeat lies often enough and they will be mistaken for the truth. I have to set the record straight.” The book will have four parts. The first part is slated for a deliberation on history, which Mengistu feels is grossly misconstrued, but will also deal with the war against Somalia, in which he was one of the principal actors. “The second part will address the Eritrean issue and the war in the north in general,” says Mengistu. The third part will be an overview of his regime’s international relations. The last part, the fourth, will offer an insight into why and how his regime collapsed.

Well, it’s about time, sir. Nineteen years is a long time to prepare a memoir. But now that it has finally come to see the light of day, be advised that you must tell the truth and nothing but the truth. You owe the people at least that much.

57. A New Opportunity for the Opposition

By **Eskinder Nega**, July 23rd, 2010

Ethiopia’s highest court, the Court of Cassation, this week passed a ruling against Medrek’s legal bid for a re-run of the election in unyielding words:

“No substantial case for a re-run has been presented,” it said of Medrek’s 80-pages long petition; concurring in almost exact words with an earlier ruling by the Supreme Court. This being the end of the legal recourse (but not the constitutional and political recourse), Medrek, rather to the surprise of its supporters, did not even feign an outrage; but in line with its abruptly subdued tone after the election, simply relayed the news to select journalists.

Both the public and the international community received the news with a prolonged yawn. No one expected a fair hearing. EPRDF, and more specifically its principal extremist, Bereket Simon, whose mere presence, let alone prolonged engagement, is a kiss of death on democratic values (he headed a judges oversight body), has damaged the integrity of the judiciary to such an

extent that, according to a study commissioned by the ECA(The African Governance Report 2—2009), the UN offshoot in Addis, experts deem it more corrupt than the Nigerian judiciary. Eighty percent of judges, according to Western diplomats in Addis, hail from the nation’s least prestigious law school, that of the highly politicized Civil Service College. Ultimately, the legal scuffle only served to reinforce a long embedded—both locally and internationally—conviction about a judiciary trusted only by the EPRDF.

There is no question now, two months after the farcical election “results” were announced, that the opposition had faltered in its response to a looming threat against its existence. A public outraged by the election “result” had intuitively looked to it for leadership; but in a moment of irksome hesitation, it failed to respond in the prompt manner the situation had warranted. But hopefully, the final decision by the Court of Cassation would now compel it to a new beginning. The situation is redeemable; the people, though disappointed, could be swayed—of course, all stringently within the constitutional and peaceful enclosure.

But as the beleaguered opposition ventures to a future that is tentative at best, it needs to ponder on two issues deeply: What caused the moment of—still lingering— hesitation when its very existence was under threat? And what could be learned from Lidetu Ayalew’s political oblivion; a fate from which the EPRDF (its Machiavellian benefactor) was unwilling—and unable—to save him from?

The danger of political vacillation is exemplified no better than in a recent event in the EPRDF. It is a narrative of how Meles Zenawi triumphed over his rivals in the TPLF in the early 2000s. He was virtually ousted from power after losing an internal debate over the Technical Arrangement, a blueprint for cease fire drawn by the international community that ignored a fundamental Ethiopian demand: restore status-quo-ante before engaging in formal negotiation with the Eritrean government. At a low point for him, a group of African leaders, who were in Addis for an annual AU head-of-states gathering openly queried “if a coup-detat had taken place in Ethiopia.” But even his ardent rivals, who were by then convinced that he should be removed, inauspiciously hesitated, calculating(wrongly, as we now know) that they could remove him with no less ease after the war had been fought and won. But the right moment to remove him elapsed, never to return again; even though the war he was against had gone Ethiopia’s way. A rare chance had been allowed to slip fortuitously. (But in fairness, he too had share in the victory.

But that is another story.) Having learned from his rivals' mistake, Meles went on to demolish them at the first opportunity.

Meles' rivals are now valuable part of the opposition. Their experience is instructive: in politics opportunity knocks only rarely. It should be exploited at the first opening. This is why if the new opportunity created by the ruling of the Court of Cassation is wasted, a long dry spell would be inevitable—one that would threaten the existence of the legal opposition.

The opposition has an exciting assortment of leaders. They are educated, have experience, are well intentioned, and crucially, are trusted by the people. The post-election paralysis could not reasonably be attributed to the quality of leadership. The shortcoming is rather in the lack of strategy. No one prepared for 99.6% "win" by the EPRDF. Its announcement triggered a confusion in which no one knew where the opposition was going what objectives were suddenly reprioritized. It was a predictable reaction to a profound surprise. Considered from this perspective, the opposition's moment of hesitation after the election "results" were announced is fathomable.

But two very long months have since passed. A new situation has cropped up in the meantime, and its time to craft a new strategy that will soberly define what the opposition's response will be to the outrage of the election "result." On this strategy hangs the fate of the legal opposition. This is an undertaking that will test the smarts of the very best the opposition has; and all things considered, the odds are in their favor to articulate a sagacious roadmap. But in these difficult times, the deeply entrenched blame culture in Ethiopian politics poses a particularly menacing threat to them. This is a time when the focus should be on opportunities and not on problems. Which way the opposition goes will be a reflection of the strength of leadership. It must establish the potency to fight and defeat the blame culture that has recurrently damaged the cohesion of the opposition.

The Ethiopian public abhors weakness more than injustice. In this respect, it is in tandem with a global trait; one that binds all cultures. This is why so many people express preference for the EPRDF over Lidetu Ayalew. Despite the cynical effort by Lidetu to spin his apparent cowardice in 2005 in to a chronicle of an ideological rift between an extremist and moderate leadership, his cowardly retreat from an epic confrontation ensued in the full glare of the public and has

relegated him to political oblivion. Not only will this episode haunt his future political career (to his credit, he still hasn't given up), but it will also dominate his legacy. The failure of the EPRDF to prop him at a crucial juncture goes to show, in part, how contemptuous it is of weakness and cowardice. (But it hasn't abandoned him altogether. They expect him to be handy if the opposition re-emerges strengthened.) EPRDF hates all things that is not part of it, but its Davis and Goliath story when it fought the Derg predisposes it to at least respect those who have the vigor to stand up for their beliefs.

There is a fine line between recklessness and cowardice. It is not beyond the power of opposition leaders to position the optimum balance between the two poles. By finding that point, the ruling by the Court of Cassation gives them an opportunity to lead from the center. They should seize it.

58. To Donors: Time to Stop Aiding EPRDF

By Eskinder Nega, July 10th, 2010

Coming only six years after the Watergate calamity, Ronald Reagan was almsot literally “the man on a horseback” who rode triumphantly in to Washington to save the disconsolate Republican Party.

(And the country, many of his partisans insist.) His victory was celebrated in many capitals around the world, too; but with no more passion than in Pretoria, South Africa, where a morally bankrupt apartheid precariously held sway.

By the time Reagan secured the presidency in the early eighties, UN resolution 1761, which called for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, was two decades old. But because the practicality of sanctions, if not the moral grounds, was adamantly disputed by Western countries, the resolution was not implemented by most rich countries upon whom the South African economy—the largest and best in Africa—relied on for its vitality. As British PM Harold Wilson, of the labor party, opined in 1964, two years after the resolution was passed, “even if the sanctions are fully effective, they would harm the people we are most concerned about—the (black) Africans.”

Reagan came to office not merely as a reluctant sanctions disclaimer in the tradition of Wilson, but a keen ally of South Africa against the spreading influence of the Soviet Union in Africa; delighting and invigorating the ruling National Party in Pretoria. Instead of sanctions, Chester Crocker, Reagan's Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, formulated a policy of constructive engagement; which envisioned using incentives to push South Africa away (slowly, he admitted) from apartheid. But only three years later, a fatal blow against constructive engagement was to be delivered courtesy of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who called it “an abomination, an unmitigated disaster” during a widely publicized visit to the US. The alliance (against communism) between Washington and Pretoria, he said, was “immoral and evil.”

Graciously but intractably rebuffed by “realists” in Washington, the Archbishop, a Nobel peace prize winner, returned home with few converts to his credit within the Reagan administration. But his effect on the rest of the nation, including the Republican Party, was so powerful it took only two more years before a Republican controlled Congress was to overturn a Presidential veto and impose devastating sanctions; which was one of the key ingredients that made a peaceful transition to democracy possible. In fact, the subsequent unconditional negotiation between the South African government and the ANC, the largest black liberation movement, would have been implausible without the burden of sanctions on the National Party. Thus came the abrupt end of constructive engagement, toxically tainted by association with apartheid, from the official discourse of US foreign policy. But almost three decades later, it is still stealthily the defining theme of many Western countries policies in multitude of authoritarian countries—Ethiopia being one of the best examples.

By the unanimous reckoning of donor countries embassies in Addis, the entire span of EPRDF's two decades rule falls miserably short of international standards. Eighteen years ago, one year after the advent of the EPRDF to power, when Ethiopia's first multi-party local election was held absent major opposition groups, notably the OLF, a key coalition partner of the transitional government then in power, the shortcoming was noted but tolerated amiably. Constructive engagement, by now rebranded quite insipidly as “quite diplomacy”, was deemed the best response. As such, bilateral and multilateral aid to Ethiopia rose phenomenally between 1992-1998, reaching peak levels in both average and total levels, when an unexpected war with Eritrea put a stop to a rising momentum. But even the war did not deter two countries, the US and UK,

from sending more aid than ever to Ethiopia; no doubt anxiously hoping that it will buy them some leverage.

However, the EPRDF doggedly snubbed attempts to influence its internal policies. That something was amiss with donors' strategy was vivid as early as 1995, three years after the first election, when a nationwide election under a new constitution, again held in the absence of major opposition groups, was marred by serious electoral irregularities as donor countries looked on helplessly. An additional three years later, an unexpected war was to break between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the ultimate test for "quite diplomacy", buttressed by years of diplomatic, political and financial investments, summarily crystallized. And much to the exasperation of its architects it failed the test wretchedly. The EPRDF remained impenetrable, oblivious, and perhaps even contemptuous, of its international partners. The policy of engagement had clearly and dramatically failed. It was apparent that sooner or later a radical alteration of policy was inescapable.

But something of truly momentous proportion was to happen in the meantime: 9/11. And everything—that is, everything!—changed.

Unsurprisingly, and quite reasonably, the war on terror was thrust to center stage; with anarchic Somalia elevating the relationship between the US (the largest and most influential donor) and Ethiopia to a new level of urgency and comradeship. But tragically, with the instinctive propensity of the Bush administration to hysteria, all other issues were not merely downgraded to lower levels but were doomed to irrelevance. This single-issue centered relationship was to culminate in the mid-2000s, at the height of Ethiopia's backslide to overt authoritarianism in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, when Ethiopia became the largest recipient of US military assistance in the horn, with more than 100 US military personnel training and working with the Ethiopian military. The US and Ethiopian militaries ties included, in the words of a Pentagon spokesperson (during the Bush presidency), "intelligence sharing, arms aid and training that gives Ethiopians the capacity to defend borders, intercept terrorists and, "—be prepared for this—"weapons of mass destruction."

With the advent of a new administration in the US, this time instinctively but not dogmatically wary of single-issue dominated relationships, aid bureaucracies, who overwhelmingly favor

continuation of present policies, had to brace for renewed calls for reevaluation. Changing gear, a new line of argument was popularized, which maintains that Ethiopia is one of handful countries where aid money is disbursed transparently and efficiently; unlike the rest of Africa where much of it is squandered by corrupt officials. But independent researches have since gone to refute the assertion. The researches show that a substantial portion of aid money poured in to Ethiopia has been diverted to buy support and vote for the ruling party, admittedly a morally less reprehensible crime than outright corruption; but still a terrible waste of scarce funds that even donor countries could ill-afford to throw away indefinitely. And more damningly, Transparency International, the international corruption watchdog, ranks Ethiopia at 126, below Nigeria at 121, in its latest corruption perception indexes (2009)

The “results” of election 2010 has profoundly shocked donor countries (and even aid bureaucracies), too. There is now less resistance to a reevaluation of policy. Perhaps the only remaining hurdle is the lingering suspicion that the gains of the past few years will be reversed and that the poor will suffer disproportionately. These are legitimate concerns that need to be addressed thoroughly and intelligently. But no nation has democratized without some pain and sacrifice. The public knows this, and informal surveys show it overwhelmingly supporting a link between aid and democratization. If the donors are serious about the peaceful and legal means to change that they speak much about, this is the time to step in and support it. It is time for donors to stop financing the making of a one party state.

59. To EPRDF: Dissolve New Parliament (It is Legal !!!)

By Eskinder Nega, July 2nd, 2010

The preparation for the elections in May 2010 was more than a year in the making in the PM's office. Abay Tsehaye, once a fixture in popular imagination as one of several mystic leaders who were really running the EPRDF behind the public persona of Meles Zenawi, but later to be demystified, publicly humiliated and now a grateful underling with a ministerial portfolio as national security advisor approached the PM's office every morning with a judicious expression. Invariably, he was impeccably attired, and frequently held a thin folder in one of his hands. And for what time they deemed necessary, Abay had almost exclusive access (but not always) to the

PM while he briefed him on an range of national security developments; but which, according to sources, often ended up being dominated by the approaching elections. Meles had insisted on preparing thoroughly for mass unrest, particularly in Addis; with a contingency plan even for an emergency evacuation of the palace. Tens of thousands of security personnel were trained and deployed in and around Addis; the latest vehicles and firearms purchased; and intelligence (both human and electronics) was beefed up. All part of a concerted effort “if possible, to deter; if not, to contain and crush riots.” Indeed, each stage of the plan had gone faultlessly; gratifying habitually worrying Meles. And they were all to be rewarded when Election Day came and went peacefully.

But what neither Meles Zenawi nor his security apparatus prepared for, nor foresee, was a party machine that was to deliver more than it was meant to (the 99 .6% “victory”) – a Pyrrhic victory that has shattered the moral foundation of the system.

Meles Zenawi approached the election by the book. He set a strategy: win the election by any means necessary. He afforded an efficient management: look no further than the tens of thousands of security personnel deployed with clockwork precision. He articulated a unique political vision: revolutionary democracy, as he eccentrically calls it. And he tried to establish a personality cult: women and youth were encouraged to wear t-shirts bearing his image. (Everyone stopped wearing them after the first day.)

What failed spectacularly, while he was busy elsewhere, was the judgment of his party underlings. Their obtuse single-mindedness has pushed the system to the brink by giving it an electoral “victory” that could be believed by none. This illustrates the chronic lack of quality middle-rankers—the true believers— that is precariously dogging the EPRDF. In the hysteria that followed the 2005 elections, millions of new recruits were literally conscripted in to the EPRDF with no regard to standard recruitment guidelines. Many of them have moved up the ladder to middle ranking positions owing to superior education over long time members. There was an implicit, though not quite formally articulated, understanding to their mass enlistment: they will serve and they expect to be rewarded in return. It’s strictly a utilitarian relationship. And that is what essentially prevailed in this election. They were asked to deliver (by whatever means necessary); they did, and they expect to be rewarded. Beyond that, it’s for the real politicians to pick up the pieces.

The EPRDF leadership slyly recognizes that the absence of overt protests by the public is not an acknowledgment of the new status quo; which has palpably slammed the door on peaceful dissent in all but name. Neither does it need to be reminded of King Menelik, who after proclaiming one of his edicts inquired about the public's reaction only to be told by thrilled aides that there were none, reportedly said, ' Ah, this means they are against it,' to dramatize the public's dangerously suppressed anger. This anger will sooner or later seek an outlet; it will not remain bottled up forever. And the indefensible "result" of the election has also fortuitously reduced the EPRDF grassroots—who, unlike the party's top brass, live amongst the people—in to an emotional wreck. No one is winning from this election "result." This is where the role of Meles Zenawi is imperative to thwart a looming disaster for his party and the nation. His domination of his party is no more simply intellectual. A bungled election has elevated it to an emotional level as well. The party grassroots look up to him to lead them out of moral wilderness. He should rise up to the call of leadership and foresight.

Here is a roadmap for the EPRDF out of the quandary: even with the specious legal wrangling over a re-run over, it's still possible for the EPRDF to legally realize fresh elections within the coming six months. What is needed is only the political will—really the will of Meles Zenawi—to dissolve the new parliament in accordance with Article 60 of the Constitution.

Here is the Constitution in its own words:

Ethiopian Constitution: Article 60

Dissolution of the House

1. With the consent of the House, the Prime Minister may cause the dissolution of the House before the expiry of its term in order to hold new elections.
2. The President may invite political parties to form a coalition government within one week, if the Council of Ministers of a previous coalition is dissolved because of the loss of its majority in the House. The House shall be dissolved and new elections shall be held if the political parties cannot agree to the continuation of the previous coalition or to form a new majority coalition.

3. If the House is dissolved pursuant to sub-Article 1 or 2 of this Article, new elections shall be held within six months of its dissolution.

4. The new House shall convene within thirty days of the conclusion of the elections.

5. Following the dissolution of the House, the previous governing party of coalition of parties shall continue as a caretaker government. Beyond conducting the day to day affairs of government and organizing new elections, it may not enact new proclamations, regulations or decrees, nor may it repeal or amend any existing law. (End of Article.)

Sub Article 1 is evidently originally tailored for the enduring EPRDF strategy to hold on to power up to the last minute, and when on the verge of being overwhelmed negotiate within the confines of the Constitution. But whatever the Machiavellian intent of its framers may have been, it also gives both the PM and the EPRDF the legal framework to correct the present crisis brought about by the ridiculous margin of “victory”. They need to seize it and employ it to the advantage of the nation.

As is clearly stipulated in sub-Article 1, the PM can dissolve parliament by the consent of its majority for what ever reason he sees fit. And what better *raison d’être* than an election result discredited by even those who voted for the “winning” party. Only a simple majority is required for dissolution, not a two thirds super-majority. But even if the law had required a super majority, no doubt that EPRDF parliamentarians can be counted on to deliver every single vote required. Parliamentarians are expected to vote for the party line at all times. Unlike most democracies, conscience is belligerently discouraged from playing a role in how they vote. In fact, party teaching maintains that seats won under the banner the party belongs to the EPRDF; for it to use as it thinks best. A diversion is defined as a breach of contract between voter and parliamentarian. The penalty is a swift recall, as had once happened against Seye Abraha et al after their fallout with Meles Zenawi. Parliamentarians will challenge the ethos only at the certain peril of their political careers. Few will dare to tread on that path if the EPRDF leadership is to opt for a re-run. But in all likelihood, it is safe to assume that they are less than enthusiastic about joining a thoroughly discredited parliament and would welcome a fresh election that offer them some chance of being elected legitimately.

Once a vote of dissolution is carried out successfully, what will remain is fresh elections in accordance with sub-Article 3 within six months. Such an opening for the nation and the EPRDF, entirely within the legal and constitutional framework, something the EPRDF is adamant about, is what Meles should be encouraged to do by his true friends—his true local and international friends.

60. Ethiopia: The politics of imagined genocide

By **Eskinder Nega**, January 7th, 2011

The cries of “Shame on you!!!” by groups of protesters occasionally resonate outside the offices of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). A wide range of issues irk the protesters.

Sometimes it would be the ACLU’s spirited defense of the First Amendment rights of the Ku Klux Klan. At other times, it would be the no less passionate defense of Neo-Nazis and scores of other fringe groups.

The convictions of the ACLU and most of the lawyers that constitute the core of its membership, however, could broadly be described as left-to the-center (in the American, not the European sense). What then could explain ACLU’s defense of the First Amendment rights of white supremacists KKK and Neo-Nazis?

“It was no-brainer to take these cases in the sense of the First Amendment principle. Did we want these cases? Did we want to receive those phone calls?” an ACLU once official told a group of protesters outside his office. “Hell no, but once it came it was no-brainer. We had to defend them (KKK).” Chip away the First Amendment rights of extremists and the rights of everyone else will be endangered, argued the official.

Partially because I have always been inspired by the principled stance of the ACLU, and partly because I adamantly believe that the trial of the imprisoned Derg officials is not only about our past, but also, by the power of precedence it sets, also essentially about our future, I have defended their right to a fair trial (which ranges from prosecutorial impartiality and

independence to competence of defense lawyers and judges) and disputed their genocide convictions.

But in doing so, I have inadvertently been mistaken for a Derg sympathizer. To Professor Tecola W Hagos, an established public intellectual, whom I respect and admire, I “seem to admire the arrogance and blood thirsty posturing of those sub-human creatures.” To Frew Kebede Tiba , an impressive up- and-coming public intellectual, whom I have also come to respect and admire, the “tone” of my analysis is not only ridden with sympathy for the Derg but could be tainted with an ulterior motive.

Aghast, I read and read my article, carefully scanning for the tone, the alleged insinuation between the lines that imply sympathy for the Derg. Alas, I could find nothing! But this is me: the accused! I concede that I could not be a credible judge. That role would have to be assumed by third, neutral parties. But until they come out in more numbers(that is, in addition to Abebe Gelaw), my conscience would not rest without stating this:

I am no more a Dergist for defending the rights to a fair trial of imprisoned Derg officials than the ACLU is racist for defending the First Amendments rights of the KKK and Neo- Nazis. I stand for principle like the ACLU; I stand for the truth as a journalist; and because of the powerful precedent this trial and its outcome sets(indeed, for the whole of Africa not just Ethiopia) I am worried about the course it has taken as a citizen.

Addressing the issue of genocide, I wrote last week:

“(The widely known) definition (of genocide by the United Nations) was an outcome of a compromise between Stalin-led Soviet Union and the West in 1948, when the UN was established. While the West pushed for the inclusion of political groups in the genocide clause, the Soviets, with the legacy of the Red Terror in their immediate past, resisted, and finally had their way when it was excluded. To many, the UN convention has been lacking ever since. And many countries, including Ethiopia, went on to incorporate political groups in their national genocide laws.”

But curiously, both Tecola (directly) and Frew (indirectly), reproach me for being uninformed about Ethiopia’s law and basing my analysis (as many people do) on the UN’s incomplete definition. Thus, Tecola says,

“Eskinder Nega, after going through some torturous and wrong analysis of the Genocide Convention and the meaning of “Genocide” (ends up with the wrong conclusion about the Derg trials.) In the Penal Code of Ethiopia, in Article 281, it is clearly stated that a “political group” is one of the protected groups. The 1948 Genocide Convention that Ethiopia was among the first to ratify in 1949, does not mention “political group” as one of the protected groups. Such fact does not in any way prevent Ethiopia from identifying and prosecuting and punishing crimes committed against “political” groups. There seems to be a confused understanding of the interplay of international agreements with domestic sovereign power in Eskinder’s analysis.” Frew’s account is based on the same premise as Tecola’s:

“(Considering) the fact that the Ethiopian Penal Code of 1957 pre-existed the commission of the crimes, there is no legal ground for disputing(as Eskinder has) that the suspects could not be charged with genocide. Yes, our law is not co-extensive with the genocide convention or the national laws of other countries which excluded political groups from protection, but it does not contradict any rule of international law and it better protects Ethiopian citizens.” I am at a complete loss where I overlooked, disputed the right to, or questioned the good judgment of the inclusion of political groups in the genocide clause of the Ethiopian Penal Code. On the contrary, in line with Frew’s argument, I believe it was the right thing to do because it corrects a fundamental shortcoming of the UN convention. Nor did I dispute the right of the SPO to file charges of genocide. What I questioned was the SPO’s prosecutorial impartiality and independence in determining whether genocide charges should have been pursued. Politics, more than the weight of evidence, led the SPO in that direction. The Derg trials should be about justice as protection and defense of the civil liberties of victims (those killed, tortured and imprisoned) through due process of law, a process in which prosecutorial impartiality and independence is of critical importance. The Derg trails do not measure up to this standard.

Professor Tecola also dismisses the issue of the other international standards for the trials that I had raised. “Another misguided and disingenuous argument is to claim that the judicial system of Ethiopia in Ethiopia does not meet international standards; therefore the convictions and decisions of punishments are erroneous. What type of international standard is to be used, and what authority for such insistence could such individuals present to convince us of the validity of their arguments,” asks the good Professor.

Standards and authority there are. Ethiopia is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR.), which protects the right to a fair trial. The statutes of this covenant are legally binding on Ethiopia. The right to a fair trial is protected in articles 14 and 16 of this covenant. The articles stipulate that all accused persons have a right to a fair trial.

As a minimum, a fair trial must meet these standards:

The right to be heard by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal

The right to a public hearing

The right to be heard within a reasonable time

The right to (a competent) counsel

The right to interpretation

The Derg trials clearly fail short of at least three of these five standards(tribunal, reasonable time and competent counsel) They bear mightily on the issue of a fair trial. In both the US and New Zealand, where Tecola and Frew reside, the absence of any one of these standards would be enough either for an overturning of a conviction or a mistrial. The absence of a broad network of human resources—qualified judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers— needed to undertake a major genocide trial would have been a deterrent for a prudent SPO and a government concerned about a fair trial. Unfortunately for us as a nation, this was not meant to be. And what should unite us therefore has ended up dividing us.

Both Tecola and Frew fail to vouch for the competence, independence and impartiality of prosecutors, defense lawyers and judges involved in this saga, but still insist on the sanctity of the convictions. And frankly, I am distressed that the issue of a fair trial is being underplayed by two distinguished Ethiopian scholars, particularly when capital punishment is involved. Professor Tecola has rightly maintained that all countries dispense justice with what they have, not with what they should have. But this argument would have been more convincing if the charges were limited to the more earthly “crimes against humanity” and “aggravated murder.” Only the compelling presence of overwhelming evidence (as in Rwanda) would support an argument in favor of a genocide prosecution with whatever resources a country has. The arguments and evidences in favor of an Ethiopian genocide, however, are at best murky. Risking the complications of a major genocide trial in this context was at best reckless. And crucially, the outcome has denied us the closure we need as a nation.

Frew rightly points out “the essence of the law against genocide is not about numbers” but more of intentions. True. And he goes on to say, “the Derg has tried to eliminate parts of political groups standing in opposition to its revolution.” Again, true. But does this make the Derg an anomaly of its time, as genociders would be under normal circumstances? All opposition groups intended the same for the Derg. Opposition groups also intended the same against each other. The TPLF, for example, murdered the entire leadership of the TLF, its competitor in Tigray. All African governments, save Botswana, also intended the same against their opponents. And most of them killed to that effect. The suppression of Communism in Indonesia, Iran, Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Spain entailed the lives of tens of thousands Communists in each country— a terrible, ghastly “permanent solution.” Unlike the Derg, they succeeded in eliminating entire Communist parties. The lives lost in each of these cases were no less than in the Derg’s cases—in fact, much more in some of them. By the standard Frew proposes, genocide stops being an historical aberration and becomes a permanent feature of the pre-1989 past. This trivializes both the spirit and memory of the true genocides in history—chiefly, that of European Jews at the hands of Nazis. This greatest of all follies in human history becomes just one more crime, distinguished from many others only by numbers.

The world changed radically—for the better— with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The moral clarity we have today was only a preserve of the West before the implosion of the Soviet bloc. Unless past events are contextualized—inside and outside a court—within this framework, our understanding of them will be fundamentally flawed. And the end result will be imagined genocides throughout the world.

Finally, Professor Tecola, at the supreme height of his eloquence, reminds us all of the victims:

“(The Derg’s) victims were not dogs and cats, but real human beings: young and old, men and women, school children and vibrant youngsters et cetera. How about their torrent of blood? Their suffering? Their memories? It is not some fading memory either; it is seared in the ethos of those who suffered: Us, millions of Us!”

I hear you, sir. I hear you, loud and clear!!! If you only knew how difficult this is for me!!!

Melakm Gena to all.

61. Ethiopia's Derg: Guilty of GENOCIDE or POLITICIDE?

By [Eskinder Nega](#), December 31st, 2010

Remarkably small and frail for his famed ferocity, imprisoned Major Melaku Tefera almost always stood in the proud poise of a soldier half his age, utterly expressionless—the picture perfect stoic—as he listened attentively to multitude of witnesses’

account of his dreaded years at the helm of Begemder and Simen, one of Ethiopia’s twelve provinces in the 70’s.

Hot-tempered and ambitious (but probably impeded by having graduated at the bottom of his class—34th out of 38, according to a recent book), Melaku was barely 25 years old when he stormed in to the near-anarchic regional capital, Gonder, as an administrator-extraordinaire allotted with unlimited power. Confronted by an urban youth that had almost rebelled against the state in its virtual entirety, and a well-armed rural based opposition, EDU, an outfit led by close relatives and senior officials of deposed Haile-Selassie, inexperienced Melaku was supremely under-qualified to be any regime’s point-man to stave off disaster in a critical province. But stave off disaster was exactly what he went on to do—surprising both his friends and critics.

The price of success, unfortunately, entailed considerable human toll (to little surprise.) But much to the horror of the public, Melaku, a native of the region, defended—even relished—the obvious excesses. As painfully narrated by scores of witnesses in court, Melaku, who ran a personal, vicious death-squad, insisted that the bodies of his victims, many of them shot in the head from close range, lay in the streets—where some were eaten by stray dogs. In all, 971 persons, mostly teenagers, were executed by the orders of Melaku. Thousands more were imprisoned and sadistically tortured.

When it was time to pass judgment, three judges who presided over the hearings convicted him unanimously of “inhuman and extra-judicial killings,” torture, and “barbaric cruelty.” They also found him guilty of one more crime: genocide. The penalty: death, which is still pending.

But have Melaku and the Derg regime as a whole really committed genocide as their convictions assert? A year after the assumption of state power by the EPRDF, in August 1992, a Special

Prosecutors Office (SPO), the first of its kind in Africa, was established and mandated with prosecutorial powers over human rights abuses committed during the 17 years reign of the Derg. And with the stated intention to prosecute the entire leadership of the regime for human rights abuses before a national court, a precedent—to much acclaim— was set in Africa.

But “the precedent” was to be plagued by controversy and doubt from the very beginning. For starters, Ethiopia was a nation chronically deficient in prosecutors who specialized in criminal law. Worse, the few that existed fell far short of international standards. The same held true for potential defense lawyers—particularly those related to human rights issues. And to cap it all, potential judges were no more prepared and adequate for the task that lay ahead. In other words, the broad network of human resources that the mission required could hardly be met by one of the least developed nations in the world. There was no way that international standards could be met. This being a foregone conclusion, the credibility of the outcome—save those related to the obvious excesses— was marred from the very beginning.

Little surprise then, when it went on to take two years, between August 1992 and October 1994, for the SPO to file its first charges. And before it was ready to close shop, having prosecuted its last case in 2006, 12 years and 2 months were to elapse—a world record. This was the longest trial in human history— a record that will certainly never be surpassed. In this delay of justice—to which ill-prepared prosecutors, judges and defense lawyers have each amply contributed their share—lies one of the most serious shortcomings(justice delayed is justice denied, as the saying goes) of the “the precedent.”

Tragically, aside from the extreme delay, there was to be an even more serious controversy. The SPO, no doubt prodded by the EPRDF, was not content to charge the fallen regime merely with the uncontroversial counts of “crimes against humanity” and “aggravated murder” (which would have sufficed for convictions and the maximum penalty), but charged them, controversially, with additional counts of genocide.

Genocide is one of the worlds most recognized and widely understood words—cutting across civilizations, languages and cultures. While the legal and scholastic definition is still a work in progress, the layman’s conception of genocide is astoundingly astute: wholesale murder of a people due to their ethnic or racial identities. This is surprisingly close to the most widely known

explanation of genocide, as articulated by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG): any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part,

1—a national,

2—ethnic,

3—racial

4—or religious group,

as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

However, like all things UN, this definition was an outcome of a compromise between Stalin led Soviet Union and the West in 1948, when the UN was established. While the West pushed for the inclusion of political groups in the genocide clause, the Soviets, with the legacy of the Red Terror in their immediate past, resisted, and finally had their way when it was excluded. To many, the UN convention has been lacking ever since. And many countries, including Ethiopia, went on to incorporate political groups in their national genocide laws.

But what is the standard for genocide when the political group “is destroyed (only) in part,” as was the case for the EPRP in Ethiopia?

The international precedent, as set in the Yugoslavia trials, stresses that “the part targeted must be significant enough to have an impact on the (number of the) group as a whole.” A substantial portion of the group must physically perish to meet the strict criteria of genocide. (Some advocate broader criteria.) And gauged from this strict standard, no political group in Ethiopia, even the EPRP, the Derg’s worst victim, has lost a substantial portion (say, 1/4th) of its membership to extra-judicial executions. In fact, the vast majority of the imprisoned were not executed. The case of the head of SPO itself, Girma wakjera, once a member of the EPRP, who was imprisoned(and tortured) but later released, illustrates the absence of intent to destroy all or a substantial portion of the oppositions’ members. Ironically, some of the judges who presided

over the trials had similar stories to that of Girma Wakjera, but still went on to convict them of genocide.

So, if genocide is to be ruled out, how then are we to describe the thousands of extra-judicial killings of the Derg?

Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr, two prominent genocide scholars, have coined the term “politicide” to describe the wide-spread extra-judicial killings “when the victims are defined primarily in their hierarchical position (in an organization) or political opposition to a regime.” And which is exactly what best broadly describes the Derg’s victims- particularly during the Red terror, for which its officials have been mostly convicted of genocide and sentenced to death.

Derg officials have been sentenced to death for the wrong reasons. Whatever the courts have said, they are not guilty of genocide. And as we consider their plea for forgiveness as a nation, we must unavoidably take this overriding issue in to consideration.

Last part of this article: next week.

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62. Ethiopia: Forgiving Derg officials for Christmas

By [Eskinder Nega](#), December 24th, 2010

Come January 1974, Ethiopia was quite as a calm sea. The low-key insurgency in Eritrea, the only organized political movement in the country, was going nowhere. Having successfully confined the insurgency to the periphery low-lands, the army’s casualty figures

(after more than ten years of fighting) were still remarkably low. The student movement had peaked in the early 70s but was losing steam as the mid-70s approached. (As were student movements elsewhere.) But whatever the intensity of the students, their failure to link with the wider populace had always meant they were benignly semi-tolerable. And for a few years there

was an unexplained, sudden spur of economic activity. To many, a take-off, closely resembling that of south east Asia, looked imminent.

But just below the surface were also the simmering dangers. Generously buttressed by the Soviet Union, Somalia, which had territorial claim over a fifth of Ethiopia's land mass, was building a large, highly mechanized modern army—one clearly intended for a Blitzkrieg in the eastern lowlands. And Ethiopia was lagging badly. (Three years later, a confident, militarized Somalia struck taking advantage of the disarray at the center.) Haile-Selassie was on the verge of senility; his designated successor was incapacitated by a stroke; and, fatefully, there were no strong hands to stir the reigns of government. The regime was visibly drifting.

A month later, in February, the implosion of a new dawn, unsolicited and unorganized, caught the nation utterly unawares. The catalyst: news of devastating famine in the north and the oil-shock of 1973 and 1974; which eventually quadrupled prices and triggered unprecedented inflationary pressures. Between February and June 1974, broad lawlessness engulfed the nation; threatening an outbreak of anarchy. No civilian government was able to assert authority. To avert chaos, intervention by the army was only inevitable and necessary. And it came (officially) on 28 June 1974(they had been organizing covertly and half-heartedly for weeks.)A hundred and nine representatives of the nation's 40 armed units, ranging from privates to Majors (higher ranking officers were barred), convened in Addis and established the "Derg", "Committee" in Geez, once Ethiopia's dominant language but now spoken only by the Orthodox clergy. To chair them, they opted for Major Mengistu Haile- Mariam, in deference to the primacy of the second division, then the nation's most powerful, which he represented. No less, his humble background and dubious ethnicity conveniently personified the revolutionary spirit of the times.

Two and a half months later, the Derg had deposed Haile-Selassie, on September 12, 1974, and imprisoned the entirety of the regime's civilian and military leaders promising "change without bloodshed." Three days later, it renamed itself the Provisional Military Administrative Council and formally assumed state power under a new chairperson, Lt General Aman Andom. But as soon as the proud General learned—much to his outrage—that the Derg only intended him as a figure head, while real power still lay with Major Mengistu, a showdown was unavoidable.

Ninety tense days later, the Derg, incensed and intimidated by Aman's refusal to play along, settles on showing—to friend and foe alike—who really was in charge. And tragically, when nothing more than a simple dismissal of the General would have sufficed (as one of Haile-Selassie's senior officials, Aman posed no real danger), the Derg succumbs to inexplicable hysteria and opts for a massacre; foolishly, and with no apparent due cause, reversing its “no bloodshed” promise to the nation. Along with Aman, his close associates and bodyguards, more than 50 other senior Haile-Selassie officials were brutally murdered and all buried in a mass grave. The nation was literally stunned in to outraged silence. Not even the harshest critics of the fallen regime approved.

The backlash was soon in full motion. Scores of opposition groups sprang up; and suddenly, the nation went from no opposition to host of the largest number of political organizations in Africa. Oppression bred resistance; not the hoped for submission. And resistance disastrously bred even more bloodshed. The low-point came three years later, in February 1977, when Mengistu, no more hindered by moderate Derg members(Brigadier General Teferi Banti et al), whom he had just eliminated in a Palace-coup, proclaimed the advent of “Red Terror” in response to the “White Terror” of the Derg's most adamant opponent, the EPRP.

The concept of Red and White Terrors was imported from the early days of the Russian revolution, which had resulted in a civil war. Both sides in that war—Red Communists and White Non-Communists— embraced violence as a vital political weapon, calculating that it would be indispensable to an eventual victory. Leader of the Whites, Lavar Kornilov, for example, instructed his army to “set fire to half of the country and shed the blood of three- fourth of all Russians.” He even ordered the death of “all workers.” The Communists were no less apocalyptic. Explaining the Red Terror in a newspaper article in 1918, they said : “ Do not look in the file of incriminating evidence to see whether or not the accused rose up against the Soviets with arms and words. Ask him instead what class he belongs, what is his background, his education, his profession. These are the questions that will determine the fate of the accused. That is the meaning and essence of the Red Terror.” At least 10 of Russia's 100 million people must be “annihilated,” proclaimed Communist leaders openly.

In Ethiopia , the Derg and its civilian allies, clearly inspired by the precedent set in revolutionary Russia, publicly vowed “to avenge the (lost) life of one revolutionary with the lives of a

thousand anarchists(EPRP members.)” Following up on their threat, thousands of officials (kebele administrators and Revolutionary Guards throughout the country) were armed and bolstered with a government issued “license to kill (netsa ermeja)” edict.

For six infamous months (between February and August), alleged EPRP members, many of them teenagers (some barely in their mid-teens), were hunted mercilessly and summarily executed. Those who escaped execution were imprisoned and mostly tortured. In the end, patently amateurish EPRP death-squads, whom Mengistu had fantastically equated with Korilov’s huge White Army, were to gun down less than 150 officials (the exact figure is disputed), to which the Derg and its civilian allies responded disproportionately with numerous human rights abuses and thousands of executions. But exactly how many thousands will remain as elusive—and controversial—as ever. (Amnesty International’s estimate of 500,000 deaths, however, is grossly exaggerated. Most of the killings happened in Addis, whose population was roughly one million back then.) An ever expanding capacity for incomprehensible violence characterized the Derg’s reign right up the end. Between the end of the Red Terror and its demise in late 1991, for example, the imprisoned Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch, Abune Tewflos, was pitilessly strangled to death (with lead wire), and Mitsewa and Hawazen were wantonly bombed by the air Force, despite the absence of a compelling military target on the ground.

No amount of violence, however, was able to prevent the downfall of the Derg. The end came after seventeen long years, in May 1991; ironically, courtesy of not the political groupings it had feared but from the midst of the political underdogs. Stunned by a defeat that was never supposed to happen, Derg officials, whose larger than life reputations had become part of the public legend, stood humbly in line to give themselves up to the victors. No sight— before or since—amazed the public more. Only one of the 109 members of the Derg, General Haile Melese, defied the new regime by melting into his home region— rural Gonder—and trying to organize an armed resistance. (Hampered by old age and lack of external support, he was doomed almost from the start. He now lives in New Zealand. His valor, however, still stands in sharp contrast to his comrades.)

And for the past twenty years top Derg members have remained in prison, reflecting on their past and the terrible consequences of their reign.(Eritrea seceded, too.) Their controversial(for its

delay and charge of genocide) trial lasted more than twelve years, culminating in the death sentences of 18 of them: Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, Captain Fikre Selassie Wogderes, Colonel Fisseha Desta, Major Berhanu Bayeh, Captain Legesse Asfaw, Major Addis Tedla, Lieutenant Colonel Endale Tessema, Captain Gessese Wolde-Kidan, Major-General Wubshet Dessie, Major Kassaye Aragaw, Colonel Debela Dinsa, Captain Begashaw Atalay, Second Lieutenant Sileshi Mengesha, Colonel Nadew Zekarias, Lieutenant Petros Gebre, Second Lieutenant

Aragaw Yimer, Major Dejene Wondimagegnehu, Lieutenant Desalegn Belay.

And now, as 2003 Ethiopian Christmas approaches (about two weeks from today), more than 37 years after the dramatic events that inadvertently propelled them into the pages of history, they are seeking the nation's absolution. Inevitably, emotions have stirred.

Merry Christmas.

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63. Thoughts on chauvinism in Ethiopia

By [Eskinder Nega](#), December 17th, 2010

“What is it about this (new) cabinet that attracts so much attention?” asks Tsegaye Chama in an article posted on Ethiomedia. (Attacks on fair cabinet, ethnic minority group, Tsegaye Chama December 1, 2010.) “The explanation for this gruesome fixation is simple,” Tsegaye assures readers. And he waves an accusing finger, assumes the moral high-ground, and, quite obviously aiming below the belt, drops the dreaded C word: “(To the Chauvinists) this cabinet is unnatural. It stands in absolute defiance and violation of the natural order of the Ethiopian political power sharing tradition, ” he says.

The heresy, as Tesgaye relates it: The rise of Haile-Mariam Desalegn , an ethnic Welayta, one of the more than 45 minorities that make up the Southern region, to the position of Deputy Prime Minister and heir-apparent to PM Meles Zenawi; who is officially due to retire in 2015. “The

hostility towards His Excellency Haile-Mariam Desalegn is unfathomable. Diaspora opinion-makers are stereotyping and stigmatizing him,” complains Tsegaye.

And lest anyone needs reminding, “the details of our despicable background(history),” is posted in three episodes on YOUTUBE; courtesy of Ben’s (the superfluous pro-EPRDF website. Aiga is the preferred venue of the tiny maladjusted Diaspora) interview with “His Honorable Ato Shiferaw Shigute (President of the Southern region.)”

Little surprise then, if there were the oppressed, there then logically must have been the oppressors. Ideally, twenty years after the triumph of the EPRDF, all are now humbled, guilt-ridden, and eager to uphold the promotion of minorities—their worst victims. “ But the reality is the other way round,” laments Tsegaye. Chauvinists—the die-hard oppressors of yesteryears—are instinctively distressed; and even worse, are “conspiring to perpetuate the historical marginalization of minorities.” To back his claim, he provides links to four articles (by Abebe Gelaw; Elais Kifle; Ephrem Madebo and Eskinder Nega.) And this is “another original crime against (Ethiopia’s) minority ethnic groups,” proclaims Tsegaye.

Chauvinism is a French word. It derives from fictional French soldier, Nicolas Chauvin, who stunned mere mortals with his many prodigious traits in the 18th century. In its political application, though, it is a hate word. A chauvinist is conceited; eactionary; a hater; and ultimately, deluded by a false sense of superiority.

Chauvinism as a political dictum was first extensively used by Soviet Communists; who, as revolutionary champions of “oppressed nations and nationalities,” loudly admonished “Russian chauvinism.” And soon, “progressives” around the world were hard pressed to find a local context. In the US, “white chauvinism” competed with racism to describe the bias against blacks in progressive circles. Even in post-1949 China, only a few years removed from 300+ years of minority Manchu dynasty rule, there was still room for “the evils of Han chauvinism.”(Hans are the 90+ majority in China.) More than four decades later, when the first batch of Ethiopia’s progressives finally emerged in the early 60s, there was even less ambiguity about the certainty of home-bred chauvinism—that of Amhara.

But while chauvinism has seen its rise and fall elsewhere, it has persisted, undiminished and potent as ever, in Ethiopia. Tegaye’s charge is no hasty blunder. Nor is it, as some may suspect,

throwback to a relic of a bankrupt ideology—now a preserve of no more than the dustbin of history. Rather, it is a cold calculation to exploit differences and fears. And thus, a clear and present danger to the nation’s democratic aspirations.

Ethiopia is famously the lone African claimant to national exceptionalism. This self-perceived exceptionalism dates back to the 16th century, when all foreigners were expelled and contacts with the outside world were severed. The case for exceptionalism stresses the exclusivity of Ethiopia’s religions and historical trajectory; and no less, the uniqueness of the nation’s cultures, diets, script and national spirit—what 60s Ethiopian progressives called psychological makeup. And for centuries, the Davidian defense of this exceptionality had been the principal—acclaimed and romanticized— national aim.

Akin to historical Israel, which had multiple languages and 12 tribes (ethnicities), Ethiopia, too, has always been a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic entity. More than 15 languages flourished at the core of Axum between the third and the sixth centuries, the height of the Kingdom’s power and prestige. But as in Israel, where the collective case of exceptionalism and national will was expressed chiefly through one language, Hebrew; Ethiopia’s collective ethos invariably had to be dominantly expressed through one language—first, Geez; and later, Amharic. Charges of Amhara chauvinism conveniently discount this colossal historical fact.

But that the stories that accurately describe modern Ethiopia are complicated is also true. Neither do we live in historical times, with their limited standards and expectations; but rather, we now inhabit a sophisticated, modern world with heightened standards and expectations. And not only Ethiopia’s politics but the core of the collective ethos must adjust to the changed times and circumstances. And in fairness to Ethiopia’s contemporary elites, old and new (barring the disingenuous Machiavellian leaders of the EPRDF), that adjustment, in the form of support for multi-culturalism and thriving Federalism (as opposed to the two-decade centralization of the EPRDF), is virtually unanimous. Ethiopia’s multi-culturalism is not only acknowledged and celebrated, but a broad consensus has emerged for the state’s role in its preservation and cultivation. This is unprecedented in Africa, where indigenous cultures are being uncontroversially undermined; and thus, perhaps, stands as an additional case for Ethiopia’s claim to a unique historical trajectory.

As to Haile-Mariam's specific case, Tsegaye's insincere charges notwithstanding, his ethnicity, however historically victimized, should not protect him from legitimate criticism. He should be held to the very standards we hold other public officials. And gauged by that standard, he fails miserably. There is a story behind his public façade of the heir-apparent. There lurks the true tales of conspiracy and greed. And, far more menacingly, danger to our nation.

With Putin's Russia serving as the role model, Haile-Mariam, who has no power base in the party, government or the security apparatuses, has been slated to play the Medvedev role in post 2015-Ethiopia, where Meles will, if all goes according to plan, continue to call the shots from behind the scenes. As a "Southerner" in a nation without a Southern people, Haile-Mariam has no recourse but rely on the goodwill of Meles.

What's Tsegaye's take on this, the real issue?

64. Wikileak's censure on Seye and Berhanu controversial

By **Eskinder Nega**, December 10th, 2010

The excision of entire passages from a leaked US embassy cable on Seye Abraha, a former Defense Minister turned opposition politician, and Berhanu Nega, a former mayor –elect turned leader of a clandestine opposition based in the US, has stirred bewilderment and disappointment here in Addis Ababa, the nation's capital. The two were conspicuously referred to in a June 2009 cable to Washington by Donald Yamamoto, then US Ambassador to Ethiopia, after a rare meeting with Ethiopia's "elusive hardliner" spy chief, Getachew Assefa.

Wikileaks posted the first two of more than 1300 leaked State Department cables on Ethiopia this week, triggering a new wave of blockades by ETC against proxies that circumvent filters against Ethiopian websites. (Despite their best effort, nonetheless, their "line of defense" is hardly impregnable.)

The revelation of the first Ethiopian cable, dated January 31, 2010, came as part of a notable international story about the Copenhagen accord on climate change. Mandated by the African Union to represent the continent, Meles is a prominent participant in this still on-going saga of

international back-door dealings, public-grand standings and plain old-fashioned diplomatic intrigue. “ Meles (told Under Secretary of State Mario Otero) that the GOE (government of Ethiopia) supports the accord in Copenhagen,” cabled the US embassy to Washington, with obvious glee. But important as this may have been to the international community, it elicited no more than a long yawn from the Ethiopian public. In one of the world’s most improvised nations, climate change could hardly be part of mainstream discourse.

But if only half-heartedly, the Under Secretary, who travelled to Addis primarily to lobby in support of the Copenhagen accords, did raise other issues of keen local interest; and in the process, inadvertently highlighted not only the increasing assertiveness of Meles in his dealings with the world’s lone super power, but also the clear reluctance of the Obama administration to apply pressure on authoritarian regimes. “ Birtukan will vegetate in prison forever,” Meles tells the Americans belligerently. And all Otero could muster in response was a pitiful “(urge to) exercise wise judgment and leadership, and CONSIDER the release of Birtukan Mideksa.” Emboldened, Meles then even goes to risk the mother of all revisionist histories. “Referencing his own struggle against the Derge regime, “details the cable,” Meles said he and his compatriots received no foreign funding, but were willing to sacrifice and die for their cause.” The Americans, in line with their famed short attention spans, were in no position to debate about events two decades in the past. And suddenly, Meles assumes the moral high-ground. There was no stopping him after this.

All in all, Meles comes out the clear winner in this cable: strong, confident, and, most importantly, his private utterances fall in perfect sync with his public pronouncements. The Americans, on the other hand, fall far short of the traditional image of a superpower; sadly, not even that of a receding one. They allow Meles to bully, provoke and lecture them; all in almost meek silence. To all appearances, they stand powerless before him.(Interestingly, not a word about freedom of the press, the principal advocates of democracy until their suppression in 2005, but an argument of sorts over civil society, whose record on democratization in Ethiopia is at best minimal.)

The second cable, dated June 2009, is classified as Secret, a notch higher than the mere confidential status for the first one; and came under a distinctly interesting title: Understanding

the Ethiopian hardliners. Written, classified and filed by Ambassador Donald Yamamoto himself, this is a very personal take of a senior diplomat on a vital national security issue.

But only two lines in to the cable, in a seeming vindication to Professor Easterly's oft repeated adage, "foreigners never have enough at stake to get it right," Yamamoto commits a startling error. "In a rare meeting with the elusive head of the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)," wrote Yamamoto, "and main hardliner within the powerful executive committee of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party, Ambassador and NISS chief Getachew Assefa discussed a wide range of regional and bilateral issues." But Getachew has never been a member of the Executive Committees of neither the EPRDF coalition nor one of its four constituent members, the TPLF; but has been, neither moving up or down, in the Central Committees of both for over two decades.

A few lines later, Yamamoto relates about Getachew's concerns about the OLF and ONLF. He also "spoke at length about former Addis Ababa Mayor-elect Berhanu Nega." And suddenly, inexplicably, the first excision, suggested by the State Department, and obviously accepted by wikileaks and the papers, appear. Presumably, only a few lines are omitted, but one could not help but wonder how "a State Department source," the rationale for the censures, could be involved here. (Or is the State Department, as many wonder, protecting Getachew's sources, too?) Mercifully, the next two lines are spared the censor's sharp scissors, and that "VOA's biased reporting; the dangers of former Defense Minister Seeye Abraha's growing authority within the opposition" are on the "reclusive" spy chief's mind is revealed. All these, and much more, come as introductory summaries; in three unusually lengthy sentences. And only then do the details ensue.

Interestingly, this rare meeting comes courtesy of former US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Irving Hicks, an African American, who is a close confidant of Ethio-Saudi billionaire, Mohammed Al Amoudi. In fairness to Getachew, though he obviously disdains the prospect of a regular meet with foreigners, he tries to compensate by giving Yamamoto a 4 hour marathon audience. (Which was not enough to break the ice between them, however. "Getachew will never be a close contact," Yamamoto informs Washington at the end of his report. And with US' embassy in Asmara cable to Washington about the need for close contact with Eritrean Generals to

encourage a coup against Isaias Afewerki posted by wikileaks, this will no doubt comfort Meles.)

Getachew speaks more like a politician, which he is, than a professional spy chief. “(the US) should brand the OLF and the ONLF as terrorists, and should never meet with them,” he argues. “The Ethiopian government would not meet with extremists in the US who bomb abortion clinics,” he assures Yamamoto, a bit comically. “ The Ambassador responded that there should be closer discussion between Ethiopia and the US on this issue,” reports Yamamoto.(Don’t hold your breath, Getachew.) All juicy, and nothing was omitted. So far, so good.

But then come the details about Getachew’s misgivings about the VOA, and everything after the first sentence is deleted. Where is room for ambiguity here, ask many in the public. No State Department source could even be remotely involved. Why then would wikileaks and the papers agree to the excisions suggested by the State Department?

But worse is in store. A paragraph later, a paragraph in its entirety, numbered 6, is missing. Number 7 is also partially cut. Number 8, as was the case for 6, is deleted entirely. Fortunately, the erasing stops here. The five subsequent paragraphs are there in their entirety. But the take (most probably, no more than a political analysis) of the security chief on Seye Abraha and Berhanu Nega are no where to be found. They are inexplicably removed “ from the public domain.”

Would Manning and Assange, both now languishing in prison, approve of censure, when the safeties of sources are clearly not endangered? Wiki leaks and the papers have a lot of explaining to do.

65. Wikileaks and papers to censure Ethiopian cables

By **Eskinder Nega**, December 3rd, 2010

“(Soon) Everywhere there is a US post (embassy or consulate), there is a diplomatic scandal that will be revealed,” wrote Bradely Manning²², from a US army base outside of Baghdad , to his online friend,Adrian Lamo. “ Hillary Clinton and several thousands diplomats around the world are going to have a heart attack.”(Lamo, a hacker, was horrified and informed the authorities.)

With access to the Defense Department's Siprnet network "14 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 8+ months", over which State Department's cables ranging up to "SECRET NONFORN" level (which means non-US citizens should not see them) are exchanged, Manning was perfectly positioned to deliver on his promise. ("Information should be free. It belongs in the public domain," he reasoned.)

In the end, he was to retrieve 251,287 dispatches from more than 250 US embassies and consulates, all compressed in just 1.6 gigabytes of text files. And 1398 of them are exchanges between the State Department and the US embassy in Addis Ababa. These interactions have, in the words of my well connected source (an American) "...word is US State Dept has been reviewing cables from Ethiopia on wikileaks and fears some of its sources may be placed in real jeopardy—think the newspapers and wikileaks have been trying to censor some of the stuff to avoid such an outcome."

America's most sensitive documents, however, including those that relate to Ethiopia, classified as "TOP SECRET" and above, are not part of the leaked documents. Manning did not hack the network over which they are exchanged.

The New York Times, one of four newspapers to which wikileaks has (unofficially) provided the entire documents, has obviously shared the Ethiopian cables with the Obama administration; which is recommending multitude of omissions to forestall possible compromises of its sources. The Times, as a matter of routine, shares the State Department's concerns with the other papers. (Der Spiegel, Germany; Guardian ,UK; Le Monde ,France; and El Pais Spain.) Each paper decides independently whether to accept the State Department's proposed excision in its entirety or just parts of it. But as Dean Baquet, the Times Washington bureau chief, says, "(those) requests are taken very seriously." The NYT has agreed to some, but not all of the omissions suggested by the State Department so far, according to its editors. No major documents related to Africa have been released to date.

The leaked cables, which cover the period between 2005 and 2010, were sent, from, or to, the US embassy in Addis. Those sent from Addis were intended to be read by officials up to the level of Secretary of State; and should be, as is the case with the cables from other embassies to Washington, mostly drafted by the Ambassador or subordinates. How they perceived, negotiated,

dealt, and maybe pressured Meles Zenawi will all soon be, as Manning intended, part of the public domain; no doubt embarrassing both sides.

But the unsettling prospect for the Americans, who reportedly rate their alliance with the EPRDF in Somalia as critical, is the extent to which the leaks may damage what is, by most insiders account, and already precarious relationship. Quick to be slighted, Meles abhors criticism. “He is oblivious to the distinction between a critique and a challenge to integrity,” says one of those he expelled (illegally) from the EPRDF leadership. And in a stroke of bad luck for the Americans, this leak has coincided with his peak petulance towards the West.(This is why Seyoum Mesfin, probably his best friend and most trusted confidant, is heading to Beijing instead of Washington as Ambassador.) Perhaps the only solace for the Americans is that the most discomforting cables will most probably be from the Bush administration. Even then, some sort of fallout—or at least unease— is almost inevitable.

An interesting read will be the cables of Vicki Huddleston and Donald Yamamoto, who lean towards Democrats but had assumed high profile positions under a patently rightist Republican administration. And more intriguingly, light could also be shed on Yamamoto’s subsequent demotion, where he still lingers. He now publicly decries the 2006 US backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia as a “mistake.” Pundits are eager to learn if and when he had expressed opposition to the invasion when the Bush administration was in office.

Ethiopian troops first crossed in to Somalia in September 2006. By November 2006, the UN was reporting of Ethiopia’s violations of 1992 arms-embargo on Somalia. US involvement, suspected by many, could be exposed by the leaks. Arms transfers are a Defense Department turf, however, and correspondences, if there were any, could very well have taken place over a different network.(The Defense Department has its own network.)US involvement in the violation of a UN arms-embargo, if confirmed by the leaks, could hardly come at a worst time. The US is chief sponsor and adamant would-be enforcer of all ten UN arms embargos—ranging from those against Hezbollah to Iran and North Korea— still in effect.

Of interest would also be —if it’s anywhere in the cables—the American estimate of Ethiopian casualties in Somalia. Meles insists that it was no more than 500, at least in 2006. Of course, no one, including his most avid supporters, believes him. Considered from the perspective of the

ferocity of the war and fanaticism of Islamic militants, the figure has been disparaged as ridiculously low.

But as far as the international community is concerned, the potential for bombshell lies squarely in the story of, in the words of Human Rights Watch,” decentralized, outsourced Guantanamo”—the secret prisons in Ethiopia where suspects with strong links to al-Qaida were held by the Ethiopian government on behalf of the CIA and FBI.

According to a series of stories for McClatchy newspapers in 2007, two journalists reported that over 150 people had been deported from Kenya to Ethiopia and interrogated by CIA and FBI agents in three secret prisons. Incredibly, up to 200 agents of the CIA and FBI were reportedly involved. Though US government officials had at the time conceded to quizzing prisoners in Ethiopia, and rationalized it on national security grounds, the intricacies of the arrangement are still shrouded in secrecy. No one believes the EPRDF went overboard to assist the Americans for nothing. Almost anything related to this theme would generate a major international story.

For the Ethiopian public, however, the height of excitement will be measured in the cables that deal with the 2005 elections. Who did the Americans think won the elections? What did they think of the June and November massacres? Or the imprisonment of CUD’s leaders? And the closure of newspapers and imprisonment of their editors? Certainly, Washington must have sought guidance and update at some point. Maybe a little bit of intra-EPRDF politics? And hoping against hope, some fantasize about a cable that deals with high level corruption.(Very unlikely.)

Perhaps, in the end, there will not be much in the cables, after all. And all this excitement will all be for nothing. Well, possible, but unlikely. And while it lasts, the excitement is thrilling.

66. Berhanu Nega and Lidetu Ayalew's controversy

By Eskinder Nega, November 26th, 2010

DATELINE: November 2010—Washington, D.C.(Berhanu Nega)

Somber faced Ethiopians stared in rapt attention as Dr Berhanu Nega's voice resonated with pronounced intensity. As he dramatically details a 2005 discussion between CUD leaders, his face is noticeably flashed with emotion.

“What (are the findings of the) Committee (tasked with exploring the political options available to the CUD as the post election controversy heats up)?” we (the CUD leadership) asked him (Lidetu Ayalew, spokesperson of CUD and member of the committee.)

“ It (the committee's work) is not necessary. You are making a mountain out of a molehill,” (responds a dismissive Lidetu.*)

“What then are we (the CUD) exactly supposed to do?” (we inquire curiously.*)

“We will call for a rally(protesting against the doctored election results) ,”(answers Lidetu authoritatively.*)

“What then happens,” (we ask eagerly.*)

“Weyane (EPRDF, the ruling party) kills (the protesters)” (responds Lidetu coolly.*)

“What then happens,” (we ask incredulously.*)

“(We get the perfect pretext to join Parliament.) We will maintain that we had opted for peaceful protest but that the government had responded with killings. (We could then go on to insist that) the only recourse left is to join Parliament and continue with the struggle from there. There will then be no grounds for anyone to accuse us of cowardice,” (says Lidetu mapping the strategy to be pursued by CUD as public pressure mounts for a showdown with the EPRDF, which had lost the election but reversed the results.)

Berhanu ends his narrative here. But he goes on.

“What I just told you is what actually came to pass in a (CUD) meeting. The person who back then calculated in terms of thirty, forty people’s lives (to get the pretext to join Parliament) is now the same person who (questions the integrity of others.). The extent of some people’s moral bankruptcy is really startling.”

(* What are in brackets marked with asterisk* are my interpretation of Berhanu’s tone.)

DATELINE: November 2010—Washington D.C.(Lidetu Ayalew)

Lidetu’s response came courtesy of D.C’s Ande-Ethiopia radio, a preserve of Diaspora fringe narrow- nationalists.

“If this was true, certainly Dr Berhanu et al would not have waited for five years to reveal this to the public,” said Lidetu. “It’s an absolute lie.”

Smelling blood, Ande-Ethiopia could not resist provoking him.

“But why would Dr Berhanu lie?” Ande-Ethiopia asks mischievously.

Lidetu is flabbergasted. He literally rumbles. (“I am sorry for my emotional response,” he says at one point.) “He would lie for four reasons,” begins Lidetu. First: the EPRP (an opposition party, which Berhanu had joined in his teens) is attacked. (There lies the origin of his malice, asserts Lidetu.) Second: Berhanu is declared an atheist. Third: a brother’s (Berhanu’s) divorce is brought up. And fourth: a bit of psychoanalysis to cap it all. (The death sentence is getting to Berhanu, reasons Lidetu.)

On and on and on goes Lidetu, and then, finally, in what looks like an act of ultimate self-defeat, shoots himself in the foot by denying that Berhanu was ever the mayor-elect of Addis Ababa. “I was disheartened to see him (during the commemorative event) being addressed as mayor. No person was elected (by the voters) to be mayor.” Only the city council could have elected the mayor, he insists. “He was merely slated for the position by the party.” (CUD had won 137 of 138 city council seats. Berahnu was elected mayor-elect by the 137 in the presence of the media.)

DATELINE: June 2005—Addis Ababa. (Five years ago)

A member of CUD's leadership (a Central Committee member) reached in to his pocket with a sigh. The avalanche of calls was on the verge of overwhelming him. Glancing at the incoming number though, he couldn't help but be intriguingly surprised.

It was Berhanu Nega calling.

“(Name withheld upon request), I need to speak with you urgently,” said an anxious sounding Berhanu, following a brief exchange of pleasantries.

“Sure, Doc,” shoots back the CC member, wondering why Berhanu would be seeking a private meeting with him.

When they met, Berhanu was quick to get to the point.

“Have you been following the press releases (attributed to the CUD) issued by Lidetu ?” asks Berhanu.

“Sort of,” responds the CC member circumspectly, but instantly cognizant of where the conversation was heading. The press releases have raised eyebrows within the leadership.

“I am worried about some of them,” continues Berhanu earnestly. “Could the EPRDF use them as evidence for incitement? I suggest that you assess them from a legal point of view.”

A graduate of AAU's reputable law school, the CC member carefully reviews the press releases. He settles on urging caution and approaches Lidetu.

“Perhaps we should be more circumspect about the wordings of the press releases,” he tells Lidetu at a private meeting.

Lidetu almost jumps up with fury.

“Why do you say that?” he asks him visibly angered.

“It's my professional opinion as a lawyer. There could be room for twisting them. They could charge us with incitement,” replies the CC member, taken aback by the ferocity of Lidetu's reaction.

“I have been mandated to issue press releases by the Executive Committee. This is the party’s position. There is no need to alter tone or content. I know what I am doing,” barks an annoyed Lidetu , and waves away the issue.

In this immediate aftermath of the post-election crisis, Lidetu was a proponent of what he termed as a “political solution.” It envisioned a mounting (peaceful) mass action against the government. “Confronted with an ungovernable country, Weyane will eventually opt for a political settlement,” he argued. “The legal option will take us no where,” Lidetu intoned passionately. Neither the electoral board nor the courts were to be trusted. “The courts are tainted beyond redemption,” he liked to say.

Lidetu personified popular sentiment at this point. This was the peak of his power and influence. He was virtually unchallengeable. Knowing this, the CC member quietly relents. He parts with Lidetu defeated and shaken.

DATELINE: January 2006—Addis Ababa

The principal leaders of CUD, save Lidetu, appear before court accused of treason —a capital punishment offense— by the government. Affixed to the charges as “evidences” were many of the press releases unilaterally issued by Lidetu Ayalew.(Though they lack the strict criteria the law sets for incitement.)

And many of the defendants could not help but wonder if it was not all a deliberate set up from the very beginning.

DATELINE: The Present.

Berhanu has his fair share of critics, but not even the harshest amongst them, including the EPRDF, have questioned his personal integrity the way Lidetu has done. Few are apt to question his personal integrity simply on the strength of Lidetu’s rhetoric;however alluring and powerful it may be. Since Berhanu boldly asserts that the exchange took place in a meeting, a more convincing case would have been made by Lidetu had he demanded the names of those present in the meeting. His failure to do so begs an explanation.

Razor sharp as Lidetu is, the public is at a loss to assume an oversight on his part. Ever since his disastrous break with CUD, Lidetu has blamed everyone (including this writer) but himself for his troubles. Between his break with CUD and the 2010 elections, when he was tenaciously propped by the EPRDF and the CUD had recklessly self-imploded, his chances of political redemption—albeit a limited version—had looked like a real possibility. What ever the shortcomings of the elections, as even Lidetu admits, that they at least accurately show those impressions were no more than a mirage.

The loss of Lidetu's imagined world, where his vindication was always around the corner, has obviously turned him in to angry man. His caprice, pretension and obvious destructiveness are no more than coping mechanisms. He should no more be hated. He should rather be pitied.

67. Haile Gebreselassie's land troubles in Ethiopia

By **Eskinder Nega**, November 19th, 2010

Ask Haile Gebreselassie about his manager, Josephus (Jos) Hermens and his emotion is easily stirred. "He is not only my manager," Haile likes to say of Herman. "We are more like a father and son team. We love and trust each other."

Herman, an Olympic 10,000 m finalist in the 70s, is broadly famous for his close relationship with the athletes he manages; who now number an astounding one hundred and twenty world class performers spread throughout the world. But however much his professional instinct militates against it, Haile stands out as his particular favorite. Herman has devotedly and assiduously mentored Haile, and Haile has unquestionably followed where his manager has led. "I go where he tells me to. I have never questioned him," has said Haile of their bushiness relationship.

No wonder then that the world was all ears when Herman spoke of Haile's dilemma to the NYT . No person but his wife, after all, could reasonably claim to be a closer confidant. Herman could also be counted on not to say or do anything that would endanger his most prized holding's

interests. He is , quoted or unquoted, the journalists “ dream-source” about Haile, and the glee (for an obvious scoop) with which the NYT run its exclusive story is barely surprising.

Hermens told the NYT that Haile Gebrselassie’s emotional decision to retire “might have stemmed in part from political pressure he was feeling in Ethiopia. His phone has been tapped by government officials and he has faced some sort of blackmail attempt.”

Despite the subsequent (and expected) protestations by Herman and Haile on government owned ETV, who denied the accuracy of the entire story, scarcely a soul here in Addis Ababa doubts that Herman spoke with the knowledge and approval of Haile. In fact, ETV’s report (in Amharic), in which the phone tapping charge was cleverly censored, has only reinforced the impression that both the leak and denial were deliberate acts to mobilize international attention to Haile’s predicament.

Herman maintains in the NYT story that Haile faces multitude of problems with the government. There are no plausible grounds to second-guess him. It would be absurd to assume that he would fabricate this out of the thin air. But whether these problems are political or bureaucratic remain ambiguous. Has his Presidential ambitions threatened a parallel aspiration by an entrenched faction in the EPRDF, provoking harassment? The list of questions could go on. And they will. But we don’t have the definitive answers to most of them at this stage. More time is obviously needed for the whole truth to emerge. As an evidently worried Herman acknowledged to the NYT, even he doesn’t know all the details.

For now though, we know of Haile’s serious land problem with the government.

As the city’s administration, headed by Corporal Kuma Demeksa, recounts it, the real-estate sector of the construction industry in Addis Ababa, is one the greatest ruses of EPRDF’s two decades reign. The sector’s enhanced stature in the city’s profile originates in the transformative mayoralty of Arekebe Ekubay, somewhere in 2004. Inspired by South Africa’s drive to provide decent low-cost housing to its massive population of have-nots, Arkebe’s administration rather hastily adopts an ambitious plan to build fifty thousand units of low-cost housing per year. A grandiose plan by Ethiopian standards, it envisioned to solve the city’s unremitting housing shortage in eight to ten years. But only a year in to the plan, the EPRDF was to suffer a humiliating loss at the polls and Arkebe had to leave office. Five years later, only 78,000 of the

intended 250,000 units for the period have been built, and more than 400,000 registered families (over a million people) are still desperately waiting for their slice of low-cost housing.

Mercifully, the fate of the city's expanding but minuscule middle and upper classes were left to the far more efficient private sector. Buttressed by generous incentives, more than 6 million square meters of land were leased to 125 mostly newly constituted real-estate companies. Planned were international standard luxury condominiums and fashionably designed family homes. In chronically under-built Addis, the possibilities to reap millions in profit seemed almost too good to be true.

Haile, not unlike many other astute businessmen, could hardly resist the temptation. Granted 40,000 square meters of land in Addis' most prized sub-city, Bole, in 2005, his expansive plan was to build 224 high-class condominiums and 38 multi-million birr villas for the city's elite. But it was to take two more years, until 2007, just to secure a building permit. And an additional two more years, until 2009, were to elapse before any construction was to begin. "Our boundary was ill-defined, which triggered a dispute with our neighbor," insists Haile in a letter to the mayor, Kuma Demeksa. "There was no way we could have started construction until this issue was resolved." But even with their resolution, construction could only proceed at a snail's pace; because, Haile contends with exasperation, "the city was unable to provide access to electricity, water and telephone services."

For different reasons, the statuses of most of the other companies were no different than Haile's. By the reckoning of the city administration, which claims to have conducted a thorough investigation, only 18 % of the leased lands have so far been built upon wholly; 20 % had began some construction but not proceeded far; and a whopping 62 % still stands idle. An intolerable situation, concluded the city administration.

Citing the contractual agreements of the leases as the legal basis for its actions, the city has now repossessed some of these lands; including that of Haile. A conservative estimate of the land Haile lost at current prices falls within the range of 120,000,000 to 150,000,000 birr. Five years ago, it was less than a fourth of this amount. The city has proposed (unofficially) to reinstate the land to Haile, but only if he agrees to procure it at current prices. Haile has responded by vowing

to pursue a legal recourse. The judiciary being what it is though, the possibility of a reversal is at best dismal.

Aside from Haile, 37 other companies, of the more than 100 identified as offending parties, have been slated for this first round of repossessions. Amongst them, Country Club Development has lost 50,000 square meters of prime land in Bole; Tekle-Birhan Ambaye, 50,000 square meters, also in Bole; and Get Enterprise, 68,000 square meters, again in Bole. In addition, the nation's two largest real-estate companies, Sunshine and Ayat, have lost thousands of square meters of land, allegedly all illegally fenced public land.(Sunshine denies the charges.) Their core holdings, however, have so far escaped repossessions.

How was Haile included in the first round of repossessions? Was it mere coincidence? Was blind justice at work, oblivious to his international fame? Or is it part of the blackmail that Herman spoke about? With police state Ethiopia in the background, it requires a leap of faith to believe that coincidence or blind justice were at play in this still unfolding chronicle.

68. Haile Gebreselassie: Politics and Retirement

By **Eskinder Nega**, November 12th, 2010

The first time Haile Gebreselassie burst onto the world-title scene was seventeen years ago, somewhere in mid-'93. Success landed him in the spotlight, and commentators were soon noting what they said (alluding to other Ethiopian athletes as well)

was a discrepancy between how old he looked and his officially declared age — twenty years. Haile's response at this stage, when he hardly spoke a word of English, was to simply flash his infectiously winning smile at his detractors. No one yet suspected that in the delicate and diminutive physical bearing of Haile lurked an extraordinary persona that will go on to attain the peak heights of the world's greatest athletes.

He endured on the world stage for an unprecedented decade and a half; winning Olympic medals and setting a bunch of world records in events spanning from 1500 meters to his personal favorites, the 5000 and 10,000 meters; and to cap it all, in what was supposed to have been the

twilight of his career, in that ultimate barometer of stamina, the marathon — for which he still holds the world record time of 2:03:59. (He is the only person on record to have breached the 2:04 barrier.)

The transformation of his personality is no less spectacular. He is effortlessly telegenic. He has always been at perfect ease, with absolutely no trace of self-consciousness, even when multitudes of cameras are focused on him. His quick mastery of the essentials of the English language is testament to his keen intelligence. His symmetry with journalists is the stuff of legends. He does not merely respond to their queries, he converses with them as he would with his long-time friends. His unforced sense of intimacy was also to win millions of hearts around the world. Even his fierce competitors, the Kenyans, could hardly resist his charms.

His transition from rural Ethiopia to the fast-track world of international superstars was perfectly seamless. There was no philandering before finally settling down; no burn-outs from excessive partying; no spend free phases from the avalanche of earnings. He wed his sweetheart early in his success, and went on to shrewdly invest his earnings in extensive business interests — which now include a car dealership (an increasingly lucrative sector); a cinema (which shows only Ethiopian films); real estate (whose value has tripled); and a widely acclaimed resort (where Birtukan Mideksa, an opposition leader who had spent most of the past five years behind bars, and whose release he helped secure, was his VIP guest along with her daughter and mother.)

Haile seemed incapable of doing wrong. But despite an acclaimed moderation in taste and lifestyle, his ambition was expanding in private. That was to become all too evident when out-of-the blue, and to the particular surprise of Ethiopians, who know him best, he announced his ambition to ascend to the nation's Presidency. This was not a humble call to serve in the public arena, which would not have surprised anyone, but a sudden and unexplained reach to an exalted position, which surprised everyone.

How and why did this transformation take place?

Perhaps, only Haile could answer this question with certainty. What is obvious, though, is the changed tempo with which his feeler in to politics was received in Ethiopia. While his sensational claim was to receive reasonable play in the international press, it was noted for its oddity by Ethiopians, and then offhandedly dismissed and ignored. Neither opposition groups

nor the ruling party expressed serious interest. Meles shrugged it off: “It’s his right,” he said, and moved on.

No doubt this was not the reaction Haile was expecting. By the time he uttered those words, he had long become unused to being ignored. But evidently, the world saw in him no more than an inspiring athlete. He, on the other hand, had taken himself far more seriously and wanted the world to acknowledge him for that. This was palpably turning into an uphill battle. And Haile, living embodiment that he is of the triumph of the mind over body, is barely a quitter. After all, only a patient man could conquer the marathon.

By September 2010 Ethiopia’s politics has seemingly (which is really illusory, by the way) irretrievably turned in favor of the ruling party, the EPRDF. Thus it was more than sheer coincidence that Haile should choose this time to appear at a nationally broadcast Congress of the EPRDF (convention, in the American parlance) and express his sympathies (but circumspectly not explicit support, since this would complicate his ambition. The law stipulates that the President must be a non-party member.)

Haile’s calculation is only too plain. With the obvious implosion of the opposition, the only plausible way to the Presidency, at least in the short run, seems to be through the EPRDF. And apparently, the way to the EPRDF lies through Meles Zenawi. All this is clear within the standard perceptive powers of the average Ethiopian.

And if Haile had maneuvered with an acceptable parameter to fulfill his ambition, he would have been tolerated by the public. But in the court of public opinion, he recklessly — and uncharacteristically — strayed too far when he in effect publicly submitted to the unpopular Meles Zenawi by giving him a highly prized personal gift in the full glare of national television. The nation watched with total shock. (The horrific death of hundreds of unarmed protesters from shots to the head and heart by government sharpshooters is still fresh in the public’s mind.)

A week later, one of Addis’ weeklies, Feteh, queried him about the gift.

“You have awarded PM Meles Zenawi a T-shirt in which you set a world record. Which of his feats earned him this honor?” asked Feteh.

His response was defensive and muddled.

“He (Meles) deserves it. He deserves it for the (achievements) I see. I have given my T-shirts and shorts to other people, too. I must have been waiting for this moment not to have done it to date. If we do not honor our fellow citizens, who will pay tribute to them for us? Let me tell you one thing; we may say many things about the PM in our country, but he is respected like a champion athlete abroad. At G-8 and G-20 meetings, he is bestowed with great respect. Besides, the Bible instructs us to obey our kings,” said Haile of Meles Zenawi, whose party swept 99.6 % of parliamentary seats in an election “that did not meet international standards,” according to European Union election observers.

The fierce public backlash was more than Haile had ever expected in his wildest imagination (as he was to later confess to some people.) And he was suddenly confronted with a new phenomenon: the swift fall from public grace. And he did not know how to handle it. He was embarrassed as well as confused. This is the beleaguered Haile Gebreselassie that limped out of the New York Marathon and emotionally declared his retirement to a shocked world.

Haile is ailing. There is the MRI that shows fluid and tendinitis in his knee joints. No one is disputing that much. It is, however, in the words of the BBC, “the-spur-of-the-moment” announcement of retirement that has baffled the world. Only last month, he spoke passionately against retiring in an interview with AP. “Why should I retire? Why should I say I will retire in three four years? I still think about doing more,” had said Haile.

When he changed his mind, he gave no time to ponder, to consult with family, friends and business associates — it was a spur of the moment decision. So unlike the old moderate Haile. So like the new controversially Meles-admiring Haile. Haile did not only suffer from physical ailment in New York. Unseen to the world, but visible to those close to him, he is also ailing emotionally. This explains the erratic decision that has become the subject of the international press. The path to his physical recuperation — if it is indeed possible — is intractably tied to his emotional well-being.

But for his emotional redemption, he must first be convinced that nothing is worth his good conscience — yes, even the Presidency !

69. EU Observer's Final Report: Let Berhanu Nega return to Ethiopia

By **Eskinder Nega**, November 8th, 2010

The much anticipated but much delayed final report by the EU Observers Mission to Ethiopia was released today in the Belgian capital, Brussels. While the final report was in line with the earlier preliminary report, the Mission is set to stir political waves by one of its recommendation: “The absence of one opposition leader in exile, as well as the imprisonment of one political leader, qualified as arbitrary detention by the United Nations, should be addressed. The review of these leaders’ legal cases would constitute an important and necessary step in order to broaden the political space.”

The “one opposition leader” is an obvious reference to Berhanu Nega, exiled leader of the underground opposition, Genbot 7. Berhanu has been sentenced to death in absentia for an alleged involvement in a coup-attempt. One of its other recommendations, the freeing of Birtukan Mideksa, referred to as “the imprisonment of one political leader” in the recommendation, has come about; but only under highly unsatisfactory terms.

Below is a summary of the latest report:

The invitation extended to EU Observers to monitor Ethiopia’s 2010 national elections was a surprise. In retrospect, though, it shouldn’t have been. The opposition had essentially self-imploded, and the EPRDF had every reason to be confident. But then again, this was how it lost the election in 2005. Yet there was a critical difference between 2005 and 2010 for the EPRDF—which was the loss of confidence between opposition leaders. Politics is like competitive group sports. Focused leadership, unhampered by internal distractions, is indispensable. And that was missing.

The mandate of the Mission was supposed to have been negotiated painstakingly (or so the EPRDF believed); which, as was reported at the time, imposed new restrictions that the EU accepted only reluctantly. But several months later, it was the EPRDF, not the EU, which was to bitterly regret an innocent looking clause that allowed for an assessment of “the environment in which the election was conducted.”

The EU Elections Observation Mission is no doubt the best of its kind in the world. The Americans have nothing that remotely competes with it. It has a reputable methodology that is uniformly applied in all countries. Over the past decade, it has used its inimitable expertise to observe almost 70 elections in 50 countries. The Mission is undeniably one clear success and pride of the European venture.

The Mission to Ethiopia was headed by Thijs Berman, a Dutch Socialist (and therefore a critique of neo-liberalism like Meles), who led a high-profile Observers Mission to Afghanistan in 2009. Berman, a journalist by profession, led a Mission of ten expert analysts, 90 long-term observers, with an additional 60 short-term Observers all centered at Addis' Hilton.

To little surprise, the Mission was under microscopic watch from the very beginning. Just how close was revealed when Berman was summoned by Meles, according to news reports, who spoke of the Mission's pending (then theoretically still secret) unfavorable preliminary report. In a pitiable attempt to steal the Mission's thunder, a hastily organized mass rally in support of the election outcome was staged in Addis, where Meles himself spoke, on the day the preliminary report was released. (The absurd pretext for the rally was a routine Human Rights Watch statement on the election.)

In an almost word to word repetition of the 2005 report, the preliminary report said that the 2010 election "fell short of certain international commitments, notably the lack of level playing field for all parties and the transparency of the process." Describing the election as low-key to the very last days, the report went on further to castigate the EPRDF: "the ruling party had at times used state resources for campaign purposes, contributing to an un-level playing field leaning in favor of the EPRDF in many areas." But it commended the Electoral Board for its technical proficiency.

The Mission promised to release a comprehensive report before the opening of parliament: "The EU EOM will stay in country to observe the tabulation of the results and the announcement of the final results. It will issue its final report within two months of the completion of the entire electoral process."

Sadly, it was not able to keep its promise.

More than five long months later, the final report was finally released on November 8, 2010 in Brussels by Berman. Denied a visa by stonewalling PM's office, Berman had to settle for the European Parliament press center.

The final report's summary runs as such:

1.ELECTION SHORT OF INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS.

While several positive improvements were introduced since the 2005 elections, there were negative developments in the practical application of the legal and electoral framework. As a result, the electoral process fell short of international commitments for elections, notably regarding the transparency of the process and the lack of a level playing field for all contesting parties. Insufficient efforts were taken to ensure a more equitable and representative electoral process.

2 NARROWING OF POLITICAL SPACE (Birtukan and Birhanu)

The changes in the legal framework together with the fragmentation of the main opposition forces in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, as well as the imprisonment of leading opposition figures and the departure in exile of one opposition leader, resulted in a cumulative narrowing of the political space within the country. The ruling party's presence throughout the country was unrivalled by opposition parties, especially in rural areas which house up to 80% of the Ethiopian population.

3. ON THE ELECTORAL BOARD

The NEBE administered the elections in a competent and professional manner given its limited resources, overcoming significant technical challenges..... Insufficient measures were taken to increase the level of trust of some opposition parties in the impartiality and independence of the NEBE.

4. ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA

It was observed that the (limited private) media were often very cautious in their reporting. The jamming of the Voice of America Amharic Service throughout the campaign period, and of

Deutsche Welle a couple of days before the elections, reduced the possibility for voters to receive information from a wider range of sources. This was not compensated by other media, as the limited outreach of print and broadcast media reduced their role in providing voters with information to make an informed choice.

5. MISUSE OF STATE RESOURCES

The separation between the ruling party and the public administration was blurred at the local level in many parts of the country. The EU EOM directly observed cases of misuse of state resources in the ruling party's campaign activities.

6. PLAYING FIELD FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

Even taking into account the inherent advantages of the incumbency, the Mission considers that the playing field for the 2010 elections was not sufficiently balanced, leaning heavily in favor of the ruling party in many areas.

7. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The exclusion of civil society organisations from voter education, together with the new and more restrictive Ethiopian Charities and Societies Law, limited the potential role of local organisations in the electoral process.

8. POLLING PROCEDURES

Polling procedures were assessed positively by EU EOM observers in 87% of visited polling stations, while closing and counting were assessed positively in 66% of cases. In 25% of observed polling stations copies of results forms were not given to party agents and in nearly half, results were not posted outside the polling station, thereby compromising the transparency and credibility of the counting process.

9. COUNTING! (THE EVIDENCE OF FRAUD!)

The NEBE announced provisional results less than 48 hours after polling stations closed, thanks to a parallel system of communication allowing for the aggregation of polling station results at

the national level. The consolidation process at constituency level was considered very problematic according to EU EOM observers. In 27% of cases observed, polling station results were different to those previously recorded by observers at polling stations. In several cases, incomplete or incorrect forms from polling stations were corrected or completed at constituency electoral offices. The transparency of the process was considered unsatisfactory in 40% of observed cases. Certain essential forms for the correct transmission of results to the national level were not filled in numerous constituencies.

10. RECOMMENDATION: LET THE DIASPORA VOTE!

The creation of specific constituencies for Ethiopian citizens living abroad, together with out of-country registration and voting in embassies and consulates could be considered. Given that the Constitution allows for an additional three seats in the HPR, these could be used to represent Ethiopians living abroad.

11. RECOMMENDATION: FREE BIRTUKAN; LET BERHANU RETURN

The absence of one opposition leader in exile, as well as the imprisonment of one political leader, qualified as arbitrary detention by the United Nations, should be addressed. The review of these leaders' legal cases would constitute an important and necessary step in order to broaden the political space.

70. Meles' new cabinet: The real story –Part I

By **Eskinder Nega**, October 22nd, 2010

Ideally, a Prime Minister is only a first among equals in a cabinet. The cabinet, the traditional name allotted to a Council of Ministers, is a collective decision-making body which formulates government policy. But with the unabated expansion and increasing complexity of modern governments, the primacy and dominance of Prime Ministers is acknowledged even in mature democracies.

In the flagship of parliamentary democracies, the UK, the potency of cabinets varied with the Prime Ministers. Margaret Thatcher, the indomitable Iron Lady, more or less ignored the mass of her cabinet members and relied on few trusted advisers. One of the world's first "post-modern" politicians, Tony Blair, was famously censured for his "sofa government" of inner core of Ministers, who made major decisions in seclusion and imposed them on the wider cabinet. John Major, who succeeded Thatcher, on the other hand, consciously maneuvered within the confines of the cabinet's collective leadership. The prerogatives of the powers invested in the Prime Minister's office, however, were never challenged.

In the Ethiopian setting, the first five years of Meles Zenawi's tenure as Prime Minister, between 1995 and the early 2000s, marked years of diffused power when the powerful TPLF politburo served as a bulwark against the traditionally unlimited power of the leader of government. But once Meles prevailed over the politburo, he lost no time in assuming the "Presidential Prime Minister role"; a position akin to that of a US President, who is neither by tradition or constitution obliged to make decisions jointly with his cabinet. The grandiose public posturing of Bereket Simon — the lone Minister with some touch of flair — notwithstanding, Meles does not even have room for a "kitchen cabinet"; which allows for a number of favored Ministers to involve in major decisions. Meles chooses to tower singularly over his cabinet.

But even with their diminished stature, Ministers still matter in an Ethiopia where the state is omnipresent in all spheres of life. Ministerial appointments and dismissals are thus followed with keen interest. And the latest Ministerial reshuffles have particularly attracted public interest; perhaps, to an extent only second to the excitement generated by the first cabinet constituted after the overthrow of the Derg in 1991, when the OLF assumed several Ministerial positions.

On the surface, there is no rational to question the latest reshuffle. Several Ministers have long overstayed their welcome; chiefly, Seyoum Mesfin, who lasted more than 19 years as Foreign Minister —a record that will most probably never be surpassed. Plus, there were no high-flying Ministers who had won the public in the way Arkebe Ekubay had once did when he was Mayor of Addis Ababa. It was high time to bring in new faces and boost cabinet morale. This of course does not mean that anyone expects incoming Ministers to compete with Meles for the limelight. Meles demands total obedience and a low-key persona; a fact obviously lost to an ANDM upstart, Dr Sentayehu Welde-Mikeal, who was suddenly appointed as Minister of Education

from the midst of the political wilderness in 2005, and, much to the detached amusement of veteran Ministers, asked too many question in cabinet sessions. And suddenly....pooh!....he was no more a Minister. His departure is subject to much speculation, but the majority consensus is that his is a cautionary tale against the over-enthusiastic upstart.

Five years ago, in the immediate aftermath of the post election crises, Meles' hastily-constituted cabinet was composed of twenty Ministers. Addisu Leggese, a physical education instructor by training, and the official Deputy Prime Minister (which no one took seriously) would have made the ideal Minister of Youth and Sports, but was yet again inexplicably assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture — a position, needless to say, that requires sophisticated technical and scientific knowledge. This would have been the mother of all Ministerial mismatches if not for the accession of Kuma Demeksa, whose professional career as a soldier peaked at the level of a Corporal in the Derg's army, to the position of Minister of Defense. (In Kuma's defense, however, another famous Corporal, Hitler, had become Commander-In-Chief of the proud German armed forces.) Junedin Sado, whose training as a geologist would have been useful at the helm of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, was instead entrusted with Transport and Communication; where he had to learn from scratch. Over at Federal and Information Ministries (the latter was dissolved in 2008), two new Ministers, Siraj Fergesa and Berahnu Hailu, much to the amusement of EPRDF's critics, assumed their positions with noticeably perplexed expressions. Five more years seemed too much for the visibly aging Kassu Illala, but he still retained the taxing — often as a micro-manager — position as Minister of Works and Urban Development. And for close watchers of Seyoum Mesfin, his increasingly baggy eyes told everything. After 30 years of doing essentially the same thing over and over again, he was evidently bored by the avalanche of routine that had dominated his life.

But 2005 was not the year for radical change. Nor was it time to test new territory with new blood. Everyone understood this. In light of the unexpected election results, which the ruling EPRDF had clearly lost but swiftly reversed by brute force, preserving a semblance of continuity was naturally to be given precedence. Old and familiar faces — Meles, Seyoum, Addisu, Tefera (whom I am obligated to leave in peace. He is suffering from cancer), Girma, Kasu, Bereket, Kuma, Junedin — had to unavoidably crowd a worn-out cabinet.

But tedious though the work at the Ministry of Trade and Industry has always been, Girma Biru apparently enjoyed the boring details and transparently thrived in his position. And he had an able deputy in the person of Tadesse Haile, who was (and still is) the Industry State Minister. But as his star shone too bright, mysterious outbreaks of rumors plainly demoralized him. Mohamed Dirir, who passes for the cabinet's most cosmopolitan personality, worked diligently at Culture and Tourism, but an alleged lack of intellectual depth undermined his seriousness. And so invisible was the Justice Minister, Assefa Kesseto, even some cabinet colleagues, let alone the public, struggled to recall his full name. The cabinet's two women, Aster Mamo and Hirut Delbo, at the Ministries of Youth and Women respectively, were universally ignored; but hardly the ideologically driven feminists whom Meles reportedly disdains, they never complained — at least, not in public. No one knew what to make of the then new Minister of Health, Tewdros Adhanom, a malaria expert with a PhD from the UK, but he proved to be a success in due course.

At the State Ministerial level, Arkebe Ekubay, at the Ministry of Work and Urban Development was visibly less enthusiastic than he was at the helm of Addis Ababa. Abera Dersa, PhD, continued to provide much needed advice to Adissu at Agriculture as State Minister, and was soon the Ministry's most respected official. Mekonen Manyazewal, now the only non-EPRDF cabinet member in Meles' new cabinet, continued to toil contentedly as State Minister at the Ministry of Finance. At Justice, Hashim Tewfic, PhD, and an anti-CUD zealot, inevitably dominated the Ministry as one of two State Ministers. Low-key Tekeda Alemu, continued in his uninterrupted stint as one of two deputies of Seyoum Mesfin. Over at Defense, Major General Haile Tilhaun, a Southerner born in Debre-Birhan, and one of the founders of the ANDM, became one of three State Ministers under Kuma Demeksa. 2010, however, was set to be the year of change. And Meles' perilous plan for post-2015 Ethiopia has begun to unravel.

71. Meles' new cabinet : Haile-Mariam's rise - Part II

By Eskinder Nega, November 5th, 2010

Unusually for the impetuously explosive Meles Zenawi, his reaction to the turbulent events of the second half of 2005 was in the best manner of the (long idolized) silent, strong Ethiopian male: he internalized his emotions. Unsurprisingly, he was a decidedly depressed man by early 2006.

There is always the straw that inevitably breaks the camel's back in such situations, and for Meles such were the findings of the Commission delegated to investigate the post-election riots. (Security forces had appallingly thrown grenades at unarmed protesters, the Commission found out.) The moody Meles that his mother once spoke of resurfaced, and suddenly, with an air of a leader let down("I did not authorize the use of live ammunition," he had sensationally told the Commission.), he was speaking of his last term in office. This of course was not the first time he spoke of leaving office, but unlike the past, the genie shot out of the bottle this time . In lieu of the transformed political milieu and his obviously elongated term in office, the proposition had to be taken seriously for the first time.

The possibility of change, even within the narrow confines of the EPRDF, invariably threatens vested interests. The first resistance instinctively came from them; and predictably, from fringe narrow nationalists(the Aiga crowd.). Meles was snappishly dismissive of the later.(He publicly ruled out the possibility of being replaced by a TPLF member, devastating the morale of the fringe.) But the issues and concerns of the former could not be dismissed. Meles is unavoidably part of the entrenched interests his administration nurtured—directly or indirectly—and as goes the political convention (and precedent) their continued sustenance demands political primacy. Astute Meles scarcely needs to be reminded of this enduring element to Ethiopia's traditional politics.

The first opening to maintain the status-quo(Meles' primacy in government),albeit stealthily, presented itself when murmurs in the OPDO against the ANDM, whose seniority in the coalition had positioned it in to the most probable successor to the Prime Ministership, began to be expressed audibly. Meles seized the opportunity. The setting was cast for a classic Machiavellian divide and rule; which, to cut a long story short, eventuated in the displacement of the ANDM by

the weakest member of the coalition, new Deputy Prime Minister Haile Mariam's Southern Movement.

There is no Southern community in Ethiopia that is naturally expressed through a common language, culture, ethnicity, or crucially, world-view (what Stalin termed as "common psychological make up.") And thus there is rationally no societal foundation for a Southern Movement. The South evolved as an administrative and political expediency for the EPRDF, which desperately needed a framework to house 45 ethnic groups (representing about a third of the nation) in its coalition. But so reviled has the region become by "Southerners"(particularly the Sidamas), it could safely be hailed as a "prison of nations and nationalities." In fact, so intense was the tension and mistrust in the regional administration between Sidamas and Welaytas on the one hand, and Gurages and Siltes on the other, that dissolution, in defiance of popular sentiment, of the all EPRDF affiliated ethnic parties in the region was deemed the only solution.(Which is against the *raison d'être* of EPRDF's existence; as it envisages a political party for each ethnic group.) In their place now stands the unitary Southern Movement, utterly detached from reality. Barring the truly transcending (like Obama), the Southern Movement is an unsuitable terrain for politicians to cultivate a power base. Meles could not have imagined it better.

But this not all there is to the story. There is also the ideal persona of Haile-Mariam himself. This completes the picture-perfect setting for Meles' ambitious drive to "Putin-ize" (after the Putin-Medvedev arrangement) post-2015 Ethiopia.

Few days after his surprise elevation to the position of Meles' deputy in the EPRDF, Haile-Mariam sat with a pro-EPRDF newspaper for a lengthy interview. " Will you assume the Deputy Prime Minister's position?" asks the reporter. " I don't know," replies Haile- Mariam warily. " But your position in the party makes it a matter of default," presses the reporter. "There is no way for me to know the secrets of the party," answers Haile- Mariam reflexively, obviously caught off guard. Ten years after his accession to the Central Committee and Executive Committee of the EPRDF, ostensibly the inner-core of the party where all important decisions are made, Haile- Mariam had yet to consider himself an insider (correctly, by the way.) Incredibly, in eight of those ten years, he was, as leader of the Southern Movement, in theory one of the coalition's four most important people. But partly for reasons detailed above, and no less

for a visibly less-than-driven persona, Haile-Mariam was(and is) contentedly low-key. In the EPRDF, he was even prepared to play second-fiddle to Kassu Illala, his underling in the Southern Movement, who has always been close to Meles. Haile Mariam is always happy to be where he is(at least in politics), never showing any urge to go any further. Each time it had seemed that he had finally peaked, touching the apex of his happy-go-lucky political career, he had, to the absolute amazement of friends and foes alike, miraculously moved up. Rest assured that he would be mighty grateful for a Medvedev role, and could comfortably counted on not to rock the boat. There is nothing more Meles could ask for.

For all intents and purposes, every piece seems to have fallen in the right place in the jigsaw puzzle. Consider the OPDO. Having been part (with Meles as a willing accomplice) of the thwarting of ANDM's two-decade ambition to succeed Meles, the OPDO is "half-happy" (a strong sense of entitlement to the position of PM still persists), and could hardly be in a state of dissent. Consider the Southern Movement. It is clearly being co-opted as a weak junior partner. More than it has ever bargained for. Consider the ANDM. It is the humiliating plight of the ANDM, however, that gives this saga much less than a fairy-tale like happy-ending for Meles . In sharp contrast to its hey-days, when its influence and power peaked in the early 2000s as Meles' most trusted ally in his make-or-break tussle with Seye Abraha et al, the ANDM's declining fortune is now epitomized by the nonsensical Ministries it leads in the Cabinet. Aside from the relatively important Justice Ministry, ANDM Ministers have been relegated to the embarrassingly lightweight Ministries like that of Youth. Its new leader, Demeke Mekonen Hassen, who hails from the low-lands of the Awi(Agew) zone in South West Amhara region, is by

default one of EPRDF's four most important leaders(along with the other three leaders of the coalition's four constituent members), but is absurdly junior in the Cabinet hierarchy to his juniors in the party hierarchy. Both the third(Defense, after Foreign) and the fourth(Federal) positions in the Cabinet have gone to Ministers from the South.(The Defense Minister is Siraj Fergesa, an ethnic Silte; and the Minister of Federal Affairs is Shiferaw Tkele-Mariam, PhD, an ethnic Hadeya. Both are as colorless as bottled water.) But Demeke is in many ways similar to Haile-Mariam. His rags-to-riches rise from an obscure teacher in the mid-90s to the helm of the ANDM could not reasonably be accounted to merit. He personifies mediocrity.

His party's loss aside, he personally could not ask for more. Meles knows this. But Demeke's accession to the helm probably has more to do with denying the ANDM a rallying figure. He is devoid of links to the Amhara heartland.

So there you have it. Meles has brilliantly maneuvered the internal dynamics of the EPRDF in favor of his plans for post-2015 Ethiopia. The new Cabinet is the culmination of his success. If all goes according to plan, brace yourselves to more years with Meles Zenawi than the mere five in front of us.

But, like they say, a week is a long time in politics. And Meles Zenawi can not be denied his fantasies in-between.

72. Remembering the November 2005 Massacres

By [Eskinder Nega](#), October 29th, 2010

With the benefit of hindsight, Meles Zenawi's repressed thread of thought in 2004 and 2005 that led to a brief phase of political liberalization is markedly apparent: a wild goose chase to justify an illegal purge in the TPLF (against Seye Abraha et al in the early 2000s)

as a means to an end in which the nation becomes freer than ever before. And when this was buttressed by political and intelligence assessments about the opposition's lack of preparedness (which were accurate), the 2005 elections looked like an ideal outlet for Meles Zenawi's guilt-ridden conscience (the purged were his close, lifelong friends.) A hitherto unprecedented electoral process—there were three largely discredited ones as a backdrop—was to placate his flustered conscience and sanctify his democratic credentials both to the public and history. But by March 2005, this fantasy was turning more in to one long nightmare.

Events up to March 2005.

The most fateful of EPRDF's decisions was its acquiescence to a long procession of live debates between political parties—which were much longer and broader than is the norm in the West. What first happened in the US in 1960—live debates between Presidential candidates Kennedy

and Nixon—arrived 45 years later in Ethiopia, and in both instances changed politics forever. In the end, the mischievous attempt by the EPRDF to dilute the opposition’s message by insisting on equal time for major and minor parties was just not enough to undercut the transformative power of TV and radio.

By March, the EPRDF leadership was fully aware of the rising storm generated by the debates. Increasingly nervous, it expels SIX US election observers at the end of the month— ironically, SIX weeks before election week. But not even the most adventurous spirits were yet predicting an opposition triumph over the EPRDF at this stage.

Events in April 2005

EPRDF’s belligerence is suddenly stretched to the limit. In a twist to actual events akin to the famed dramatic developments in Indian movies, the person the EPRDF entrusts to unleash havoc turns out to be not its favored attack dog(whom I hardly need to name), but one of its most unassuming personalities, the physical education instructor—cum—Deputy Prime Minister, Adisu Legesse. In a live public debate held on April 15th, fifteen days after the expulsion of the election observers, Addisu equates the opposition with the Rwandan Interhamwe militia, which was responsible for genocide. And thus, perhaps by deliberate design, but no less plausibly, by sheer blunder, the EPRDF becomes morally and legally challenged by the specter of hand-over of power to a genocidal opposition—even if it was to win an election.

Events in May 2005

The first day of May marks the arrival of three hundred international observers—representing the EU, Carter Center and the AU. Six days later, on May 7 , the EPRDF surprises the nation with a massive rally at Meskel square. Meles is ecstatic with joy. “There is no need for us to steal an election,” he tells the assembled emotionally. EPRDF critics are stunned to silence. Devoid as they are of divine powers, there was no way for them to predict vindication in less than twenty four hours. And in the absence of an alternative explanation, it had to be only the will of providence that compelled a miracle for the opposition on historic May 8.

Not a thousand words would suffice to describe what happened at city center that day. Too large to be captured by a single camera, this mass of humanity happened momentarily and passed

away forever—always to be imagined; never to be satisfactorily explained verbally or fully captured visually. (There seems to be space for oral history even in modern times after all.) It was now time for the EPRDF to be stunned to silence.

On Election Day, May 15, two millions Ethiopians head to the polls with pronounced optimism and enthusiasm. And in a show of remarkable restraint for a country with a “genocidal opposition”, the day passes without a single incident of election related violence. But the PM has a surprise in store for the next day. He looks and sounds unnerved. “The government has decided to bring all security forces, the police and local militias, under the command of the Prime Minister. All public meetings and demonstrations are outlawed for a month,” he tells a shocked nation on May 16.

The next day, May 17, brings more surprises; but this time, pleasant ones for the public. Unofficial results indicate a landslide for the CUD, one of the nation’s two major oppositions, in Addis Ababa. The speaker of Parliament, Dawit Yohannes, loses his seat. And so do several Ministers. As bellwether for nationwide sentiment, the implication of Addis’ results immediately sends shock waves through both the EPRDF and the opposition. Both are vividly caught off guard.

EPRDF reacts instinctively. Ignoring the tallying of votes then still in progress, it declares itself the winner. Anna Gomez, chief EU election observers, reacts immediately, “improper for a ruling party,” she tells journalists. On May 28th, the electoral board controversially certifies EPRDF’s claim of overall majority. The public is simply outraged. Eight days later, with the opposition looking from the sidelines, students protest accusing the EPRDF of fraud. EPRDF’s hasty claim of plurality thus triggers public protests. Police fire live ammunition. A young female student, Shibre Desalign, is shot fatally and becomes the first victim of post-election violence. Yusef Abdella, a student at Kotebe’s TTC, succumbs to a bullet wound, and becomes the second victim. A great tragedy is beginning to unravel. Two days later, June 8th, protests erupt again and bullets from security forces kill three 16 years olds: Nebiyu Alemayehu, Fekadu Negah and Abraham Yilma (the later two brothers.) Security forces bullets also somehow find and kill Zulufa Surur, a mother of seven. The government eventually acknowledges the death of 26 people. The real figure, however, is much higher. Over 1500 people are imprisoned. And EPRDF prepares for further repression.

Three days later, Meles Zenawi speaks of Ethiopia's "maturing democracy" in an interview with Reuters. On the same day, MP-elect Tsegaye Adane, member of UEDF, the other major opposition, is shot dead in Arusi. And in a clear shoker, eight highly anticipated Air-force trainee-pilots in Belarus refuse to return to "Ethiopia's maturing democracy" and seek political asylum, symbolizing spreading dissent in to the ranks of the military.

Ethiopia teeters on the brink of change. Thousands of Ethiopians in the US and Europe hold candle light vigils for the dead.

Events in July and August

Outgoing EPRDF dominated Parliament, whose members had mostly lost their seats, vindictively pass bill that strip most of the essential powers and responsibilities of Addis Ababa city government. Almost immediately, the first calls to boycott Parliament are aired. (Addis loses its public rally permit authority.) Dr Birhanu Nega becomes mayor-elect of Addis Ababa.

By the end of August, the EPRDF and EU observers are engaged in a war of words. Anna Gomez publicly rebukes the electoral process for "failure to meet international standards." Meles' response: "garbage."

Events in September and October

Electoral board announces official results: EPRDF and allied parties 68% of parliamentary seats; 20 % CUD; 12% UEDF. The opposition responds by calling for a rally to protest the results on October 2nd. Meles personally appears on national television and sternly delivers a warning: "The rally is illegal." But the public is determined to defy the warning. An epic showdown seems to be in the making.

Three days before D-day, however, the opposition backs down and cancels the rally. An alternative stay-home action called for by the opposition for three consecutive days as of October 3 is universally ignored.

Western diplomats mediate between the EPRDF and the opposition but the talks almost immediately fail. Ten days later, CUD officially boycotts Parliament pending the fulfillment of eight watered-down preconditions. UEDF breaks ranks with CUD and opts to join Parliament.

Parliament opens on October 10 and elects Meles as PM for the third time. The next day, October 11, MPs who boycotted Parliament are stripped of their immunity from prosecution. Meles accuse CUD of treason. “They want to remove the government through street action,” maintains Meles.

CUD calls for nation-wide strikes and stay-at –homes as of the first week of November. Many vow to follow its lead.

The massacres of November—The Climax!

Merkato explodes early Tuesday morning on November 1. The government responds with immediate show of force. Scores die in the streets of Merakto. Many more are injured. By mid-afternoon, prominent CUD leaders are rounded up and newspaper offices are raided. Hailu Shawel, Birtukan Mideksa and Birhanu Nega are imprisoned. Police wantonly shoot and kill wife of an arrested CUD member in Addis; outraging the public. Wide reports of indiscriminate killings by police. Children and women amongst the dead and injured. The EPRDF is responding with massive force. The protests , however, are evidently unplanned and are mostly fueled by police brutality.

By the third day, protests spread to regional cities: Dessie, Gonder, Baher Dar, Awasa, Dire Dawa and Arba Minch. Tens of thousands are imprisoned. A fee of 1500 birr and forced confessions (absurdly absolving authorities of responsibility) are demanded to release corpses. Describing the events that transpired over those days, Samuel Frehiwot, chairman of a commission established by Parliament to investigate the riots said, “ Old men were killed while in their homes. Children were also victims while playing in the garden.” His deputy, Welde-Michael Meshasha described how many died, “The majority died from shots to the head.”

People were shot, beaten and even strangled, the commission find out.

“ It was a massacre. There is no doubt that excessive force was used,” Welde-Michael told AP after he and Frehiwot fled the country before submitting their report to parliament.

The world watched in utter disgust. And in the end, the inevitable happened: the government prevails over its unarmed citizens. A pyrrhic victory if there was ever one!!

History will not forget the murdered innocents!!

73. Open Letter to Birtukan Mideksa

By [Eskinder Nega](#), October 15th, 2010

One of the drawbacks of living in Ethiopia is the limitation it imposes on reading.

The New York Time's bestsellers list is actually further away than the mere eight thousand physical miles that separate the US and Ethiopia. Amazon's magical kindle? Science-fiction fantasy, as far as we are concerned. But thanks to the internet, we at least read of the great books that hit Western markets with sustained (and enviable) consistency. And what promises to be one of them, Nelson Mandela's collection of private papers, under the title of "Conversations with Myself," was released on Tuesday; addressing amongst other subjects, his anguish at becoming hero-worshipped.

The image of Mandela in the popular imagination altered slowly over the long years of his imprisonment. During his trial and the many subsequent years that followed, he was "a radical; a communist who espoused violence." That he escaped the death sentence was ironically projected as testimony to the independence of South Africa's judiciary; the prevalence of rule of law even if only within the narrow confines of apartheid. In the poisoned environment of bitter cold-war rivalry, his conviction was trumped as an indictment against the "violent" black liberation movement and an affirmation of the "prudence" of the architects of institutionalized racism. But this is a decade's long story, and towards the end the image of Mandela changed decisively. It took the persistence of a small minority—with human rights activists at its core—to make a difference. And they had no choice but to build an image of the perfect Mandela—saintly, perfect; almost God-like. Mandela reflects on this in his new book: "One issue that deeply worried me in prison was the false image I unwittingly projected to the outside world; of being regarded as a saint. I never was one, even on the basis of an earthly definition of a saint as a sinner who keeps trying....As a young man, I combined all the weaknesses, errors and indiscretion of a country boy, whose range of vision and experience was influenced mainly by

events in the area in which I grew up and the colleges to which I was sent. I relied on arrogance to hide my weaknesses.”(End of quotation.)

Whatever Mandela says though, his idealized image—made-up persona—is held so dearly by South Africans, no prospect is dreaded more than its deconstruction ; which is what he is now frantically fighting for. But if the experience of the US is anything to go by, he is doomed to fail—at least in the short run. For the mythologized rendering of George Washington, who led the American war of independence against the British, as a person incapable of uttering a lie, endured in school textbooks even after it was exposed—by the original source, no less—as a made-up story. America refused to let go of the mythologized idol easily. But even if downgraded slightly, hero Washington remains. And real hero he was. Like the rest of us, he just was not perfect. Perfection is really a divine attribute, beyond the reach of us mortals. Mandela treads on the same path. His deconstruction is only a question of time. Still, his hero-status will not falter.

There are multiple parallel stories in Ethiopia. One inevitably evolved with the extraordinary rise of the EPRDF to power, and involved scores of personalities—Haylom Arya, Muse Tekle, Gessese Ayele and others. But there is now an overt drive to re-write history around a made-up persona of Meles Zenawi.(The theme: Meles as the misunderstood Messiah!) A thousand pages (by Col. Eyasu.) have already been devoted to his perfection. But his inevitable deconstruction will hardly be controversial. It will be an open-and-shut case.

The imprisoned leaders of Kinjit, who disputed a stolen election against the odds, were no less mythologized as the campaign to secure their freedom unraveled. Stricken by the intensity of emotion with which they were welcomed at Washington’s Dulles Airport weeks after their release in 2007, an American police officer famously wondered if they were “a rock- band.” Recounting the extraordinary events of that day, Professor Al Mariam had this to say: “The crowd would not leave them alone. They followed them outside the terminal. They sang for them. They assembled in the parking lot. They sang some more. They followed them on the highways, miles and miles of cars lined up in two lanes. Young people flashing the “V” sign as they sped down the highway, calling out their names and thanking them. “We love you Birtukan. Thanks Bre(Birhanu). Thanks Dr. Hailu, Eng. Gizachew, Ato Brook. They followed them to the Washington Mall. And to the Mayflower Hotel. They just couldn’t get enough of them....People

hugging, kissing, embracing, singing and congratulating each other, unstoppably.”(End of quotation) Only mythologized leaders, not ordinary politicians, could have been received this way.

While too many of them were to sadly fall from the pedestal prematurely, the elevated images of Birtukan and Birhanu endured. And both were to be reinforced in due course: Birtukan, because of her re-imprisonment; and Birhanu, because of his alleged involvement in a coup-attempt.

The world-wide campaign to free Birtukan between 2008 and 2010 is a book-length story. However, in its broad outlines, it mirrors multitude of other campaigns to free famous prisoners around the globe— South Africa’s Nelson Mandela , Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi, and now that he is a Noble prize winner, China’s Liu Xiabo. Inevitably, an exalted image of the prisoner towered over the substance of the issue in all instances. There is a rational reason for this. People are swayed—and engaged— more by simple tales of personal nobility and heroism rather than the mundane details of issues.

And here comes the thrust of this letter: it is only the inflated image of Birtukan—with its impossibly high standard—that has been punctured by the vulgarly worded pardon-request. The real Birtukan remains unscathed. Under the made-for- public veneer, there is the real Birtukan that indeed inspired millions; admittedly, less perfect than the idolized image, but still worthy of the admiration of millions; still endowed with evident leadership qualities; and whose moral and intellectual integrity remains intact. In actual fact, it’s a blessing in disguise that the lofty image is no more.

The standard definition aside, moral bravery in politics amounts to taking unpopular positions despite social disapproval and possible backlash. Practically all the great personalities of history have at one point in their career been forced to take unpopular positions. Their greatness lies in their subsequent success in overcoming this interlude. They did not give up; daunting though their prospects seemed. And they went on—unwearyingly and doggedly— to win.

The nation expects nothing less from you

FREE ESKINDER NEGA & ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS, in ETHIOPIA!

Free Eskinder Nega

Eskinder Nega's Amharic Articles

1. ኢትዮጵያና የጠፋው 8.5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር - በእስክንድር ነጋ

ትላንት፣እሁድ፣ ግንቦት 14'2003 ዓ.ም፣ የእናቴን አርባ አወጣኹ። ውስጤ የፈጠረውን ስሜት ልገልፀው አልቻልኩም። ደስታ አይደለም።በውስጤ ያለው ባዶነት ደስታን ውጦ የሚያስቀር ጨለማ ጉድጓድ ነው። እርካታ ብለው የተሻለ ይመስለኛል። የእናቴ ነፍስ ከእንግዲህ የፍርድ ቀንን በሰላም መጠበቅ ትችላለች ብዬ አስባለኹ።

በባህላችን ለቅሶ ይከበራል። ሙታንን እንደ ኢትዮጵያዊያን የሚያከብር ሕዝብ የለም። ከ3 እስከ 7 ቀናት እያለቀሰንላቸው እንቀመጣለን። በ12 እና በ 30ኛው ቀናት በቅዳሴ ግዜ ምልጃ ይሰማላቸዋል። በ40ኛው ቀን ሰፋ ባለ ዝግጅት ይታሰባሉ። ለሙት ዓመታቸው ፀበል ፀዲቅ ይዘጋጃል። የሚችል፣ ሰባተኛውን ዓመት ድንኳን ጥሎ እየፀለየ፣ እየበላና እየጠጣ ያስታውሳቸዋል።

ይህንን ሁሉ እንደኋላ ቀር ባህል የሚቆጥሩት እንዳሉ አውቃለኹ። እኔ ግን አልስማማም። ለሚወዱት አይበዛም። ከእኛ ኋላቀርነት ይልቅ፣የፈረንጆቹ ጭካኔ ነው የሚሰቀጥጠኝ።ቀብረው በነገታው normalcy ወደሚሉት መመለስ ነው። የሰውነትን ዋጋ በእጅጉ እንዳሳነሰ ባህል እቆጥረዋለኹ። እነሱ እኛን እንጂ፣ እኛ እነሱን ስንመስል ማየት አልቻልንም።

እናቴን የቀበርኩ ዕለት የመኪና ታርጋ ሲመዘገብ እንደነበር ሰማኹ። ለኢሕአዴግ አፈርኹለት። በባህላችን ለቅሶ አይደፈርም። ይከበራል። ደመኛ እንኳን ፀቡን ያበርዳል። በመንገድ የሚያልፍ አስክሬንን፣ ሕዝብ እጅ ይነሳል፣ ወታደር ሰላምታ ይሰጣል። የሰልስቱ ዕለት ግን ኢሕአዴግ በጋዜጣ የሰድብ ናዳ አወረደብኝ።(#ዛሬ እናቴ ከሞቱ 3ኛው ቀን ነው\$ እየተባለ።) ሌላ ነውር።ለ40ውም አላረፈም፣ታርጋ ሲመዘገብ እንደነበር ሰማኹ።

#ኢሕአዴግ ቀይ መስመር የለውም;\$ ብዬ አንድ የሚቀርባቸውን ሰው ባለፈው ሰሞን ጠይቄው ነበር።

#የለውም;\$ ብሎመለሰልኝ ፊቱን ቅጭም አድርጎ።

#ቀይ መስመር መኖርማ አለበት። ከፖለቲካ የሚበልጥ እኩ ብዙ ነገር አለ፤\$ ብዬ በስሜት መለስኹለት።

ቀይ መስመር ከሌለ ህሊና የለም ማለት ነው። ህሊና በብዙ ምክንያቶች ይጠፋል። ጥላቻ አንዱ ነው። ራስ ወዳድነት ሌላው ነው። ከፋትም መንስዔ ነው።እንዲህ እንዲህ እያሉ ብዙ መዘርዘር ይቻላል። የኢሕአዴግን መሪዎች በሚመለከት ግን፣ እስከቅርብ ግዜ ፍርሃታቸው ነው ብዬ አስብ ነበር። ሕዝብን ያንገላቱ ሰዎች ናቸው። ይሄ ግን ቀላሉ ወንጀላቸው ነው። ሀገራቸው ላይ የፈፀሙት ታሪካዊ በደል አለ።የሚሊኒየሙ ጥፋት ነው የሚሉት ብዙዎች ናቸው። ከዚያ በኋላ የነበርን ጭራ መያዝ ነው የሆነባቸው። የነበርን ጭራ ሊያዝ ደግሞ፣ህሊና ቅንጦት ነው።

የተባበሩት መንግስታት የልማት ተቋም ባለፈው ሳምንት ይፋ ያደረገው ጥናት ግን፣ ፍርሃታቸውን አቀጭጭበኛል። ምንም ቦታ የለውም ባይባልም፣ አውራ ነው ብሎ ለመከራከር ከዚህ በኋላ ይከብዳል።

እንደጥናቱ ውጤት ከሆነ፤ በኢትዮጵያ፤ ሥልጣን የሀብት ምንጭ ሆኗል። የባለሥልጣናቱን ስም ባይዘረዝርም። ይሄ በሌሎች የአፍሪካ ሀገሮች እውን ከሆነ፤ ብዙ አሥርት ዓመታት ተቆጥረዋል። ኢትዮጵያ አንዷ ስላልነበረች ስንደሰት ኖረናል፡

የ5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ባለሀብት ጌታ ለመሆን ስለበቁት የዛየር መሪው ሞቡቱ ሴሴኮ አንብበን ለአፍሪካዊያን ወንድሞቻችን አዝነንላቸዋል። ሞቡቱ ሥልጣን ሲይዙ አምስት ሳንቲም አልነበራቸውም። የናይጄሪያው ሳኒ አባቻ ሥልጣን ላይ በቆየባቸው ጥቂት ዓመታት ከ2 እስከ 5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ወደ ኪሳቸው እንዳስገቡ ሲሰማ የተፈጠረው ድንጋጤ ትውስ ይለኛል። ከመቼው፤ ከአፍሪካ ወጣ ስንል ደግሞ፤ የኢንዶኔዢያው ሱሃርቶ አሉ። ከሀገራቸው ላይ ከ15 እስከ35 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ዘርፈዋል። ጎረቤታቸው የፊሊፒንስ ፈርዲናንድ ማርቆስ ከ5 እስከ 10 ቢሊዮን ጭጭ አድርገዋል። በአውሮፖ ደግሞ፤ የሰርቢያው ሚሊሶቪች እንደምንም ብለው 1ቢሊዮን ሞልተዋል።ይህ ማለት ግን፤ ሁሉም መሪዎች ዘራፊዎች ናቸው ማለት አይደለም።

ይሄ ሁሉ (ከሚሊሶቪች በቀር) ቅድመ ግንቦት 20 1983 መሆኑ ነው። በወቅቱ የነበሩት የደርግ ባለሥልጣናት ግን፤ ከውስኪና ጥሬ ሥጋ ባሻገር ብዙም አልተጓዙም። ስኳር የቃሙትም ቢሆኑ፤ የዶላር ሚሊየን አልሆኑም። ከአንዲት ሚኒባስ ያለፉት በጣት የሚቆጠሩ ናቸው። ደርግ ፈፅሞ ዘራፊ መንግሥት አልነበረም። ደርግን ያሰከረው የሰው ደም ነበር፤ ገንዘብ ቦታ አልነበረውም።

ሌባ አለመሆኑ ግን ደርግን አያስመስግነውም። እኔ በግሌ፤ ሳይሰርቅ ከሚገድል መንግሥት፤ እየሰረቀ የማይገድል መንግሥት እመርጣለኹ። የሰውን ሕይወት የሚያክል ረቅቅ ፍጥረት በገንዘብ ሊተመን አይችልም። ደርግ ሳይገድል ቢዘርፍ ይሻል ነበር። ገንዘብ ይተካል። ያለቁት ወንድሞቻችንና እህቶቻችን ግን መቼም አንተካቸውም።

ችግሩ፤ ዘራፊ መንግሥታት ብዙ ጊዜ ገዳይ መሆናቸው ላይ ነው። የሱሃርቶ መንግሥት በ10ሺዎች የሚቆጠሩ ዜጎቹን ፈጅቷል።ከእኛ ቀይሽብር የባሰ ነበር። የፊሊፒንስ ማርቆስ መንግሥትም ነፍስ ለማጥፋት አልበዘነም። የሞቡቱ ሴሴኮ የግድያ ሥርዓት የተበሰረው ፓትሪስ ሉሙምባን የመሰለ ብርቅዬ መሪ በመቅጠፍ ነበር። ከዚያ በኋላ መቆሚያ አልነበረውም። የሳኒ አባቻ መንግሥት ደግሞ ሳይሰት ነበር። ሰይፉ ለባለቅኔዎች እንኳን አልታጠፈም። (ይቀጥላል)

(ካለፈው የቀጠለ)

ቅዳሜ ረፋዱ ላይ ጀምበር ለመጥለቅ ዳር ዳር ትላለች። የግንቦት አናት ሰርሳሪ ፀሐይ ዘንድሮ በደመና ለዝቦ ነው የሰነበተው። ከእኩለ ቀን አንስቶ የከተማዋ አየር ቀዝቀዝ ብሎ ውሏል። አንዳንዴም መለስተኛ ካፊያ መጠት ሄደች ይላል።

የብሥራተ ገብርኤል ሰፈር ነዋሪ እንደወትሮው የግቢ በሩን ቀርቅሮ በየቤቱ ውስጥ ተከቷል። ትናንሽም ትላልቅም ቤቶች በረዣዥም የአጥር ግንብ የተከለሉ ናቸው። በቁራሽ የእርሻ መሬት ደም ሲቀባባ የኖረ ሕዝብ፤ ከቤቱ ይልቅ አጥሩን አጥብቆ ይሰራል። ውጤቱ ጥሩ አልሆነም። ረዣዥሞቹ አጥሮች በነባሩ የኢትዮጵያዊያን ማሕበራዊ ሕይወት ላይ የቆሙ ግድቦች

ሆነዋል። የሰፈርተኛው ትስስር እንደ ፈረንጆቹ የላላ ለመሆን ትንሽ ነው የቀረው። የጥንቱ ኦብሮነት ለአዲሱ ባይተዋርነት ሹብረክ ብሏል።

እንዲህም ሆኖ፤ ኢትዮጵያውያን አሁንም በሰርነቻቸው፤ በለቅሶቻቸውና በአምልኮታቸው እንደተሳሰሩ ናቸው። የጥንቱ ዕድር አልተበጣጠሰም። የብስራተ ገብርኤል ነዋሪ አብሮ ይሰርጋል፤ ተደጋግፎ ይላቀሳል፤ ተሰባስቦ ፈጣሪውን ያመልካል።

የቅዳሜው የእድር ጡሩንባ ግን፤ ሰፈርተኛውን በእጅጉ ግራ አጋባ። ሰዓቱ ተዛብቷል። ጥሩምባው አየሩን የሰነጠቀው ከረፋዱ 12 ሰዓት ገደማ ነው። ተሰምቶ አይታወቅም። የእድር ጥሪ ከሌሊቱ 11 ሰዓት እስከ 12 ሰዓት ነው። ዛሬ ምን ተፈጠረ? ነዋሪው በጉጉት ከየቤቱ ብቅ አለ።

«እድርተኞች፤ ነገ፤ ግንቦት 20፤ ከጠዋት 12 ሰዓት ጀምሮ በመስቀል አደባባይ የሕዳሴውን ግድብ አስመልክቶ ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ ስለሚደረግ እንድትገኙ ተብላችኋል።» እያሉ አደበላለቁት የእድሩ ለፋፊ፤ ትከሻቸው ላይ ባንጠለጠሉት የድምፅ ማጉያ። ሸረ፤ እድር ከቶ ስለሕዳሴው ግድብ (የዓባይ ግድብ) ምን አገባው? ሰልፉስ እውነት ለግድቡ ነው ወይስ ለኢሕአዴግ ድል? ማን ይጠየቅ? ማንስ ይመልስ? የብስራተ ገብርኤል ነዋሪ ከንፈሩን በቁጭት እየመጠጠ ወደየቤቱ ገባ። ነውር የጠፋበት ዘመን።

ቀበሌዎች በበኩላቸው፤ እያንዳንዱን በር እያንዳኩ ወረቀት በትነዋል። «ከ18 ዓመት በላይ የሆነ እንዳይቀር» ብለዋል። በግዴታ ይሁን በውዴታ አልለየም። በትምህርት ቤቶችም ሲቀሰቀስ ሰነባብቷል። ተማሪዎቹ ግን ከ18 ዓመት ቢታች ናቸው። ግንቦት 20 አልተነሳም። ለዓባይ ግድብ እንዲወጡ ነው የተነገራቸው። «ገለልተኛ» የሴቶችና የወጣቶች ማህበራት ምንጩ ያልታወቀ ገንዘብ ረጭተዋል። የጥቃቅንና አነስተኛ ኢንተርፕራይዞች አባላት በቡድን እንዲወጡ ጥብቅ መመሪያ ተሰጥቷል። የቀረ ወየውለት። ለእነዚህ ምክንያት መንገር አላስፈለገም። በቀጭን ትዕዛዝ ግልብጥ ብለው ይወጣሉ። ዝንፍ ቢሉ ጉሮሮዋቸው እንደሚዘጋ ያውቁታል። ለጥቂት ቀናትም የመንገድ ለመንገድ ቅስቀሳ ተደርጓል፤ ትርፉ ከሕዝብ ግልምጫ ብዙም ባያልፍም። ሆኖም፤ አንድም ሰው ትርጉም አለው። በእንጥብጣቢ በርሜል ይሞላል። ስለዚህም፤ በአራቱም ማዕዘን ተወጥሯል።

የግንቦት 20 እለት፤ የማይናቅ ቁጥር ያለው ሕዝብ በመስቀል አደባባይ ተገኝቷል። አንድ ሚሊዮን ተብሎ የታለመው ግን ቅዠት ሆኖ ቀርቷል።

ግልፅ ባልሆነ ምክንያት፤ ሰላማዊ ሰልፉን በቶሎ ለመበተን ጥድፊያ ነበር። በሁለት ዓረፍተ ነገር የምትዘጋ ጥያቄን ግማሽ ሰዓት የሚያላዝኑባት መለስ ዜናዊ፤ የአምስት ደቂቃ ብቻ ንግግር አደረጉ። በ20 ዓመታት ውስጥ አጭሩ ንግግራቸው መሆኑ ነው። አዲስ ክብረወሰን። (ብዙዎች ልምድ እንዲያደርጉት ተመኝተውላቸዋል።) በጥቅሉ፤ ሰላማዊ ሰልፉ ሁለት ሰዓታት እንኳን አልቆየም።

ለምን?

ተቃውሞ ስለተፈራ። መጀመሪያውንም፤ ፈራ ተባ እየተባለ የተጠራ ሰልፍ ነበር። ሕዝብ ወደ አደባባይ ገብቶ አልለቅም ቢልስ? የግብፅ ታሂርር አደባባይ ተፈጠረ ማለት አይደለም እንዴ? ዘንድሮ ሕዝብን በመጨፍጨፍ መበተን አይቻልም። በአረብ ሀገራት አይተነዋል። አደባባይ የተቀመጠ ህዝብን ደግሞ መጨፍጨፍ አያመችም። ኢሕአዴግ መውደቂያውን አመቻችቶ ነበር። አደጋው እንመለስን አልጠፋቸውም፤ ብዙ ያውቃሉ። በሕልውናቸው ቁማር የተጫወቱት፤ አጋጣሚውን

መጠቀም የሚችል የተደራጀ ሕዝብ የለም ብለው ስላመኑ ነው። አልተሳሳቱም። የሞከረ እንኳን አልነበረም። ሰልፉ ቶሎ የተበተነው ለምናልባቱ መሆኑ ነው። ማንም ስለምንም መቶ በመቶ እርግጠኛ መሆን አይችልም። ያቺ ቀዳዳ መደፈን ነበረባት።

ኢኮኖሚያዊ ስሜት አደገ የሚል መሪ ፈገግታ ከፊቱ ሊጠፋ አይችልም። ከዚህ በላይ ብዙ ሊፈልግ አይችልም። የመለስ ፊት ግን ብዙም ሳይፈታ ነው ሰላማዊ ሰልፉ የተጠናቀቀው። ሐሳባቸው ሌላ ቦታ የሄደ ይመስላል። እርግጥ፣ የሀገር መሪ ሆኖ የሚታሰብ አይጠፋም። ቀልብን የሚሰልብ ጉዳይ የሚያጋጥመው ግን፣ አልፎ አልፎ ነው።

ከጠቅላይ ሚኒስትሩ ጋር ሰሞኑን ተጋፍጦ የሚገኘው ጉዳይ ቀልብን ሊስብ የሚችል ብቻ ተብሎ ሊታለፍ የሚችል አይደለም። አንድ ደረጃ ከፍ ይላል። ቅሌት ቢባል ይመጥነዋል። ፈረንጆች Scandal ይሉታል። መለስ ጭው ብለው የጠፉ ቢመስሉ አይገርምም።

8.5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ከባድ ገንዘብ ነው። ዘንድሮ እንኳን ለኢትዮጵያ ለአሜሪካ ይከብዳታል። ላለፉት 5 እና 6 ዓመታት በኢኮኖሚው ተዓምር አስመዝግበናል እየተባለ፣ ሐገራችን በዚህ ዓመት ወደ ውጭ ከምትላካቸው ምርቶች የምትጠብቀው ከ2 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ትንሽ ነው ከፍ የሚለው። 8.5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ከ4 ዓመታት ድምር ልፋታችን ጋር የሚስተካከል ነው፤ እንደ ሐገር ሆነን። ታዲያ፣ ይሄ ቅሌት መባል ይነሰው እንዴት?

ከኢትዮጵያ ላይ ስለተዘረፈው 8.5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ዛሬ ብዙረዝር የቀባሪ አርጂ ያደርገኛል። ሁሉም ያውቀዋል። ዘረፋው ዜና አይደለም። ዜናው በተባበሩት መንግሥታት በኩል ለመውጣት መብቃቱ። ጥርጣሬያችን አሁን በማስረጃ ተደግፏል። ኢሕአዴግ ከዚህ በኋላ ማስረጃ ሊጠይቀን አይችልም።

ከ8.5 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ላይ ከ60 እስከ 65 ከመቶ የሚሆነው ገንዘብ ከሀገር የወጣው ከውጭ ንግድ ጋር በተያያዘ መልኩ እንደሆነ በተመድ ሪፖርት ተቀምጧል። የነጋዴዎች እጅ አለበት ማለት ነው። ይሄ ብዙ አያከራክርም። ብዙ ሚሊዮን ዶላሮች የሚያወጡ መኖሪያ ቤቶች በአሜሪካ የገዙ ኢትዮጵያውያን ነጋዴዎች እንዳሉ ይታወቃል። ንግዳቸው ግን ሙሉ ለሙሉ ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ነው። ገንዘብ እንዳሸሹ ግልፅ ነው። ድምር አቅማቸው ግን እምብዛም እንደሆነ የአደባባይ ሚስጢር ነው። (የአላሙዲንን አቅም አያካትትም።) በጣም ተለጥጦ ከ2 እና ከ3 መቶ ሚሊዮን ዶላር አይዘልም። እንዲያውም፣ 400 ሚሊዮን ዶላርን እንኳን በእነሱ ላይ ብናሳብ፣ 8 ቢሊዮን ዶላር ይቀራል። ለዚህ ገንዘብ ተጠያቂዎቹ በስልጣን ላይ ያሉት አንዳንድ የኢሕአዴግ መሪዎች ናቸው። ሌላ ተጠርጣሪ የለም። ያለ ቀይ መስመር ደሃ ሀገራቸውን አድምተዋል።

ግንቦት 20 እለት የመለስን ቀልብ የሳበው ይህ ጉዳይ ነበር ብዬ ተስፋ አደርጋለሁ። መንግሥታቸው ብዙ ብዙ ጥያቄዎች አሉበት።

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2. የኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ ወልደሥላሴ ሞት - በእስክንድር ነጋ

የደርግ የቀድሞ የደህንነት ሚኒስትር፣ ኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ ወልደሥላሴ፣ ባለፈው ቅዳሜ፣ ግንቦት 27 ቀን 2003 ዓ.ም፣ በእስር ላይ በነበሩበት ቃሊቲ ወህኒ ቤት አርፈዋል።

ወንዳወንድ ገፅታና ደንዳና ሰውነት የነበራቸው ኮ/ል ተስፋዬ፣ በሕይወት ዘመናቸው ብዙ ከመናገር ይልቅ ማዳመጥን የሚወዱ ሰው እንደነበሩ በቅርብ የሚያውቋቸው ሰዎች ይናገሩላቸዋል። የደርግ አባል አልነበሩም። ሆኖም፣ አብዮቱ የመጣላቸው እንጂ የመጣባቸው እንዳልነበር ነጋሪ አላስፈለጋቸውም። ተስፋዬ የጭቁኖች ልጅ ነበሩ። ወዲያው ነበር ታማኝ የሆኑት።

በመጀመሪያዎቹ የአብዮት ዓመታት ከደርግ አባሉ ተካ ቱሉ ስር ሆነው ሰርተዋል። በማዕረግ ግን ተስፋዬ ይበልጡ ነበር። በስልጠናም የሰማይና የምድር ያህል ይራራቁ ነበር ማለት ያስደፍራል። ተስፋዬ እስራኤል ድረስ ሄደው ተምረዋል። ከሞሳድ ጋር ትከሻ ለትከሻ ተጋፍተዋል። አክራሪ አብዮተኞች የእስራኤል ቆይታቸው ሁልጊዜ ይቆጠቁጣቸው ነበር። ብዙም ሲያሟቸው ኖረዋል። የመንግሥቱ ኃይለማርያም ልብ ግን በተስፋዬ ብቃት በጠዋቱ ማልሷል። ተስፋዬ ሰለቸኝ ሳይሉ ጧት ማታ ይሰራሉ። አለቃቸው እንደዚያ ዓይነት ሰው አልነበሩም። ብዙም ሳይቆይ፣ ተካ ተነስተው ሜዳውም ፈረሱም የተስፋዬ ሆነ።

ተስፋዬ፣ ሚኒስትርነት ወዲያው ነበር የተመቻቸው። ሰውነታቸው እንደፊኛ ተለጠጠ። ከጭንቅላታቸው እስከእግር ጣታቸው ወፈሩ። ዝምታቸውም በዚያው ልክ ጨመረ። ብዙ ሚስጢሮችን እየዋጡ አስቀሩ። አንደበታቸው ቢከፈት አፈትልከው የሚያመልጧቸው ሳይመስላቸው አልቀረም። ሚስጢሮቹም ከቀን ወደ ቀን ተደራርበውባቸዋል። ለምሳሌ፣ ስለ በዓሉ ግርማ አሟሟት ያውቁ ነበር። ብርቅየው ደራሲ በሞቱ ጊዜ የመንግሥት «የጓዳ ሚስጢር» በእሳቸው መስሪያ ቤት ውስጥ ተማክሎ ነበር። ቅዳሜ እለት ወደመቃብራቸው ይዘውት ሄደዋል። ከመንግሥቱ ሌላ፣ ይሄን ሚስጢር የሚያውቅ አሁን ከቶ በነፍስ ይኖር ይሆን?

ደርግ፣ እረፍትን ሳያውቅ የሞተ መንግሥት ነበር። ከ1971 እስከ 1978 ዓ.ም የነበሩት ሰባት ዓመታት አንፃራዊ ሰላም ነበራቸው። ሻዕቢያ ተዳክሞ ነበር። ሕወታት ገና በዳዴ ላይ ነበረች። የዚያድ ባሬ መንግሥትም ተንፍሷል። ደርግ የማይገፋ ተራራ ነው ተብሎ የተነገረለት በእነዚህ ዓመታት ነበር።

በ1978 ግን፣ የአልጌና ግምባር በሻዕቢያ እንደ ድንገት ተደመሰሰ። ከዚህ በኋላ፣ ደርግ ከማጥቃት ወደ መከላከል ተሸጋገረ። ከሁለት ዓመት በኋላ አፍክበትን ተቀማ። መንገዳገድ የጀመረው ከዚህ ግዜ አንስቶ ነበር ማለት ይቻላል። ከሶስት ዓመት በኋላ፣ በግንቦት 1983 ዓ.ም፣ ሙሉ ለሙሉ ተሸነፈ።

በደርግ ተቀዋሚዎች ላይ መረጃ የማሰባሰብ ኃላፊነት የተጣለው በኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ መሥሪያ ቤት ላይ ነበር። ኃላፊነቱ ሁለት ገፅታዎች ነበሩት። አንደኛው፣ አማጺያኑ በከተማ የነበራቸው መዋቅር መበጣጠስ ሲሆን፣ ሁለተኛው አማጺያኑ እምብርት ድረስ ዘልቆ በመግባት መረጃ ማሰባሰብ ነበር። ይህንን ተልዕኮ ለማስፈፀም፣ ሙያዊ ስልጠና የተሰጣቸው በርካታ የመረጃ ሰራተኞች በኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ ስር ነበሩ።

የመጀመሪያውን ኃላፊነት እነ ኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ በብቃት ተወጥተዋል። አንድም አማፂ፣ በከተማ የረባ መዋቅር አልነበረውም፤ እስከመጨረሻው እለት ድረስ። ውድቀታቸው፣ ሁለተኛው ተልዕኮ ላይ ነበር። አንድንም አማጺ ሰርገው በመግባት መረጃ

መቃረም ሳይችሉ ቀርተዋል። ያ ሁሉ የተማረ ኃይል አንዲትም ቁም ነገር መስራት አልቻለም። የአልጌና፣ የአፍክሌት፣ የምፅዋና የሽሬ ድንገተኛ ወታደራዊ ጥቃት የዚህ ክፍተት ውጤት ነበር። አማጺያኑ ድል የተጎናፀፉት ድንገተኛ ጥቃት መሰንዘር በመቻላቸው ነበር።

ስለዚህም፣ የኮሎኔሉን አጠቃላይ ውጤት ሃምሳ ከመቶ ነበር ማለት ይቻላል። ችግሩ፣ በሞትና ሽረት ትግል የ50 ከመቶ ውጤት ሽንፈት መሆኑ ላይ ነው።

ይሄ ማለት ግን፣ ለደርግ ውድቀት ተስፋዬ ብቸኛና ዋነኛ ተጠያቂ ነበሩ ማለት አይደለም። ተጠያቂዎቹ ብዙዎች ናቸው፤ የሚጀምረውም ከአናቱ ከአራሳቸው ከኮሎኔል መንግሥቱ ነው። ቁምነገሩ፣ በዋናነት ከሚፈረጁት መካከል አንዱ ኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ መሆናቸው ነው። ከደርግ ስልጣን ባሻገር ሃገርን የመጠበቅ ኃላፊነት ነበረባቸው። ኃላፊነታቸውን አልተወጡም። ውጤቱ ኤርትራን አስከፍሏል።

ኮሎኔሉ ያለፉትን 20 ዓመታት በእስር አሳልፈዋል። ግንቦት 20 1983 ዓ.ም ታስረው፣ ግንቦት 27 ቀን 2003 ዓ.ም ከዚህ ዓለም በሞት ተለይተዋል። 7307 ቀናትን በአንዲት ጠባብ ግቢ ውስጥ ተወስነው አሳልፈዋል። በእስር ላይ የነበራቸው ቆይታ ከመደበኛ እስረኛ የተለየ እንደነበር አውቃለሁ። የደርግ ባለሥልጣናት ከብዙሃኑ እስረኛ ጋር አልተቀላቀሉም። ለብቻቸው ተከልለው ነው የኖሩት። እስር ቤታቸው ንፁህ ነው። ጥበቱም የሚጋነን ሆኖ አያውቅም። ዓመታት በገፉ ቁጥር፣ ብዙ እስረኞች ወይ በሞት፣ ወይ በፍቺ፣ እየተቀናነሱ አሁን አሁን እንዲያውም ሰፍቷቸው እንደሚኖሩ ሰምቻለሁ። ቴሌቪዥንና ቤተመጻሕፍት አላቸው። የመዝናኛ እና የስፖርት ጊዜም አመቻችተዋል፤ ቢንጎ የዘወትር ጊዜ ማሳለፊያ ነው። ከቅርብ ጊዜ ወዲህም፣ አረብ ሳት ገብቶላቸዋል። የሚከታተሉትን ጣቢያ የሚወስንላቸው ግን ወህኒ ቤቱ ነው። ከሁሉም በላይ ደግሞ፣ ቤተሰቦቻቸውን ቶሎ ቶሎ ያገኛሉ። በኢትዮጵያ ደረጃ፣ አያያዛቸው የሚያስከፋ አይደለም። ብዙዎቻችን በኢሕአዴግ ገሃነማዊ እስር ቤቶች ያየነውን መከራ እነሱ አላዩም። ከዚህ አኳያ፣ እድለኞች ናቸው ማለት ይቻላል።

በአንድ ወቅት፣ ተስፋዬ ወልደሥላሴ፣ ፍቅረሥላሴ ወግደረስ፣ ለገሠ አስፋውና ስለሺ መንገሻ አንድ ክፍል ውስጥ እንደነበሩ ሰምቻለሁ። የተረጋገጠ ግን አይደለም። እነዚህ የደርግ አባላት ተስፋዬን አኩርፈዋቸው እንደነበረም ከእነዚያው ሰዎች አጫውተውኛል። እንደገና ግን፣ የተረጋገጠ አይደለም፤ ወሬ ነው። እውነት ቢሆን ግን አልገረምም። ኢሕአዴግ አዲስ አበባን ለመያዝ በተቃረበበት ጊዜ፣ ባለሥልጣናት እንዳይጠፉ ኬላ እንዲዘጋ ተስፋዬ ትዕዛዝ ሰጥተው ነበርና። በትዕዛዛቸው መሰረት፣ አዲስ አበባ የነበሩት የደርግ ባለሥልጣናት በኢሕአዴግ እጅ ወድቀዋል። (የተረፉት 4 ብቻ ነበሩ። እነሱም በወቅቱ ጣቢያን አምባሲ ገብተዋል።) እስር ቤት ሲገናኙ፣ ትዕዛዙ መንግሥቱን የተኩት የጄኔራል ተስፋዬ ገብረኪዳን እንጂ የእሳቸው እንዳልነበር ተናግረዋል። ምን ያህል እንደታመኑ አላውቅም።

ከኮሎኔል ተስፋዬ በፊት፣ ተካ ቱሉ እዚያው እስር ቤት አርፈዋል። ከደርግ አባላት መካከል፣ ካሣዬ አራጋውና ካሣሁን ታፈሰም የመጨረሻ እስትንፋሳቸው የወጣቸው በእስር ላይ ሆነው ነበር። ሌሎች የማላቃቸው የደርግ አባላትም እዚያው እንደሞቱም እገምታለኹ። በነፍስ ያሉት አርጅተዋል። የእድሜያቸውን 1/3ኛ በእስር አሳልፈዋል። ቅስማቸው ያልተሰበረው ጥቂቶች ናቸው። ሁሉም ተፀፅተዋል። ጥፋታቸው የማይረሳ መሆኑ እንደተጠበቀ ሆኖ፣ የሚታዘንላቸው እንጂ የሚጠሉ ሰዎች መሆናቸው አብቅቷል። ከሞቱት በላይ ከሚኖሩት በታች ሆነው ያለፉትን 20 ዓመታት አሳልፈዋልና።

ስለዚህም፣ ከአሁን በኋላ ከእስር ቤት ወደ ቤታቸው የሚመለሰው ፊሳቸው መሆኑ ትርጉም የለውም፡፡ መሞት የሚገባቸው ከእስር ተፈትተው በየቤታቸው ነው፡፡ እነሱ ያላሳዩትን ርኅራሄ ለእነሱ በመቸር፣ ለታሪክ የማይረሳ ትምህርት ትቶ ማለፉ ለቀጣዩ ትውልድ ይጠቅማል፡፡

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3. ሶሪያ፣ አሜሪካ፣ አውሮፓና ኢትዮጵያ - በእስክንድር ነጋ

የአሜሪካው ፕሬዝዳንት ባራክ ኦባማ ሰሞኑን ተወጥረው ሰነባብተዋል፡፡ የመንግሥታቸው ወጪ ከገቢው መንጥቆ ማምለጡ አዲስ ዜና አይደለም፡፡ ትንሹ ቡሽ እንደ እ.ኤ.አ. በ2000 ዓ.ም ከክሊንተን ስልጣን ሲረከቡ፣ የአሜሪካ መንግሥት በካዝናው ትርፍ ገንዘብ ነበረው፡፡ ገቢው ከወጪው ይበልጥ ነበር፡፡ በ2010፣ ዓመታዊ የባጀት ጉድለቱ ከ1 ትሪሊዮን ዶላር በላይ ሄዷል፡፡ በየዓመቱ የተጠራቀመው ጉድለትና ብድር ተደማምሮ ዘንድሮ ከ14 ትሪሊዮን ዶላር በላይ አሻቅቧል፡፡ ይሄ ነው ብሔራዊ ዕዳ ማለት፡፡ ሽክሙ አሜሪካን እያንገዳገዳት ነው፡፡

አብዛኛው ዕዳ የተቆለለው ቢንላደን በለኮሰው የሽብርና የፀረ ሽብር ጦርነት ነው፡፡ አስደናቂነቱም እዚህ ላይ ነው፡፡ በታሪክ፣ ከስረው የተፈረካከሱ ታላላቅ መንግሥታት በብዛት ይገኛሉ፡፡ በቅርቡ እንዲያው ሶቭየት ሕብረት አለች፡፡ የገነባችውን የጦር ኃይል መሸከም አቅቷት ለውድቀት ተዳርጋለች፡፡

የአሜሪካ የተለየ ነው፡፡ እርግጥ፣ ገና አልወደቀችም፤ አልከሰረችም፡፡ ጫፍ ላይ ግን ደርሳለች፡፡ በአንድ ሰው መዘዝ፡፡ ድንቅ ነው፡፡ በታሪክ የመጀመሪያው ነው፡፡

ታዲያ፣ ኦባማ ለወረሱት ዕዳ እንጂ ለሶሪያ ግዜ ባይኖራቸው እንዴት ይፈረድባቸዋል? ከሁለተኛው የዓለም ጦርነት በኋላ አሜሪካን እንዲህ ደብቷት አያውቅም፡፡

የሶሪያ ሕዝባዊ አብዮት ከተቀጣጠለ ይኸው አምስት ወራት አልፈውታል፡፡ የጀመረ ሰሞን፣ ከምር የወሰደው አልነበረም፡፡ የትንሹ አሳድ መንግሥት ከማይገፉት የመካከለኛው ምሥራቅ ሀገሮች እንደአንዱ ነበር የሚቆጠረው፡፡ ጠንካራ ተቃዋሚ አልነበረበትም፡፡ ሕዝቡ የተከፋፈለ ነው፡፡ በኢትዮጵያ በብሔር ነው፣ በሶሪያ ደግሞ በኃይማኖት ነው፡፡ ብዙኃኑ ሕዝብ ሱኒ ነው፡፡ ሥልጣን ላይ ያሉት አሊዋ የሚባሉ የሙስሊም ክፍያ ናቸው፡፡ አይጥና ድመት ናቸው፡፡ ለእነአሳድ የተመቸ ነው፡፡ Air-tight ይሉታል ፈረንጆች፡፡ መፈናፈኛ የለም ለማለት ነው፡፡ የተከፋፈለ ህዝብ ለአብዮት አይሆንም፣ ብለው ተነተኑ የፖለቲካ ምሁሮቹ፡፡ ግብፅ ሌላ፣ ሶሪያ ሌላ፡፡

በሂደት ግን፣ ትንታኔውና ሂደቱ የቀንና የሌሊት ያህል ተለያዩ፡፡ አይፈነዳም የተባለው ሕዝባዊ ቁጣ ፈነዳ፡፡ አይተባበርም የተባለው ሕዝብ ተባበረ፡፡ አይዘልቅም የተባለው ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ ዘለቀ፡፡ አይከፋፈልም የተባለው የሶሪያ ጦር ተከፋፈለ፡፡ አይደራደሩም የተባሉት አሳድ አንገት ደፉ፡፡ የፖለቲካ ተንታኞቹም ድራሻቸው ጠፋ፡፡ ግራ ተጋብተዋል፡፡ ለውጥ አይመጣባትም የተባለችው ሶሪያ ለውጥ አይቀሬ ሆኖባት፡፡ ሚዛኑ ከእነ አሳድ ወደ ሕዝቡ እያጋለ ነው፡፡

ይሄኔ ነው እንግዲህ የዓለም አቀፉ ማህበረሰብ ሩጫ የሚጀምረው፡፡ በግብፅ አይተነዋል፡፡ ቀደም ሲልም፣ በቱኒዚያና በሊቢያ፡፡ የኃይል ሚዛን ታይቶ ነው ሕዝብ የሚታገዘው፡፡ ዲሞክራሲ ሁለተኛ አጀንዳ ነው፡፡ በዲፕሎማሲው ዓለም ይህ ስም አለው፡፡ Realpolitik ይሉታል፡፡ መንግሥት ሲያይል ከመንግሥት ጋር፣ ሕዝብ ሲያይል ከሕዝብ ጋር መቆም ማለት ነው፡፡ በሌላ አነጋገር፣ እውነት ከኃይል ጋር ነው ያለው ማለት ነው፡፡ Might is right ይሉታል እነሱ፡፡ ቀላል ነው፡፡ ዋጋ አያስከፍልም፡፡ ጥቅምን ማዕከል ያደረገ አካሄድ ነው፡፡

ለወትሮው፣ የዓለም አቀፉ ማህበረሰብ ተሳትፎ ሲያስፈልግ፣ አሜሪካ ፊት ፊት ትቀድማለች፡፡ የዓለማችን ብቸኛዋ ኃይል መንግሥት ናት፡፡ አይገርምም፡፡ እንድትመራ ይጠበቅባታል፡፡ በተለይ አውሮፓውያን እርስ በእርስ ስለማይስማሙ (ስለሚፎካከሩ)፣ አብረው ለመሥራት የአሜሪካንን አመራር ይፈልጋሉ፡፡ ገላጋያቸው ናት፡፡ እሷ ከሌለች ጊዜያቸውን እርስ በእርስ በመኖከስ ያጠፋሉ፡፡ እኔ ልምራ፣ እኔ ልምራ በሚል፡፡ እዚህ እኛው ሀገር በኢሕአዴግ ውስጥ እንደተኮተተው ባሕል ማለት ነው፡፡ ዶ/ር ነጋሶ ጊዳዳ ሰሞኑን በወጣው መጽሐፋቸው ቁልጭ አድርገው አስቀምጠውታል፡፡

እንዲህ ነው፡፡

የሕወታት አመራር መከፋፈል አባዱላ ገመዳን አስጨንቆ ነበር፤ በ1993፡፡ «የብአዴን ተሰሚነት እየጨመረ ነው፡፡ ይሄ ደግሞ፣ የአማራና የኦሮሞ ጦርነት ይቀስቅሳል፤ በማለት አህዴድን ቀስቅሰዋል፤ ገና ሠራዊቱን ሳይለቁ፡፡ ሕገወጥ ቅስቀሳ ነበር፡፡ ሠራዊቱ ፖለቲካ ውስጥ እንዳይገባ ሕገ-መንግሥቱ ይከለክላል፡፡ አህዴድና ብአዴን ተስማምተው የሚኖሩት አንዱ የመሪነቱን አክሊል እስካልጨበጠ ድረስ ብቻ ነው ማለት ነው፡፡ የአባዱላ መፍትሔ፣ መለስን በመደገፍ ብአዴንን መቋቋም የሚል ነበር፡፡ መለስ በዚህች ቀዳዳ ሾለኩ፡፡ ተጠቀሙ፡፡ አሜሪካ፣ በአውሮፓውያን መካከል ባለው ተመሳሳይ ክፍተት ገዝፋ ኖራለች፡፡ ተጠቅማለች፡፡

አሜሪካ ዲሞክራሲን ለማስፋፋት ብዙ የለፋችና መስዋዕትነት የከፈለች ሀገር ናት፡፡ በተለይ በአንደኛውና በሁለኛው የዓለም ጦርነቶች ዲሞክራሲን ያዳነች ሀገር ናት፡፡ ውለታዋ የሚረሳ አይደለም፡፡ በኢኮኖሚም ቢሆን፣ ገና አልወደቀችም፡፡ ዓመታዊ ምርቷ ወደ 15 ትሪሊዮን ዶላር ደርሷል፡፡ እሷን የምትከተለው ቻይና ገና 4 ትሪሊዮን ዶላር አልደረሰችም፡፡ አሜሪካ ጡንቻው አላት፡፡ ችግሩ፣ አንፃራዊ ኃይሏ እየኮሰሰ መሄዱ ላይ ነው፡፡ ለግዜው ግን፣ የሚፎካከራት ሀገር የለም፡፡

ለዚህ ነው፣ ባለፈው ሰሞን በሊቢያ ጉዳይ የውኃ ሽታ መሆኗ ብዙዎችን ያስገረመው፡፡ የዓለምአቀፉ ማህበረሰብ ፊታውራሪ ፈረንሳይ ነበረች፡፡

«እንዴት አሜሪካ ምን ነገት?» ተብለው ተጠይቀው ነበር አባማ፡፡

እሳቸው ምንም አላሉም፡፡ እንዲያውም ያፈሩም መስለው ነበር፡፡

«ከኋላ ሆነን መምራትን እንመርጣለን፤» ብለው ረዳቶቻቸው መልሰውላቸዋል፡፡ ዓለም ሳቀባቸው፡፡ ከኋላ ሆኖ መምራት? ምን ማለት ነው? የአሜሪካ ወግ አጥባቂዎች በእጅጉ በገኑ፡፡ «አሁንም ኃይል ነን፡፡ አባማ ናቸው መምራት የተሳናቸው፤» ባይ ናቸው፡፡ በሚቀጥለው ምርጫ ልክ ሊያስገቧቸው ዝተዋል፡፡

አባማ ግን፣ የሰሟቸው አይመስሉም፡፡ ሊቢያን በሶሪያ ደግመውታል፡፡ አሁንም «ከኋላ ሆኖ መምራትን» ነው የመረጡት፡፡ ከባለፈው ዓርብ አንስቶ፣ ለአሳድ ታማኝ የሆኑ ወታደሮች ሐማ በምትባል የሶሪያ ከተማ ውስጥ ብዙ ሰው ጨርሰዋል፡፡

ሕዝብን በታንክ ደብድበዋል። ይህ አውሬአዊ ድርጊት የሕዝቡን ቁጣ ጨምሮታል። ወደቤቱ አልገባም። ጭራሽኑ ቤታቸው የነበሩት መንገድ ላይ ያሉትን ተቀላቅለዋቸዋል። ሕዝቡ አሳድን ሳያወርድ ወደቤቱ እንደማይመለስ ግልፅ ሆኗል። ለውጥ የግድ መምጣት አለበት። ዓለምአቀፉ ማሕበረሰብም ዝም ብሎ መመልከት እየተሳነው ነው።

በዚህ ሳምንት፣ የአሳድን መንግሥት በተመድ ፀጥታው ምክር ቤት ለማስወገዝ አውሮፓዊያን መሪ ተዋናያን ሆነዋል። አሜሪካ፣ ተመልካች ናት። ኋላው ፊት፣ ፊቱ ኋላ ቆሟል።

ነገሮች ቢለዋወጡ፣ በኢትዮጵያስ ይደገም ይሆን? አውሮፓዊያን አሜሪካንን ተከተው ዓለምአቀፉን ማሕበረሰብ ይመሩ ይሆን?

ሐሳብ የሚጭሩ ምልክቶች አሉ። በምርጫ 2002 የአሜሪካ ድምፅ ብዙም አልተሰማም። ታች ላይ ሲል የነበረው የእንግሊዝ ኢምባሲ ነበር። ችግሩ፣ ቅድመ ሊቢያ፣ ሚጢጢዋን እንግሊዝ እንደ ኃያላን መንግሥት የሚቆጥራት መጥፋቱ ነበር እንጂ። ያኔ የኦባማ አስተዳደርም ሆነ በኢትዮጵያ የሾማቸው አምባሳደሩ አዲስ ነበሩ። በምርጫው ሰዓት ለመጥፋታቸው እንደምክንያትም ቀርቧል።

አምባሳደሩ ለመላመድ ብዙ ጊዜ ፈጅቶባቸዋል። ከዓመት በኋላ፣ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ መገናኛ ብዙሃን ፊት ሲቀርቡ፣ «እኔ የማተኩረው በልማትና ኤድስ ላይ ነው።» አሉ። የዓለምአቀፉን መሪነት ሚና ሀገራቸው ላለመፈለጋ ወይም ላለመቻሏ እንደምልከት ሆኖ ግን አልተወሰደም። በተቃዋሚዎች ላይ ተስፋ ስለቆረጡ ነው ተባለላቸው። በሊቢያ ዙሪያ የነበረው ትንሽ ጥርጣሬ ጫረ። የሶሪያው እያጠናከረው ነው።

በዓረብ ሀገሮች የተቀጣጠለውን ሕዝባዊ ቁጣ፣ ፈረንጆች፣ «ዘ ዓረብ ስፕሪንግ» ብለውታል። ስፕሪንግ ማለት በጋቸው ነው። እንደ እኛ ለ10 ወራት አይዘልቅም። በእነሱ 4 ወራት ገደማ ይቆያል። ስፕሪንግ፣ ሞቃታምም ብርዳማም አይደለም። መካከለኛ ነው። በጣም ይወዱታል። የውጭውን አየር በነፃነት የሚተነፍሱት በዚህ ጊዜ ነው። የዓረብ ስፕሪንግ ሲሉ፣ ጥሩ ጊዜ መጣ ማለታቸው ነው። የነፃነት አየር የሚተነፈሱበት። እጩ የሚባልበት።

ይህ አየር በዓረቡ ዓለም ተወስኖ የሚቀር አይደለም። ወደአፍሪቃም ይመጣል። ከወዲሁ «የአፍሪቃ ስፕሪንግ» እያሉት ነው። መምጣቱ አያነጋግርም። መቼ? የሚለው ነው እንጂ ያልለየው። በብዙ መልኩ፣ ግብፅ በዓረቡ ዓለም ያላትን ቦታ ኢትዮጵያ በጥቁር አፍሪቃ አላት። የዓረብ ስፕሪንግ የተባለው ግብፅ ሲገባ ነበር። በተመሳሳይ፣ የአፍሪቃ ስፕሪንግ እውን የሚሆነው ኢትዮጵያ ከገባ ነው።

ግብፅ፣ በዓረቡ አለም ትልቁ የአምባገነኖች ምሽግ ነበረች። ያ ምሽግ ተንዷል። በጥቁር አፍሪቃ፣ ትልቁ ምሽግ ኢትዮጵያ ናት። በግብፅ ሰላማዊ ሽግግር እንዲኖር አሜሪካ አግዛለች፤ አርፍዳም ቢሆን። አቅሙ (ወይም ፍላጎቱ) የከዳት በሊቢያና በሶሪያ ነው። ኢትዮጵያ ለሰላማዊ ሽግግር ድጋፍ ያስፈልጋታል።

ታዲያ እስከዚያ አሜሪካ ታግማም ይሆን? ወይስ አውሮፓውያን ይተኳት ይሆን?

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4. የታክሲዎች ስራ ማቆም እንድንችል - በእስክንድር ነጋ

አስኮ፣ ላፍቶ፣ ለቡ፣ አያት፣ ሲ.ኤም.ሲ፣ ዓለም ባንክ፣ ቀራንዮ፣ ኮተቤ፣ ቃሊቲ... የማለዳ ታክሲ ለወትሮውም መከራ ነው። ግፊያው የድብድብ ያህል ነው። ትላንት ሰኞ ግምቦት 8/2003 ግን፣ ተጋፍቶ የሚገባበት ታክሲ የጠፋው ገና ከጠዋቱ 12 ሰዓት ጀምሮ ነበር። የአንድ አዓቱን ግፊያ እየሸሸ ቀደም ብሎ ከቤቱ የሚወጣው የከተማው ነዋሪ ታክሲዎች ምር አድማ መተዋል ብሎ መጠርጠር የጀመረው የወትሮ ደምበኞቹ የውሃ ሽታ ሆነው ሲቀሩበት ነበር። የቻለ እንደ ሰርዲን በሞጠቀጠቁት አውቶቢሶች ላይ እንደምንም ተሰጉሎ አመለጠ። ከፊሉ በእግሩ አስነካው። እድለኛው የቤት መኪና እየተባበረው በምቾት ወደ መሀል ከተማ ዘለቀ። ብዙዎች ከስራና ከትምህርት ቀርተው ወደቤታቸው ተመለሱ።

የሚገርመው በተፈጠረው እንግልት ያዘነና የተቆታ እምብዛም መሆኑ ነበር። ለወትሮው፣ የአዲስ አበባ ነዋሪና ታክሲዎች ብዙም አይፋቀሩም። ህዝቡ ታክሲዎችን አማርራል። ታክሲዎች ህዝቡን ያማርራሉ። ተቻችለው የሚኖሩት የግድ ነው። በዚህች እለት ግን የታክሲዎቹ ህብረት የህዝቡን ልብ አሸንፏል።

ይሄ ህዝብ መተባበር የጠማው ህዝብ ነው። ከቀይ ሽብር በኋላ በምርቻ 97 ለአጭር ጊዜ ብልጭ ብሎ ድርግም ብሎበታል። መከዳዳት፣ መጠላለፍ፣ መሰባበቅ፣ መወነጀጀል፣ መራራቅ፣ እንደሬት የመረረው ህዝብ ነው። እንደቱኒዚያ፣ እንደ ግብጽ፣ እንደ ሶሪኦ፣ እንደ የመን ሚሊዮኖች በአንድ ሳምንት ለመተንፈስ የጓጓ ህዝብ ነው። ከምንም በላይ ህዝቡ በታክሲዎች ህብረት ተደስተዋል።

በዛ ላይ፣ ከታክሲዎቹ ጥአቄ በስተጀርባ አለውን እውነታ ሕዝቡ የሚጋራው ነው። ጣሪያ በነካው የዋጋ ግሽበት አልተደቆሰ ጠህብረተሰብ ክፍል የለም። ህዝቡ መኖር አኳቃተው ነው። በሽሮ እንካን መኖር ከብደዋል።

የታክሲ ገቢ ባለበት ከቆመ ሁለት አስር አመታት ተቆትረዋል። ኢህአዴግ በ1983 ስልጣን ሲይዝ የታክሲዎች የእለት ገቢ ከ100 እስከ 120 ብር ነበር። ከሃያ አመታት በኋላ ዛሬም ያው ነው። የቤንዚን ዋጋ ግን በሌትር ከሁለት ብር ወደ ሃያ ብር ተሰቅሏል። የሾፌሮቹም ገቢ ባለበት የቆመ ነው።

የታክሲ ስራ ራጫ ነው። አድካሚ ነው። ነጻነትም የሚሳ ነው። ወደ አንድ አቅጣጫ ተሳፋሪ ይዞ ሄዶ ተመላሽ ከጠፋ፣ ኪሳራ ነው። የታክሲ ሾፌር ከመሬት ተነስቶ የሚወደውና የሚጠላው ሰፈር የለም። እንዲያዋጣው ሲሄድም ሲመለስም ተሳፋሪ መመላለስ አለበት። ከቤንዚኑ ውድነት አኳያ በከፊል እየሞላ መመላለስ አያዋጣም። ስለዚህም፣ የታክሲን አቅታጫ የሚወስነው ገበያው ነው። ሾፌሩ ወይም ባለቤቱ አይደለም። ኢህአዴግ ግን አሁን እኔ ልወስን እያለ ነው። ገበያው ስላልሰራ መንግስት ጣልቃ መግባት አለበት ባይ ነው።

ኢህአዴግ ገቢያው ችግር እንዳለበት ሲናገር የመጀመሪያው አይደለም። የሚዝ፣ የስኳር፣ የስጋ፣ የዘይት ዋጋዎችንም አስተካክላለሁ ብሎ ከተነሳ ሰነባብቷል። ውጤቱ ግን አልሰመረም። ሸቀጦቹ ከገበያ ጠፍተዋል። የስኳርና የዘይት ግዢ ሰልፎች የአዲስ አበባ መለያዎች እየሆኑ ነው። የዋጋ ግሽበቱ ደግሞ ጭራሽ ተባብሶ 30 ከመቶ ደርሷል። በሌላ አነጋገር፣ መንግስት ታች ድረስ ወርዶ ሲቆጣጠር ውጤቱ የተበላሸ ነው የሚሆነው። በሸቀጦቹ ዙሪያ የተፈጠረው ችግር ወደታክሲዎች ላለመሄድ ታኮ ሊሆን ይገባ ነበር።

ባለታክሲዎቹም ሆኑ የታክሲ ሾፌሮች የስምሪት ህጉ ተግባራዊ ከመሆኑ በፊት እንደማያዋጣቸው ባገኙት አጋጣሚ ሁሉ አበክረው ተናግረዋል። ኢህአዴግ ግን የሚናገርበት እንጂ የሚያዳምጥበት ጆሮ የለውም። ሰሚ አላገኙም። ወደስራ ማቆም የሄዱት ተገደው ነው። ምርጫ አልነበራቸውም።

ኢህአዴግ ለስራ ማቆሙ ምላሽ የአዲሱ ዘመን ማብሰሪያ ሆናል። የወትሮው ፉከራ፣ ሸለላ፣ ማስፈራራት፣ ድብደባና እስር አልተተገበሩም። ድምጹን ማጥፋት ነው የመረጠው። ወደ ክፍለ ሀገር የሚወጡ ሚኒስትሮችና አውቶቡሶች ከፍተኛ እንዲሞሉ ጥሯል። ደጋፊዎቹ ታክሲዎች ወጥረው ሰርተዋል። ከነበረው እጥረት አኳያ ግን፣ ክፍተቱ አልተሞላም።

ሰኞ ሰፋዱ ላይ ስምሪቱ እንዲቆምና ታክሲዎች እንደልብ ተንቀሳቅሰው እንዲሰሩ የቃል መመሪያ ተሰቷቸዋል። በዚህ የተደሰቱ በርካታ ታክሲዎች አመሻሽ ላይ ወጥተዋል።

ዛሬ ማክሰኞ ታክሲዎች በብዛት አሉ። የሚሰሩት ግን በተሰጣቸው መስመር ብቻ አይደለም። አንዳንዶች እንደፈለጉ ይሰራሉ። የሚናገራቸው የለም። መጨረሻው አይታወቅም።

የስራ ማቆሙ አድማ ተሳካም አልተሳካም ግን፣ ቢያንስ ቢያንስ ህዝብ መተባበር እንደሚችል አሳይቶናል። ይህ ታላቅ ቁም ነገር ነው። በሁለተኛ ደረጃ ደግሞ፣ የኢህአዴግ እብሪት መተንፈሱ ታውቆበታል። ይህ ደግሞ፣ ለኢህአዴግም፣ ለህዝቡም፣ ለሀገርም የሚበጅ ነው።

5. «የምርጫውን ውጤት ሕዝቡ ተቀብሎታል» አምባሳደር ቡዝ - በእስክንድር ነጋ

ቻይና ሰራሽ እስክራብቶዬን ከገዛኹት ሁለት ቀናት እንኳን አላስቆጠርኩም። ገና ከወዲሁ እየተቆራረጠ ግን ትዕግስቴን እየተፈታተነው ነው። በዘመኑ የአራዳዎች ዘይቤ «መዴ» ሊበላሽ አፋፍ ላይ እየተንገዳገደ ነው።

በሌላ በኩል፣ የአምባሳደር ቡዝ ቃለ -ምልልስ አለብኝ። ለሁለተኛ ሳምንት መዝለቁ ምቹት አልሰጠኝም። አቦ ! ስንት የሚፃፍለት ነገር እያለ ! ስለሚሊኒየሙ ግድብ ምን ተነካ ? የእኔንም ሆነ የብዙ ሰዎችን ስሜት እየኮረኮረ ያለ ጉዳይ

ነው። ኢሕአዴግ ብቻውን እየጋለበው ነው፤ እያተረፈበትም ነው። ቅዳሜና እሁድ በአሜሪካ ስለተደረጉት ፀረ - ኢሕአዴግ ሰላማዊ ሰልፎች አንዲት ጦማር ብሰንቅ ነፍሴ በደስታ ትውተረተር ነበር። የብዕሬ ቱሩፋት የሚሊዮኖችን የታፈነ ስሜትም ትኮረኩር ነበር ብዬ አስባለኹ።

የገራገር መሳዩ አምባሳደር ቃለ -ምልልስ የሞተ ጉዳይ መስሎ እየታየኝ ነው። ችግሩ፣ ብዕሬን እንዳላጥፍ የገታው ቁጭት በውስጤ መብከንከኑ ነው።

አምባሳደር ቡዝን በግል አግኝቼ ለማነጋገር ዕድሉን አላገኘኹም። በባሕልና በትምህርት ላይ ማተኮርን እንደሚመርጡ አስማለኹ። ማለፊያ ነው እኔ ከሁለቱም የለኹበትም። በስም እንደሚያውቁኝ ግን የማምናቸው ወዳጆቻቸው ነግረውኛል። እውነት ከሆነ፣ በጨረፍታ ያውቁኛል ማለት ነው።

ከእሳቸው በፊት ከነበሩት ያማማቶ ጋር በተደጋጋሚ ተወያይቻለኹ። እንዲያውም፣ አንድ ጊዜ እኔንና ባለቤቴን መኖሪያ ቤታቸው ድረስ ጋብዘውን ነበር፤ እግዜር ያከብራቸውና። ከሕግ ውጭ የጋዜጣ ፍቃድ ተከተከልን ብዬ ስሞታ ብጤም አጫውቻቸዋለኹ፤ ሕግ እንዲከበር እንዲማለዱን በመማፀን። ከልብ አዝነው ሲያዳምጡኝ አስታውሳለኹ። በኋላ ላይ ግን፣ መልስ ነፈጉኝ።

የአሜሪካ ብሔራዊ ፀጥታ (National Security) አስተማማኝ አጋር በሆነው ኢሕአዴግና የሞራልና የመርህ ስበት ባላቸው ሰለባዎቹ መካከል ሚዛን ጠብቆ መጓዝ፣ ለአሜሪካ ዲፕሎማቶች ቀላል ያልሆነ ፈተና ነው። ያማማቶን ተረድቻቸዋለኹ። ስለዚህም፣ ገፍቼ አልሄድኩም። «አትምጣብን» መባል አላስፈለገኝም። ምልክቶቹ ከበቂ በላይ ነበሩ ለእኔ፤ ባለስስ ቆዳው የሀበሻ ልጅ።

ስለቡዝ ስፅፍ ይሄ ለሶስተኛ ጊዜ መሆኑ ነው። የመጀመሪያውን የሞኑጫጨርኳት በእንግሊዝኛ ነበር። መረጃ ሳፈላልግ የኢንተርኔት ካፌዎች ሲሳይ ሆኜ ከርሜ ነበር። ውጤቱ በመጠኑም ቢሆን እንዳውቃቸው ያበቃኝ መስሎኝ ነበር።

ቃለምልልሳቸውን ካነበብኩኝ በኋላ ግን፣ የማውቃቸው በጣም በትንሹ እንደሆነ ተሰምቶኛል። በመካከላችን ገደል እንዳለም ተረድቻለኹ።

እንደብዙሃኑ ኢትዮጵያውያን፣ ሀገሬ ለዲሞክራሲ ዝግጁ ነኝ ብዬ አምናለኹ። እውን እንዲሆን በብዕሬ ታግያለኹ። እየታገልኩም ነው፤ እነጋናን፣ ማሊን፣ ቦትስዋናን የመሳሰሉ የአፍሪካ ሀገራት አርአያ አድርጌ። ወደአውሮፓና አሜሪካ መመልከት አላስፈለገኝም።

አምባሳደር ቡዝ ደግሞ፣ «ኢትዮጵያ መካከለኛ ገቢ ወዳላቸው ሀገሮች የምታደርገውን እንቅስቃሴ ብንደግፍ ይሻላል»

ብለዋል፤ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ በሰጡት ቃለ -ምልልስ፡፡ «ኢትዮጵያ እዚያ ደረጃ ላይ ስትደርስ፤ እድገቱ በራሱ አሜሪካ ወደምትፈልገው ዲሞክራሲና የመድብለ ፓርቲ ስርዓት እንድታመራ ያግዛታል» በማለትም ደምድመዋል፡፡

እኚህን ቡዝ የተዋወቅኳቸው በአውራጃምባ ታይምስ ጋዜጣ በኩል ነው፡፡ ኢንተርኔት ላይ ያገኘኋቸው ቡዝ፤ እንዲህ አይነት እምነት እንዳላቸው ፍንጭ አይሰጡም፡፡ የአሜሪካ የላይኛው ምክር ቤት (ሴኔት) ቀርበው የአምባሳደርነት ሹመታቸውን ለማፅደቅ የምስክርነት ቃል ሲያሰሙም፤ በሀገራት ነፍስ ወከፍ ገቢና በመድብለ ፓርቲ ስርዓት መካከል ቁርኝት አለ ብለው አልተከራከሩም፡፡ አዲስ አበባ ላይ እንደ ድንገት የዘረገፉት ዱብዕዳ ነው፡፡

አምባሳደር ቡዝ ወደ ኢትዮጵያ ከመምጣታቸው በፊት በሁለት የአፍሪካ ሀገራት አምባሳደር ሆነው አገልግለዋል፡፡ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ በአምባሳደርነት የተሰየሙት በላይቤሪያ ነበር፤ በ 1997 ዓ .ም፡፡ ድኅረ ቻርልስ ቴለር ላይቤሪያ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ሀገር ሆናለች፤ በአሜሪካ የቅርብ ክትትልና ድጋፍ፡፡ ቡዝ በላይቤሪያ በቆዩባቸው ሶስት ዓመታት ዲሞክራሲ ስር ሲሰድና ሲጎለብት ለማየት ታድለዋል፡፡ ላይቤሪያ ግን መካከለኛ ገቢ ካላቸው ሀገራት የምትመደብ አይደለችም፡፡ ዲሞክራሲ እንዲያብብ የጠየቀው የአምባገነኑ ቻርልስ ቴለር መወገድ፤ የቀሪዎቹ ፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ቁርጠኝነትና የዓለምአቀፉ ማሕበረሰብ ድጋፍ ናቸው፡፡

ከላይቤሪያ ወደ ዛምቢያ ነበር ያመሩት፡፡ ይቺም የአፍሪቃ ሀገር የመካከለኛ ገቢ ባለቤት አይደለችም፡፡ የተመሰከረላት ደሃ ሀገር ናት፡፡ ዲሞክራሲ ግን ለምልሞባታል፡፡ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ስልጣን ተቀባብለውባታል፡፡ ቡዝ የቅርብ ምስክር ሆነው ለሶስት ዓመታት ኖረውባታል፡፡

ታዲያ፤ እንዴት ነው ወደ ኢትዮጵያ ሲመጡ ዲሞክራሲና የሕዝብ የነፍስ ወከፍ ገቢ የተቆላለፈባቸው ? Enlighten us, sir!!

ብልፅግናንና ዲሞክራሲን በማዛመድ ቡዝ የመጀመሪያው አይደሉም፡፡ የአሳቤው ምንጭ ፕሮፌሰር ጆሸዋ ሙራቪችክ ይባላሉ፡፡ ሕይወታቸውን ያሳለፉት በባለ ብዙ ፈርጅ ምርምር ተጠምደው ነው፡፡ ስማቸው የተጠራው ግን፤ ሀብትንና ዲሞክራሲን በአስተሳሰብነት ሰፊ ያለ ጥናታቸው ነው፡፡ ብዙ ተከታይም አፍርተውበታል፡፡ እኔ እስከገባኝ ድረስ፤ ቡዝ አንዱ መሆናቸው ነው፡፡

ከቀሪዎቹ ተከታዮቻቸው መካከል የሚመደቡት ፕሮፌሰር ስቲቨን ክሌስነር በበኩላቸው፤ ነፍስ ወከፍ ገቢያቸው 6000 ዶላር ያልደረሱ ሀገራት ለዲሞክራሲ አልደረሱም ብለው ይከራከራሉ፡፡ የሙራቪችክ ተከታዮች፤ አነስም በዛም ብለው አልተከራከሯቸውም፤ እኔ እስከማውቀው ድረስ፡፡

የአሜሪካ የውጭ ጉዳይ ሚኒስቴር (ስቴት ዲፓርትመንት) የኢትዮጵያን አጠቃላይ ዓመታዊ ምርት ወደ 30 ቢሊዮን

ዶላር እንደሚጠጋ ገምቷል፤ በ 200 1 ዓ .ም፡፡ ይሄንን ለ 80 ሚሊዮን ኢትዮጵያውያን ስናካፍለው፤ በነፍስ ወከፍ ወደ 365 ዶላር አካባቢ ይደርሳል፡፡ ደርግ ከዛሬ 20 ዓመታት በፊት ሲወድቅ 120 ዶላር ነበር፡፡ በኤሊ ፍጥነት ነው እየተንቀጠቀጠ ያለው፡፡ 6000 ዶላር ወይም ደግሞ በአሃዝ ወዳልተገለፀው የአምባሳደር ቡዝ መካከለኛ ገቢ አካባቢ ድርሽ ለማለት ስንት ተጨማሪ ዓመታት እንደሚጠይቅ መገመቱን ለአንባቢ መተው እመርጣለኹ፡፡

የአምባሳደር ቡዝን ግምት ግን በቀጥታ ከአንደበታቸው የመስማት አጉል ጉጉት አድርጎብኛል፡፡ ወደዱም ጠሉም፤ ከእንግዲህ ያሉበት ድረስ ሄጄ ልፈልጋቸው ነው፤ አያሳፍሩኝም የሚል ብርቱ ተስፋ ሰንቁ፡፡

ቡዝ፤ ምርጫውን አስመልክተውም አስተያየት ሰጥተዋል፡፡ በምላሻቸው ቢያንስ በእኔ ላይ የእግር እሳት እንደለቀቁብኝ ነው የቆጠርኩት፡፡ ለዚህ ባለሁለት ክፍል ዳሰሳም ዋነኛው ምክንያት ነው፡፡

የቀረበላቸው ጥያቄ፤ «በ 200 2 ምርጫ ኢሕአዴግ 99.6 በመቶ (የምክር ቤት መቀመጫዎችን) ማሸነፉ ከዲሞክራሲያዊ ሥርዓት ግንባታ አንፃር እንዴት ይመለከቱታል» የሚል ነው፡፡

አምባሳደሩ ምላሽ ሲሰጡ፤ «ምርጫውን በተመለከተ በወቅቱ መግለጫ ሰጥተናል» ብለው ጀመሩ፡፡ ጥሩ፡፡ እኔም ብሆን ያለፈው ሳምንት አንስቼዋለኹ፡፡ አሜሪካ ኃላፊነቷን ተወጥታለች፡፡ ምንም የሚያከራክረን ነገር የለም፡፡ ጭብጡንም ማንሳት አለመፈለጋቸውን እረዳለኹ፡፡ ደጋግመው እንደሚሉን፤ ተጨቃጭቀው ምንም ከማይሰሩ፤ ተግባባተው ትንሽ ቢሰሩ ይሻላል፡፡

ነገር ድብልቅልቁ የወጣው በሚቀጥለው አረፍተነገራቸው ነው፡፡ አምባሳደሩ ቀጠሉ፤ «የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝብ የምርጫውን ውጤት ተቀብሏል» አሉ፡፡ እደግመዋለኹ፡፡ «የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝብ የምርጫውን ውጤት ተቀብሏል !!»

እነዚህን ቃላት ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ ያነበብኳቸው ቅዳሜ ዕለት ከሌሊቱ 7 ሰዓት እንደነበር አስታውሳለኹ፡፡ ባለቤቴና ልጄ ተኝተዋል፡፡ እኔ ሳሎን ቁጭ ብዬ አነባለኹ፡፡ አንድ ጊዜ አንብቤ ጋዜጣውን ጠረጴዛ ላይ አስቀመጥኩት፡፡ ደክሞኝ ፊደሎች እየተዘበራረቁብኝ ይሆን ? በረጅሙ ተነፈስኩኝ፡፡ ዓይኔን አሻሸኩ፡፡ ትንሽ ቆይቼም አረፍተ ነገሩን ለሁለተኛ ጊዜ ተመለከትኩት፡፡ እነዚያው ፊደሎች መልሰው አፈጠጡብኝ፡፡ ከእኔ በኩል ስህተት የለም፡፡ ከቡዝ አንደበት በትክክል የፈነጠቁ ቃላት ናቸው፡፡ ሳቅኩኝ፤ የቁጭት ሳቅ፡፡ የዛሬው ረዥም ቀን ነው፡፡ ይበቃል፡፡ አልጋዬ ውስጥ ገባሁ፡፡ እንቅልፍ ቶሎ አልወሰደኝም፡፡ ምላሽ ልፅፍላቸው የወሰንኩት ይሄኔ ነው፡፡

በጠዋቱ ወደ ኢንተርኔት ካፌ አመራኩ፡፡ የአሜሪካ ውጭ ጉዳይ ሚኒስቴርን ድረ -ገፅ ከፈትኩ፡፡ ምርጫ 200 2 በማስመልከት ያሰፈረውን አፈሴላዊ ግምገማ ለማግኘት ብዙም አላስቸገረኝም፡፡ በከፊል እንዲህ ይላል፡፡

In a tally of the popular vote, 91.95% voted for EPRDF and affiliate parties, while only 8.05% voted for the opposition countrywide. Election Day was peaceful as 89% of registered voters cast ballots, but independent observation of the vote was severely limited. Only European Union and African Union observers were permitted, and they were restricted to the capital and barred from proximity to polling places... .. Overall, the 2010 elections were not up to international standards because the environment conducive to free and fair elections was not in place.

በግምገማው 4 አንኳር ነጥቦች ተቀምጠዋል፡፡

የምርጫ ካርድ ካወጣው ሕዝብ 89 በመቶ ድምፅ መስጠቱን፤

ድምፅ ከሰጡት መካከል 91.5 በመቶ ኢሕዴግን መምረጣቸውን፤ 8.0 5 በመቶ ብቻ ተቃዋሚዎችን መምረጣቸውን፤ ምርጫውን እንዲታዘቡ የተፈቀደላቸው የአውሮፓና የአፍሪካ ሕብረቶች ብቻ መሆናቸውን፤ የእነሱም እንቅስቃሴ ገደብ የተጣለበት መሆኑን (የአሜሪካ ኤምባሲ እንዳይታዘብ ተከልክሏል፤ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ) የነፃ ፍትሐዊ ምርጫ ድባብ ያልነበረ መሆኑ፤ ይህም ምርጫው የዓለም አቀፍ ደረጃ እንደማያሟላ ማድረጉን ተንትኗል፡፡ እንግዲህ፤ እንደአሜሪካ መንግሥት ግምገማ ከሆነ፤ ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ነፃና ፍትሐዊ ምርጫ አልተደረገም፤ ቢያንስ በ 2002 ዓ .ም፡፡

ታዲያ፤ እንዴት ነው ነፃና ፍትሐዊ ያልሆነ ምርጫ ውጤት አንድ ሕዝብ ሊቀበል የሚችለው ? የአሜሪካ ሕዝብ ነፃና ፍትሐዊ ያልሆነ ምርጫን ውጤት ይቀበላል ብለው አምባሳደር ቡዝ እንደማይከራከሩ መገመት አይቻልም፡፡ የአሜሪካን ሕዝብ አውቀዋለኩ፡፡ ቅን ሕዝብ ነው፡፡ ጀግና ሕዝብ ነው፡፡ ለሙቡቱ የሚሞት ሕዝብ ነው፡፡ ስለፍትሕም የሚጨነቅ ሕዝብ ነው፡፡ በእነዚህ ነጥቦች ዙሪያ ከአምባሳደሩ ጋር ሙሉ ለሙሉ እንስማማለን፡፡

የምንለያየው በኢትዮጵያውያን ዙሪያ ነው፡፡ ኢትዮጵያውያን ነፃና ፍትሐዊ ያልሆነ ውጤት በምን ሂሳብ ሊቀበሉ እንደሚችሉ ፈፅሞ እንቅፅልሽ ሆኖብኛል፡፡ ፈሪ ስለሆኑ ይሆን ? ያልሰለጠኑ ስለሆኑ ይሆን ? ስለፍትሕ መጨነቅ የማይችሉ ስለሆኑ ይሆን ? ወይስ እንደ ዲሞክራሲም ድህነትና የሞራል እሴቶችም የተሳሰሩ ናቸው ? በደሃ ሀገሮች ፍትሕ የቀጨጨዋ ዋጋ ነው ያላት ?

ከሁሉም በላይ ግን፣ ሕዝቡ ነፃና ፍትሐዊ ያልሆነውን ምርጫ ውጤት ስለመቀበሉ የአምባሳደሩ ማስረጃ ምንድንነው ? የእሳቸው የግል አቋም ነው ? ወይስ የመንግሥታቸው ? መልስ የሚሹ ጥያቄዎች ናቸው፡፡

ብዙ ብዙ መሄድ እችላለኝ፡፡ ማቆምን ግን እመርጣለኝ፡፡ ይሄን መጣጥፍ በመለጠጥ እንዳላንዛዛው እየፈራኸ ነው፡፡

ሃሳብ በማቅረብ ላጠቃልል፡፡ አምባሳደር ቡዝ የእኔን ምላሽ ብቻ መሰማት የለባቸውም፡፡ ከሌሎች ቢሰሙ ለእሳቸውም ሆነ ለመንግሥታቸው ይጠቅማል፡፡ ፃፉላቸው፡፡ ረዥም መሆን የለበትም፡፡ ሁለት ወይም ሶስት አረፍተነገሮች ይበቃሉ፡፡ በጥሩ እንግሊዝኛ መሆንም አያስፈልገውም፡፡ ቁም ነገሩ፣ ከተለያዩ ኢትዮጵያውያን መስማታቸው ነው፤ በድጋፍም ሆነ በተቃውሞ፡፡

አድራሻቸው፡ -

pasaddis@state.gov

በእኔ በኩል፣ ሕዝብ የምርጫውን ውጤት አልተቀበለም፡፡ በኃይል የተጫነበት መሆኑ ግን እውነት ነው፡፡ በሁለቱ መካከል የቀንና የጨለማ ያህል ልዩነት አለ፡፡

እውን አምባሳደር ቡዝ ይሄ ጠፍቷቸው ነውን ?

ፀሐፊውን በ serk27@gmail.com ማግኘት ይቻላል

6. ኢትዮጵያ፡ ሕዝባዊ ተቃውሞና የወታደራዊ መንግሥት ጥያቄ - በእስክንድር ነጋ

የደርባባውና የ82 ዓመቱ አዛውንት ሆስኒ ሙባረክ ከስልጣን መውረድ ዓርብ አመሻሽ ላይ ሲበሰር፣ በግብፅ ታሪክ ተሰምቶ የማይታወቅ እልልታና ሆታ ቀለጠ... ሕዝብ በደስታ ሰክሮ ሌሊቱን አሳለፈ....

አይ ካይሮ ያቺን ምሽት!... እንዴት ትረሳለች?... እኛስ አብረናቸው አላደርገንም እንዴ?... ዕድሜ ለአልጀዚራ፣ ለቢ.ቢ.ሲ፣ ለሲ.ኤን.ኤን፣ ለፕሬስ ቲቪ... የካይሮ ሕፃናት እንዴት ይረሱናል?... ገብቷቸው ይሆን እንዲያ የፈነጠዙት?... ጨለማውን ብርሃን እንደዋጠው እውን ለእነሱም ታይቷቸው ነበርን?... ቀልባቸው ነግሯቸው ይሆን?... የትላልቆቹ ምኑ ይወራል... በእነሱ ደስታ እኛም እምባ ተራጭተናል...

ቆም ብሎ ለማሰብ አፍታ የተገኘው በነጋታው ነበር፤ ዕለተ ቅዳሜ፡፡

ለመሆኑ፤ አዲሶቹ የግብፅ መሪዎች ከቶ እነማን ይሁኑ? የሕዝቡን የዲሞክራሲ ተስፋ አክብረው ተግባራዊ ማድረግ የሚችሉስ ናቸውን?

መቼስ፤ ብዙ ሚሊዮን ሕዝብ ወጥ መልስ ይኖረዋል ተብሎ አይጠበቅም። ያ እንደ አንድ ቤተሰብ ተመሳጥሮ መብረክን ያንበረከክ ሕዝብ ግን፤ የቅዳሜ ጀምበር ገና ሳትጠልቅ ስሜቱ ተደበላልቆ አረፈው። የሚያስገርም ፍጥነት። ይባስ ብሎ፤ የሕዝባዊው ተቃውሞ እምብርት በነበረችው ታሂር አደባባይ ጎራ ለይቶ በመፈክር መፋለም ጀመረ።

«ወደቤት የመመለሻው ጊዜ አሁን ነው» በማለት በሺህዎች የሚቆጠሩ ወጣቶች አደባባዩን አደበላለቁት፤ ጓዛቸውን እየጠቀሉ። አዲሱ የግብፅ መንግሥት፤ ሕዝቡ ለ18 ቀናት ከትሞ ከሰነባበተበት ታሂር አደባባይ እንዲለቅ አዎንታዊ ምላሽ ሊሰጠው ይገባል የሚሉት መሆናቸው ነው።

«አብዮቱን ከግብ ሳናደርስ አንነቃነቅም» የሚል የሺህዎች የተቃውሞ ጩኸት ወዲያው ተቀበላቸው። «የሕዝብ ራዕይ ከመብረክ ስንብት በእጅጉ የመጠቀ ፋይዳ ያለው ነው» ብለው ተከራከሩ፤ አደባባዩን ለቆ ለመሄድ ግዜው አልደረሰም በማለት።

የውዝግባቸውን ምንጭ ላስተዋውቅዎ።

«Egyptian Military Council» ተብሎ ይጠራል፤ በእንግሊዝኛው። «የግብፅ ወታደራዊ አስተዳደር ደርግ» እንደማለት ነው በአማርኛ ፍቺው። አዎ! ደርግ! ታዲያ ይሄ አያስደነግጥም? (ደርግ የግዕዝ ቃል ሲሆን፤ በእንግሊዝኛው «Committee» ወይም «Council» ማለት ነው።)

ነገሩ ከዚህም ይብሳል። ወታደራዊው ምክር ቤት 6 አባላት አሉት። ሁሉም የመብረክ ተሟላቾች ናቸው። ፊልድ ማርሻል መሐመድ ሁሴን ታንታዊ፤ የመከላከያ ሚኒስቴር፤ ሌተና ጄኔራል ሳሚ ሀፌዝ ኢናን፤ የኢታማኑር ሹም፤ ም/ል አድሚራል ሞሐብ ማማሽ፤ የባሕር ኃይል አዛዥ፤ ኤር ማርሻል ራዳ መሐመድ ሀፌዝ ሞሐሜ፤ የአየር ኃይል አዛዥ እና ሌተና ጄኔራል አብዱል አዚዝ ሰይፈዲን፤ የአየር መከላከያ አዛዥ ናቸው የደርጉ አባላት።

የወታደራዊው መንግሥት መሪ ሆነው ብቅ ያሉት ታንታዊ፤ ጀማል አብዱል ናስር ስልጣን ላይ በነበሩበት በ1950ዎቹ ኢጋማሽ በሶቪየቶች የሰለጠኑ ሰው ናቸው። ዕድላቸው ሆኖ፤ ገና በተመረቁ ማግስት፤ እ.ኤ.አ በ1956 ዓ.ም፤ ሀገራቸው ባልታሰበ ጦርነት ተናጠች። ይህ ጦርነት፤ እ.ኤ.አ ከ1940ዎቹ መጨረሻ እስከ 1970ዎቹ መጀመሪያ በነበሩት ዓመታት በግብፅና በእስራኤል መካከል ከተካሄዱት አራት ጦርነቶች ሁለተኛው መሆኑ ነው። በምክትል መቶ አለቅነት በተሳተፉበት በዚህ ጦርነትም ሆነ በ1967 እና በ1973 (አሁንም እንደ እ.ኤ.አ) በተካሄዱት ቀጣይ ጦርነቶች፤ ታንታዊ የተለየ ክብርና አድናቆት የሚያስጣቸው የጦር ሜዳ ጅብዱ አልፈፀሙም። ለሶስት አስርተ ዓመታት በዘለቀው የመብረክ የእገዛዝ ዘመን፤ ለሃያ ዓመታት በመከላከያ ሚኒስቴርነት ተደላድለው እንዲቆዩ ያበቃቸው ዓይነተኛው ምክንያት ይህ እንደሆነ ብዙዎች ይገምታሉ፤ የ«አርቆ አስተዋዩን» መብረክ ብልጠት ግምት ውስጥ አስገብተው ማለት ነው።

በ2008 ዓ.ም፣ በግብፅ ያለው የአሜሪካ ኤምባሲ ታንታዊን በተመለከተ ለዋሽንግተን ያስተላለፈውን ሚስጢራዊ ሪፖርት በቅርቡ ዊክሊክስ ይፋ አድርጎታል። ሪፖርቱ፣ የመከላከያ ሚኒስትሩ ታንታዊ ትኩረት የሙባረክ መንግሥት ተረጋግቶ እንዲያዘግም መሆኑን ሲገልፅ «የለውጥ ፍላጎቱም ሆነ አቅሙም የሌለው ሰው ነው» በማለት አጣጥሏቸዋል።

የታንታዊ ወግ አጥባቂነት ተጨማሪ ማስረጃ ካስፈለገውም፣ ወታደራዊው መንግስት በአብዮቱ ማግስት ባወጣው የፅሁፍ መግለጫ ላይም ተንፀባርቋል። ሙባረክ «ለሕዝብ ደህንነት ሲሉ» ነው ስልጣናቸውን የለቀቁት በማለት ተንቆለጸጸሰዋል። በካይሮ ጎዳናዎች ላይ በባዶ እጁ ታሪክ ለሰራው የግብፅ ወጣት እንቅስቃሴ ነው የሆነበት። ጄኔራሎቹ የትኛውን የታሪክ መዛግብት ነው የሚያጣቅሱት?

ታዲያ፣ ይህ ሁሉ የሚያመለክተው ምንን ነው?

በአሸናፊነት መንፈስ የተጨፈረበት «የሕዝብ ድል» ባዶ ተስፋ መሆኑን ይሆን? እንደ 66ቱ የኢትዮጵያ አብዮት፣ የሕዝብ ድል በጥቂት ወታደሮች ተነጥቋል ብለን መደምደም ይገባን ይሆን? ወይስ የግብፅ አብዮት በመንታ መንገድ ላይ ቆሟል ማለቱ ይበቃል?

ከሁሉ በላይ ደግሞ፣ አንዳንድ የኢሕአዴግ ሹማምንት በለበጣ እንደሚያነገንቡት፣ በኢትዮጵያ ሕዝባዊ ተቃውሞ ቢቀጣጠል፣ እውን ውጤቱ የወታደራዊ አገዛዝ አኪራ ከመሆን አያልፍምን? ከንቱ ልፋት ነው የሚሆነው?

1. መለስ ላድርግዎት፤ ወደ ግብፅ። ወታደራዊው መንግሥት የወሰዳቸውን ቀዳማዊ እርምጃዎች ልብ ይበሏቸው፡-
2. ሕዝቡ በስፋት ሲሳለቅበት የኖረውን ፓርላማ በቅፅበት አፍርሶታል። (ገዢው ፓርቲ ከ90 በመቶ በላይ መቀመጫዎችን «አሸንፎ» የያዘበት ም/ቤት ነበር።)
3. ሕገ-መንግሥቱን አግዷል።

ሁሉም የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች በነፃነት እንዲንቀሳቀሱ ፈቅዷል።

ጄኔራሎቹ ሙባረክን በቃላት ያሞካሸሸቸው እንጂ፣ በተግባር ግን፣ የአምባገነንነታቸው ሁለት ዋና ዋና ምስሶዎችን ለመነቃቀል ቅንጣት ታህል አላመነቱም። የለውጡን ፍጥነት ለመግታትም ሆነ አቅጣጫውን ፈር ለማሳት አልሞከሩም።

በአንፃሩ፣ የኢትዮጵያው ደርግ፣ አፄ ኃይለሥላሴን ከስልጣን ያወረደ ዕለት ነበረ የተቃውሞ እንቅስቃሴ በሞት የሚያስቀጣ ወንጀል መሆኑን ነጋሪት አስገሸሞ ያወጀው።

አማራጭ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ባልነበሩበት ኢትዮጵያ፣ ደርግ ጥርት ያለና ግልፅ ዓላማ ተከስቶለታል። ግዜ ያለፈበትን የጭሰኛው ስርዓት የማፈራረሱ ተግባር የታሪክ ዕዳው እንደነበር ቁልጭ ብሎ ታይቶታል። ይህ ደግሞ፣ ኃይልን ተገን አድርጎም ቢሆን ስልጣን ላይ የመቆየት ፅኑ ፍላጎት ጭሮበታል።

የዛሬዋ ግብፅ ግን፣ በርካታ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች በህቡዕም በይፋም የሚተረማመሱበት ሀገር ናት። የግብፅ ወታደራዊ መሪዎች የፖለቲካ መድረኩን ብቻቸውን አልተቆጣጠሩትም፤ የመንግሥት ስልጣን እጃቸው ላይ ቢወድቅም። በሶስት አቅጣጫ ተወጥረዋል። የዓለም አቀፉ ማሕበረሰብ አለ፤ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች አሉ፤ በተለይ በተለይ ግን፣ ሕዝባዊ ተቃውሞውን ያስተባበሩት ወጣቶች ያቋቋሙት «የአደራ ጠባቂ ምክር ቤት» ክትትል አለባቸው።

የጠራ ዓላማ ያለው ወጣቶች አብዮተኞች ጋር ነው እንጂ አዛውንቶቹ የጦር ጄኔራሎች ዘንድ አይደለም። እንደደርግ፣ ሊፈርስ የሚገባው ስር የሰደደ ማሕበራዊ፣ ኢኮኖሚና ፖለቲካ ስርዓት ፊት ለፊታቸው ተጋርጦ አይገኝም። አንድን ግለሰብ ማዕከል ያደረገ የፖለቲካ ሥርዓት ፍርስራሽ ነው የተረከበው። አምባገነናዊው ሥርዓት በሕብረተሰቡ ላይ የተለበጠ ነው። ማሕበራዊና ኢኮኖሚያዊ ጥልቀት የለውም። መቀረፍ ብቻ ነው የሚሻው።

ግልፅ የሆነ ማሕበራዊና ኢኮኖሚያዊ ግቦች ባልተቀመጡበት ሁኔታ ደግሞ፣ ወታደሩ የፖለቲካ ኃይል ሆኖ የመውጣቱ ዕድል እጅግ አነስተኛ ነው፤ በግብፅም ሆነ በኢትዮጵያ።

የግብፅ የዲሞክራሲ አብዮት የመቀልበስ አደጋ አልተጋረጠበትም። ወታደራዊው መንግሥት ለዲሞክራሲያዊው አብዮት መሰረታዊ ግቦች የተሻለ አማራጭ አለኝ ማለት እስካልተቻለ ድረስ፣ ሊያስነሳው የሚችለው አደጋ ሊኖር አይችልም። ዓለም በሁለት ተፎካካሪ የኃይል መንግሥታት ጎራ ተከፋፍላ በምትናጥበት ዘመን የምንኖር ቢሆን ኖሮ፣ የግብፅ ጄኔራሎች አማራጮች በነበራቸው። ዛሬ ግን አንዱ ጎራ ከሰሟል፤ አማራጭ የለም። በምዕራቡ ዓለም የሚታወቀው ዲሞክራሲ ብቸኛው መንገድ ሆኗል፤ ሕዝቡም ተቀብሎታል። መፈናፈኛ የለም።

ብልሆኖ የግብፅ ጄኔራሎች ከዚህ ነባራዊ እውነታ ጋር ተስተካክለው መጓዝን መርጠዋል። ብስለታቸው፣ የረዥም ዘመን ልምዳቸው፣ ክህሎታቸውና ሕዝባዊነታቸው ጎልቶ ይታያል።

እኔ በበኩሌ፣ የኢትዮጵያ ወታደሮች ከግብፅ ወታደሮች የደበዘዘ ብስለት፣ ልምድ፣ ክህሎትና ሕዝባዊነት አላቸው ብዬ አላምንም። እንዲያውም፣ የኢትዮጵያ ጄኔራሎች ለሕዝብ መብት ብለው ወጣትነታቸውን በዱር በገደሉ ያቃጠሉ ናቸው። ሕዝባዊነታቸው ቢልቅ እንጂ ፈፅሞ የሚያንስ አይደለም። ከግብፅ ጄኔራሎች በላይ የሚፈሩበት ምክንያት አይታየኝም። ከመርህ አኳያ፣ ለለበጣው በቂ ምክንያት አላገኘኩለትም።

ወታደር ስልጣን ይውረስ እያልኩኝ አይደለኩም። ይሄ ግልፅ እንዲሆንልኝ እፈልጋለኩ። የሀገሬ የዲሞክራሲ ሽግግር በዚህ መንገድ እንዳይሄድ ነው ምኞቴ፤ ፀሎቴም።

ነገሮች በዚህ አቅጣጫ የግድ ከሄዱ ግን፣ አልደነግጥም።

ደርግ የተዋቀረው ከፍተኛ መኮንኖችን በማግለል ነበር። ከሻለቃ በላይ ያሉትን አላቀፈም። ይህ ከፍተኛ፣ ለጭፍን ስህተቶቹና መቅሰፍታዊ ፍፃሜው ምክንያት ሆኗል። ከዚህ የቅርብ ጊዜ ታሪክ አኳያ፣ የኢትዮጵያ ወታደሮች ይህንን ስህተት ይደግማሉ ብዬ ለመገመት እቸገራለኩ።

በጄኔራሎች የሚመራ ወታደራዊ መንግሥት፣ ያልተገራ ሳይሆን የሰከነ፣ ከጭፍን አከራሪ ይልቅ ወግ አጥባቂ ነው የሚሆነው። በፖርቱጋል፣ በግሪክ፣ በስፓኝ፣ በናይጄሪያ እንደዚህ ዓይነቶቹ ወታደራዊ መንግሥታት ሀገራቸውን ለተሟላ ዲሞክራሲ ስርዓት አብቅተዋል። ግብፅ በዚያ መንገድ ላይ ነች። በአስደናቂ ፍጥነት አዲስ ሕገ-መንግሥት በሕዝብ ውሳኔ ፀድቋል። ሙባረክ ከወደቁ ግን፣ ገና ሁለት ወራት እንኳን አልተቆጠሩም። የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች (የሙባረክ ፓርቲን ጨምሮ) ለምርጫ እየተዘጋጁ ነው። የተዋጣለት የዲሞክራሲ ሽግግር እየሆነ ነው።

ከሁሉም በላይ ግን፣ በኢትዮጵያም ሆነ በሌሎች ሀገሮች፣ ወታደሮች እንኳንስ ስልጣንን በብቸኝነት ለመያዝ ቀርቶ፣ ረዘም ላለ ጊዜ በፖለቲካው መድረክ ላይ ለመቆየት የሚያስችል አንዳችም ሰብብ የላቸውም። ዘላቂ ወታደራዊ መንግሥት የሚመሰረትበት የተቀናጀ ርዕዮታዊ፣ ሀገራዊና ዓለም አቀፋዊ መሰረት ፈፅሞ የለም። ዓለም ተለውጣለች።

የትም ይሁን የት፣ ወታደሮች ሊመሩት የሚችሉት አጭር ዕድሜ ያለው የሽግግር መንግሥትን ብቻ ነው። የኢትዮጵያ ወታደሮች ከዚህ ዓለም አቀፋዊ ድብብ ውጭ አይደሉም። ለመሆን የሚፈልጉበት ምክንያትም አይታየኝም።

7. በፍ/ቤት የእስክንድር ነጋ ቃል

April 2nd, 2012

የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት ጥር 15 2004 እኔን 7ኛ ተከላሽ እስክንድር ነጋን አስመልክቶ የሰጠው ብይን በ3 ይከፈላል። እነዚህም፡-

- 1ኛ. የአመፅ ተግባርን ለመፈፀም ከሚንቀሳቀሱ የሀገር ውስጥ ፓርቲ አመራሮች ጋር ስለጉዳዩ ተደጋጋሚ ስብሰባ ያደረግኩ መሆኔን፤
- 2ኛ. የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት የግንቦት 7 ልሳን ነው ብሎ ለጠረጠረው የኢትዮጵያ ሣተላይት ቴሌቪዥን የተለያዩ መረጃዎች የሰጠኩ መሆኔን፤
- 3ኛ. ሁከትን የሚቀሰቅሱ ፅሁፎችን የፃፍኩና ያሰራጩኩ መሆኔን የሚያስረዱ መረጃዎች እንደቀረቡብኝ የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት በይዟል።

«የአመፅ ተግባርን ለመፈፀም ከሚንቀሳቀሱ የሀገር ውስጥ ፓርቲ አመራሮች ጋር ስለጉዳዩ ተደጋጋሚ ስብሰባ አድርጓል» ከተባለኩት ልጀምር ስብሰባዎቹን ከመቃኘቴ በፊት ግን፣ ስብሰባዎቹ ሲደረጉ አጥሎ ስለነበረው ድብብ ለተከበረው ፍ/ቤት ግንዛቤ ማስጨበጥ የግድ ይላል፡ ፡ ድብቡ በስብሰባዎቹ ይዘት፣ ዓላማና ግብ ላይ ቀጥተኛ አንድምታና ተፅዕኖ ነበረውና።

ምንም እንኳን እንደ አንድ ለነፃነቱ ትልቅ ዋጋ እንደሚሰጥ ጋዜጠኛ ከመንግሥት ጋር ያለኝ ተቃርኖ ብዙ ዓመታትን ያስቆጠረ ቢሆንም፤ በየካቲት 2003 ዓ.ም. በግብፅ እንደድንገት ስኬት ለመሆን በበቃው ሰላማዊ፣ ዴሞክራሲያዊና ህዝባዊ ለውጥ የተደናገጠው የኢትዮጵያ መንግሥት «እርምጃ እንወስድብሃለን» ብሎ እንዲዝትብኝም ምክንያት ሆነ። ቀደም ባሉት 4

ሳምንታት፣ ማለትም በወረሃ-ጥር ዓለምን አስደምሞ ስለነበረውና በግብፅ ለተቀጣጠለው ህዝባዊ ተቃውሞ አርአያ የነበረው የቱኒዲያ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ለውጥ በተለያዩ መገናኛ ብዙሃን አስተያየት ስሰጥና ስተነትን፣ በጋዜጦችና በኢንተርኔት ደግሞ ፅሁፎች ሳቀርብ ስነባብኛ ነበር።

እውነቱን ለመናገር፣ በአረብ ሀገራት እንዳየነው ዓይነት ፈጣን፣ ሰላማዊና ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሂደት በሀገሬም ማየት እንደምሻ በቀጥታ አልናገር እንጂ፣ ልቤም አእምሮዬም በአዲሱ ክስተት ተሸንፎና ተማርኮ እንደነበር መደበኛ አልሻም። ከሚያውቀኝ ህዝብና መንግሥትም የተሰወረ አልነበረም። ማስጠንቀቂያ ያሰጠኝም ይህ እውነታ ነበር። «ኢትዮጵያ ሰላማዊ የሆነ የዴሞክራሲ ሽግግርና ለውጥ ያስፈልጋታል» ብዬ ያኔም ሆነ ዛሬ ከልብ አምናለኩ። ሂደቱን ጠብቆ ለተከበረው ፍርድ ቤት እንደማስረዳውም ይህ እምነት የእኔ ብቻ ሳይሆን የብዙሃኑ ኢትዮጵያውያንም እንደሆነ በሰላማዊና በህጋዊ መንገድ በተግባር ለማሳየት የጀመርኩት እንቅስቃሴ፣ ውሎ አድሮ «የማይቆረጠም ባቄላ» እንዳይሆን በኢህአዴግ በእንጭጩ ተቀጭቶ፣ የህሊና እስረኛ ለመሆን አብቅቶኛል።

ለማንኛውም፣ በወረሃ-የካቲት 2003 ዓ.ም. ፒያሳ ከሚገኝ አንድ የኢንተርኔት ቤት በር ላይ በፌደራል ፖሊስ አባላት ተይዘና በመንግሥት የተሰጠኝን ማስጠንቀቂያ በሚመለከት፣ በወቅቱ ለንባብ አብቅቼው ከነበረው ባለ2 ክፍል መጣጥፍ የመጀመሪያውን ክፍል አቃቤ ህግ ለፍርድ ቤቱ አቅርቦታል፤ ምን እንደሚያስረዳለት ለእኔ ግልፅ ባይሆንም። ለፍርድ ቤቱም ያስረዳው ነገር የለም፡ ፡ በእኔ በኩል ግን፣ አሁን ከሳሼ ሆኖ የቆመው መንግሥት ሲዝትብኝና ሲያስፈራራኝ እንደነበር ያረጋግጥልኛል። ይህን ነው በዚህ ክስ ላይ ያጠላው ድባብ የምለው። የተመሰረተብኝ ክስ ግልፅ የሆነ መነሻ አለው።

መቋጫው እዚህ ፍ/ቤት አድርሰኛል። የመጣጥፉ ርዕስ «ጄኔራል ጻድቃን፣ ኢህአዴግና የሰሜን አፍሪቃ አብዮት» የሚል ነው። የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት በአፅንኦት እንዲያነበው አሳስባለኩ። የተመሰረተብኝ ክስ በሐሰት የተቀነባበረና የበቀል ግብ እንዳለው ግልፅ ቢሆንም፣ የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት ከሀገር ውስጥ ፓርቲ አመራሮች ጋር ስላደረግኳቸው ስብሰባዎች እናድከላለን ባዘዘው መሰረት በክሱ ውስጥ የተካተቱትን 3 ስብሰባዎች በአጭር በአጭሩ እቃኛቸዋለኩ።

1ኛ. በአንድነት ጽ/ቤት ስለተካሄደው ስብሰባ

ነሐሴ 29 2003 ዓ.ም. በአንድነት ለዴሞክራሲና ለፍትህ ፓርቲ ጽ/ቤት ተደርጎ የነበረውን ህዝባዊ ስብሰባ አቃቤ ህግ ለተከበረው ፍ/ቤት በማስረጃነት አቅርቦታል። እንደ አቃቤ ሕግ አቀራረብ ከሆነ፣ ስብሰባው በህብዱ የተደረገ፣ የአመፅ ቅስቀሳ የተጧጧፈበትና ተሰብሳቢዎቹ ህገ- ወጥ ተግባር ለመፈፀም ያሴሩበትና የተስማሙበት መድረክ ነበር። በዚህ ክስ ሂደት አስደማሚ ከነበሩት ክስተቶች መካከል ይህን ህዝባዊ ስብሰባ «ህብዱ ነበር» በማለት አቃቤ ህግ የተከራከረው ነው። እንዳልነበር ግን አሳምኖ ያውቃል። ምርመራውን ያጣራው ፌደራል ፖሊስ የሚያውቀውን ሐቅ አቃቤ ሕግ አያውቅም ተብሎ ሊጠረጠር አይችልም።

ይጠርጠር ከተባለም የአቃቤ ህግን ሙያዊ ብቃት ጥያቄ ውስጥ የሚከት ከመሆን አያልፍም። ችግሩ ግን የአቃቤ ህግ ሙያዊ ብቃት አይደለም። ፖለቲካው ጣልቃ እየገባ ወደማይፈልጉት አቅጣጫ ባይመራቸው ኖሮ፣ አቃቤ ህጋን ማህበረሰባቸውንም

ሆነ ሀገራቸውን በብቃት ማገልገል የሚችሉ ናቸው። ሆኖም፣ በባዶ እጅ ከስ እንዲመሰርቱ ሲገደዱ የሌለን ያለ አስመስለው ከማቅረብ ውጭ አማራጭ የላቸውም። ይህንን ነው በዚህ ክስ ውስጥ በድግግሞሽ የምንታዘበው።

ለማንኛቸውም፣ ህዝባዊ ስብሰባው ህጋዊ እንደነበር፣ በህብው ሳይሆን በሚዲያ ጥሪ ተደርጎ የተከናወነ እንደነበርና ምንም ዓይነት የአመፅ ቅስቀሳ እንዳልተደረገበት በማያሻማ ሁኔታ የሚያስረዱ የፅሁፍና የቪዲዮ ማስረጃዎች ለተከበረው ፍ/ ቤት አቅርበናል። በዚህ ብቻ ግን አላበቃንም። ከሚያስፈልገው በላይ ቢሆንም፣ ዛሬና ነገ ደግሞ በሰው ማስረጃዎች ይበልጥ እናጠናክራቸዋለን።

የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት ጠንቅቆ እንደሚረዳው፣ መሰብሰብ ህገ-መንግስታዊ መብት ነው። ከዚያም አልፎ በህገ መንግስታዊ ድንጋጌ እውቅና አገኘም አላገኘም ተፈጥሯዊ መብትም ነው። እነዚህ እውነታዎች ግን ከምርጫ 97 በኋላ በአብዛኛው ተጥሰው ይገኛሉ። ኢትዮጵያም የመሰብሰብ መብት በወረቀት ላይ እንጂ በተግባር የማይከበርበት ሀገር ሆናለች። አንድነት ፓርቲ ባዘጋጀው ስብሰባ ላይ ፅሁፍ እንዳቀርብ ስጋበዝ ምንም ሳላቅማማ የተቀበልኩት፣ ይህ መብት ምንም ሳይሸራረፍ ሊከበር ይገባል ብዬ ስለማምን ነው። ባለኝ አቅም ህዝብ ተሰባስቦ በሰላማዊ መንገድ ስለሀገሩ ጉዳይ እንዲመክር ለማበረታት አስቤ ያደረግኩት ነበር። ይህ መብት እንዲከበር መታገል ሁሉም ዜጎች ላይ የተጣለ ኃላፊነት ነው፤ ይህንን የተከበረ ፍ/ ቤት ጨምሮ። በዚህም መሰረት የተከበረው ፍ/ ቤት በዚህ ስብሰባ ዙሪያ የቀረበውን ፍሬከርሲ ክስ ሁሉ ውድቅ በማድረግ ለዜጎች ተፈጥሯዊና ህገ- መንግስታዊ መብት መከበር የፍርድ ቤቶችን ከለላና ጥበቃ የመስጠት አደራና ኃላፊነት አለበት። ብይኑን ታሪክና ህዝብ በጉጉት ይጠብቁታል።

2ኛ. ከመኢዴፓ አመራር አባላት ጋር ስላደረግኳቸው ስብሰባዎች

የተመሰረተብኝ ክስ አስቂኝና አዝናኝ ምዕራፍ ደግሞ በአንድ በኩል እኔ፣ በሌላ በኩል መኢዴፓ፣ በሌላው ጫፍ ደግሞ ግንቦት 7 የተሳሰረንበት ልብ-ወለድ ትረካ ነው። በዚህ ልብ- ወለድ ትረካ ግንቦት 7 በዋና ተዋናይነት መመሪያ አውራጃ ሆኖ ቀርቧል። ድጋፍ ሰጪ ተዋናያንና መመሪያ ተቀባዮች ደግሞ እኔና መኢዴፓ ሆነን ተሰለናል። አስቂኛ ተግባር፣ ድርሰት ፀሃፊዎቹ ወደ ዝርዝር ትረካቸው ገና ከመግባታቸው መነሻ ሃሳባቸውን አፈራርሰውት ማረፋቸው ነው።

እንደልብ-ወለዱ ትርክት ከሆነ እኔና መኢዴፓ በግንቦት 7 የተሰጠንን ተልዕኮ ለማሳካት መጀመሪያ በአንድነት ጽ/ቤት በተደረገው ህዝባዊ ስብሰባ፣ በቀጣይነት ደግሞ በጣይቱ ሆቴል እየተገናኘን እንመክርና እናሴር ነበር። ዛሬ በቪዲዮ ማስረጃ ለተከበረው ፍ/ቤት እንደምናሳየው፣ ትራጂ-ኮሜዲው የሚጀምረው አንድነት ጽ/ቤት በተደረገው ህዝባዊ ስብሰባ ላይ ነው። የግንቦት 7 ወኪልና የመኢዴፓ አመራር አባል ነው የተባለው አበበ ቀስቶ፣ በመስከረም ወር በመስቀል አደባባይ እንዲደረግ በታቀደ ህጋዊ ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ ላይ ተሰብሳቢ እንዲካፈል ጥሪ ያቀርባል። የስብሰባው ተካፋይ የሆነኩት ሌላኛው የግንቦት 7 ወኪል የተባልኩት እኔ ደግሞ፣ ሰላማዊ ሰልፍ መደረግ የለበትም ብዬ ተቃውሞ በማቅረብ የተሰበሰቢውን ልብ እክፍላለኩ። አስቂኝም-አዝናኝም ነው። ወይ ግንቦት ሰባቶች በአስቂኝና አዝናኝ ደረጃ ዝርክርኮች ናቸው፤ ወይ ደግሞ ልብ-ወለድ ትረካው በጀማሪዎች ተቀናብሯል ማለት ነው።

ትራጂ-ኮሜዲው በጣይቱ ሆቴልም ይቀጥላል። የኢቃቤ ህግ ምስክርና የመኢዴፓ መሪ የሆኑት አቶ ዘመኑ ሞላ በዚህ ፍ/ቤት ተገኝተው እንደመሰከሩት፣ በጣይቱ ሆቴል ባደረግነው ውይይት «ከኢትዮጵያ ውጭ የሚላክ ገንዘብ አትቀበሉ» ብዬ ምክር

ሰጥቻለሁ። በልብ-ወለዱ ግን ግንቦት 7 ገንዘብ ላኪ ወይም ፋይናንስ ሆኖ ቀርቧል። እዚያው ጣይቱ ሆቴል መኪዴጋዎች «ሰልፍ እናደርጋለን» ሲሉ፣ እኔ «ተው» እላለኝ። በዚህ አስቂኝ ትረካ፣ ግንቦት 7 በአንድ እጁ የሚገነባውን በሌላኛው እጁ ያፈርሳል። በእንደዚህ ዓይነት አስቂኝ ድራማ የተጠመደ ድርጅት የልጆች እንጂ ፈፅሞ የአዋቂዎች ስብስብ ሊሆን አይችልም። በፀረ-ሽብርተኝነትም ለመከሰስ ብቃት የለውም። ይሄ ጉድ ተይዞ ነው የተከበረው ፍርድ ቤት የጥፋተኝነት ውሳኔ እንዲያስተላልፍብኝ የሚጠበቀው።

3ኛ. በመቋቋም ላይ የነበረው የሲቪክ ተቋም

ብዙሃኑ ኢትዮጵያውያን ሰላማዊ ለውጥ እንደሚፈልጉ በተግባር መታየት አለበት ብለን የምናምን 7 ኢትዮጵያውያን ተሰባስበን ኮሚቴ አቋቁመን ነበር። ህቡዑ ድርጅት የተቋቋመ በማስመስል የዚህን ኮሚቴ አንድ ቃለ-ጉባዔ አቃቤ ህግ በማስረጃነት አቅርቦታል። ይህ ኮሚቴ በሰላማዊና በህጋዊ መንገድ ብቻ የሚንቀሳቀስ እንዲሆን በመስማማት ቃለ-ጉባዔ ይዘን በመፈራረም ይፋዊ እንቅስቃሴ ለመጀመር ተዘጋጅተን ነበር። ይህን የሚገልፀው ቃለ-ጉባዔ ለፍርድ ቤቱ አይቅረብ እንጂ፣ መኖሪያ ቤቱ ውስጥ በፍተሻ ተገኝቶ በኤግዚብትነት ተመዝግቦ በፖሊስ እጅ ይገኛል። ቃለ-ጉባዔው በሁለት አርጅናሎች ተዘጋጅቶ የተቀመጠ በመሆኑም፣ ሁለተኛውን ኮፒ ለተከበረው ፍ/ቤት በፅሁፍ ማስረጃነት አቅርቦናል። ኮሚቴው ፍፁም ህጋዊና ሰላማዊ መሆኑን መንግሥት በመተማመኑም ከእኔ ውጭ ያሉት አባላት ለእስር አልተዳደረጉም። ከስድስቱ መካከል 2ቱ ዛሬ በሰው ማስረጃነት ቀርበው የነበረውን ሂደት ለተከበረው ፍርድ ቤት ያስረዳሉ።

እዚህ ላይ ቢሆንም፣ አቃቤ ህግ የሌለን ነገር ያለ አስመስሎ ለማቅረብ የተገደደው፣ «የተቸገረ እርጉዝ ያገባል» እንዳሉት፣ በእጁ ላይ ምንም ተጨባጭ ማስረጃ ስለሌለ መሆኑን ፍ/ቤቱ ልብ ሊለው ይገባል።

4ኛ. ከኢትዮጵያ ሣተላይት ቴሌቪዥን ጋር አለህ ስለተባልኩት ግንኙነት

የተከበረው ፍርድ ቤት በሰጠው ብይን፣ የግንቦት 7 ልሣን ነው ብሎ ለጠረጠረው ኢሣት የተለያዩ መረጃዎችን መስጠቱን በአቃቤ ህግ ማስረጃ መረጋገጡን አትቷል። አቃቤ ህግ ባቀረባቸው ማስረጃዎች ውስጥ ግን አንድም ቦታ ላይ እኔና ኢሣት ቴሌቪዥንን የሚያገናኝ ማስረጃ ማቅረቡን አልገለፀም። በሌላ በኩል ግን፣ ከኢሣት ሬዲዮ ጋር ቃለ-ምልልስ አድርጓል በሚል ከአበበ በለው ጋር ያደረግሁት ቃለ-ምልልስ በማስረጃነት ቀርቧል። የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት ለኢሣት ቴሌቪዥን የተለያዩ መረጃዎች እንደሰጠሁ አድርጎ የተረዳው፣ የኢሣት የቦርድ አባል ከሆነው አበባ በለው ጋር ያደረግሁትን የተለያዩ ቃለ-ምልልሶች አጣቅሶ ነው ብዬ እገምታለሁ።

ኢሣት በቀጥታ የግንቦት 7 ልሣን ነው ተብሎ መገመቱ ስህተት ነው ብዬ አምናለኝ። ይህንን ስል፣ የግንቦት 7 አባላት በኢሣት ዝግጅት ክፍልም ሆነ በቦርድ አባላት የሉም ብዬ መከራከሬ አይደለም፤ እንዳሉ አውቃለሁ። ብዙሃኑ የኢሣት ዝግጅት ክፍልና ቦርድ አባላት ግን የግንቦት 7 አባላት እንዳልሆኑ ጠንካራ እምነት አለኝ። ለምሳሌ ከቦርድ አባላቱ መካከል በግል የማውቃቸውና የማከብራቸው ወዳጆቼ ፕሮፌሰር አለማየሁ ገብረማርያም፣ ታማኝ በየነ፣ አበበ ገላው፣ አበበ በለው፣ ሉሊት መስፍንና ለጊዜው የማላስታውሳቸው ሌሎችም የግንቦት 7 አባላት እንዳልሆኑ አውቃለሁ፤ እመሰክራለኝም። ከሙህራዊ ብቃታቸውና Integrity አኳያም ግንቦት ሰባትም ሆነ ሌላ ማንኛቸውም ድርጅት ከኋላ ሆኖ በዘፈቀደ የሚያሽከረከራቸውና የሚጠመዝዘዋቸው ሰዎች አይደሉም።

ግንቦት 7 የተባለው ድርጅት «የግንቦት 7 ድምጽ» የሚባል ልሣን አለው። በኢንተርኔት የሚሠራጭ ጋዜጣ ነው። «የግንቦት 7 ድምፅ» የሚባልም ሬዲዮ ጣቢያ አለው። ከሬዲዮና ከጋዜጣው ባሻገር ቴሌቪዥን ካለውም «የግንቦት 7 ድምፅ» ብሎ የማይሰይምበት ምክንያት አይታየኝም። እንዲያውም፣ ነገሮቹ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ባላደረጉት ደረጃ አዲስ የተቋቋመው ግንቦት 7 የቴሌቪዥን ጣቢያ ባለቤት ለመሆን ከበቃ፣ ግርማ ሞገሱንም ሆነ ተሰሚነቱን የሚያገላለጥ በመሆኑ እንዲታወቅለት እንጂ እንዳይታወቅበት የሚፈልግበት ምክንያት ግልፅ አይደለም።

ለማንኛቸውም፣ ለተከበረው ፍ/ቤት ግንዛቤ የኢሣትን ቻርተር በፅሁፍ ማስረጃነት አያይዘነዋል። ቻርተሩ እንደሚገልፀው ከሆነ፣ ቴሌቪዥን ጣቢያው ከማንኛቸውም የፖለቲካ ድርጅት ጋር ያልወገነ ነፃ ተቋም ነው።

በዚህ ክስ ውስጥ እስከተገለፀበት ጊዜ ድረስ፣ የኢትዮጵያ መንግሥት ኢሣት የግንቦት 7 ልሣን መሆኑን አንድም ጊዜ ተናግሮ አያውቅም። በዚህም ሳቢያ፣ ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ በህጋዊና በሰላማዊ መንገድ የሚንቀሳቀሱ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች መሪዎች፣ ጋዜጠኞችና ሙህራን ከኢሣት ጋር ተደጋጋሚ ቃለ-ምልልሶች እንዳደረጉ ሀገር የሚያውቀው ሐቅ በመሆኑ፣ ማስረጃ ማቅረብ የሚያስፈልገኝ አይመስለኝም። የተከበረው ፍ/ቤት በjudicial notice ግምት ውስጥ ሊያስገባው ይችላል። ፍሬ ነገሩ፣ ከኢሣት ቴሌቪዥን ጋር ቃለ-መጠይቅ ማድረግ ከግንቦት 7 ጋር መወገን ወይም ማሰር ነበር ብሎ መደምደም የሚቻልበት Context አልነበረም። ይህን ስል ግን፣ በኢሣት ውስጥ ያሉት የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች አባላት ሚና ሊያሳስቡን አይገባም ማለት አይደለም። ኢሣት ነፃ ተቋም ነኝ እስካለ ድረስ፣ ሊያነጋግረንም ሊያሳስብንም ይገባል። የውይይት መድረኩ ግን ከቶ ፍርድ ቤቶች ሊሆኑ አይገባም።

በመጨረሻም፣ ከአበበ በለው ጋር ስላለኝ ግንኙነት ልናገር። ሰሞኑን በኢትዮጵያ ቴሌቪዥን ቅሺ ገብሩ በሚል ርዕስ የተላለፈ ዶክመንተሪ ፊልም ነበር። ዋና ማጠንጠኛ የሆነችው ታጋይ በደርግ እጅ ወድቃ ቃለ-ምልልስ ሲደረግላት፣ «የመንግሥትን ሬዲዮ እንዳናምን ያደረገን የትግራይ ገበሬ በሕወሓት እየተገደደ ለጦርነት ይማገዳል የምትሉት ነው» ብላ ነበር። መላ የትግራይ ገበሬ እውነት አለመሆኑን ያውቅ ነበርና። በተመሳሳይ መንገድም፣ በዚህ ክስ አበበ በለው፣ አበበ ገላው፣ አባንግ ሜቶን የመሳሰሉ ታዋቂ ግለሰቦች የግንቦት 7 አመራር አባላት ናቸው ተብለው መፈረጃቸው በዲያስፖራውና በዓለም አቀፉ ማህበረሰብ ዘንድ ክሱን፣ ሂደቱንና በአጠቃላይ የኢትዮጵያን ፍትህ ሥርዓት ተአማኒነት የሚያሳጣ ነው። እንዳልሆኑ ቢያንስ ቢያንስ መላው ዲያስፖራ ያውቃልና። ከአበበ በለው ጋር ያደረግኳቸው ቃለ-ምልልሶች ሙሉ ዋሽንግተን ዲሲ ውስጥ ባለ የኤፍ ኤም (በእነሱ ኤ.ኤም) ሬዲዮ ጣቢያ ላይ የተላለፈ ነው። በሬዲዮ ጣቢያው የሚተላለፈው የአማርኛ ቋንቋ ፕሮግራም ግንቦት ሰባትም ሆነ ኢሣት ከመቋቋማቸው በፊት የነበረ ነው። መንግስትም ጠንቅቆ የሚያውቀው ጉዳይ ነው። ፍርድ ቤቱን ሆነ ተብሎ ለማሳሳት እየተሞከረ የሚገኘው፣ ለቀረበብኝ የፈጠራ ክስ ተጨባጭ ማስረጃ ማቅረብ ስለማይቻል ብቻ መሆኑን ለተከበረው ፍ/ቤትም ሆነ ለማንኛውም ገለልተኛ ተመልካች ሊሰወር አይችልም።

5ኛ. ሁከትን የሚቀስቅሱ ጽሁፎችን የፃፈና ያሰራጨ ስለተባልኩት

አቃቤ ህግ ያቀረቡብኝ የፅሁፍ ማስረጃዎች ሲቃኙ፣ በጋዜጣና በኢንተርኔት የወጡ 6 መጣጥፎች፣ በሀገር ውስጥ ከሚታተሙ ጋዜጦች ጋር ያደረግኳቸው 2 ቃለ-ምልልሶች፣ በአሜሪካ፣ በካናዳና በስዊድን ሀገራት ካሉ ሬዲዮ ጣቢያዎችና ፓልቶኮች ጋር ያደረግኳቸው ቃለ-ምልልሶች ተካተዋል። በተጨማሪም እንዴት እንደሚመለከተኝ ግልፅ ባይሆንልኝም፣

ወ/ት ብርቱካን ሚዴቅሳ በስዊድን ሀገር ያደረጉት ንግግርና ይልማ በቀለ የተባሉ ኢትዮጵያዊ ምሁር ያወጡት አንድ መጣጥፍም በማስረጃነት ተቆጥረውብኛል።

እነዚህን ሁሉ በዝርዝር መቃኘት አስፈላጊ ነው የሚል እምነት የለኝም። ሆኖም፣ For the record በስሜ የወጡት መጣጥፎችና የሰጠኋቸው ቃለ-ምልልሶች የእኔ የሆኑና እስካሁን ድረስ ያለምንም ማሻሻያና መሸራረፍ ሙሉ ለሙሉ የማምንባቸው ናቸው። ዓላማቸው ብጥብጥ ማስነሳት አልነበረም። በሀገራችን የህልውና ጉዳይ የሆነውን ሰላማዊ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሽግግር እንዲኖር የሚመከሩ፣ የሚማፀኑ፣ የሚገስፁ፣ የሚለምኑና መንገዱን የሚጠቁሙ ናቸው። በኢትዮጵያ የአውራ ፓርቲ ግንባታ መከራ በሀገሪቷ አንድነት ቁማር መጫወት ነው። እንደአንድ ለሀገሩና ለህዝቡ የሚቆረቆር ዜጋና ጋዜጠኛ ድምፄን የማሰማት ኃላፊነት ነበረብኝ፤ ኃላፊነቴንም ተወጥቻለኝ። ከዚህ በኋላ ከእኔ የሚጠበቀው የምክፍለው ዋጋ ካለ በፀጋ መቀበል ብቻ ነው።

ሰላም፣ ዴሞክራሲ፣ አንድነትና ፍቅር ለሀገሬና ለህዝቧ እመኛለሁ።

አመሰግናለሁ።

8. ጃኬት አስወላቂው ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትራችን - በእስክንድር ነጋ

ሰሞኑን፣ አንድ ግሩም መፅሐፍ እያነበብኩኝ ነው። ባለፈው አርብ ነው የወጣው። በዳንኤል ተፈራ የተፃፈና በዶ/ር ነጋሳ ጊዳዳ ሕይወት ዙሪያ የሚያጠነጥን ነው። ብዙ ኦዲዲስ ነገሮችን ይዟል። አንድ ስሜቴን የኮረኮረውን ነገር ላካፍላችኩ ወድጃለኝ።

እንዲህ ይነበባል (ከገፅ 240 የተወሰደ)፡-

በመቀሌ የተካሄደው የሕወታት ካድሬዎች ስብሰባ እንደተጠናቀቀ የተወሰደውን እርምጃ (እነ ስዬን ማባረር) ለኢህአዴግ ም/ቤት ለማቅረብ አባል ፓርቲዎች የተገኙበት ስብሰባ ተጠርቶ ነበር። ለእማኝነትም የሽማግሌዎችን ቡድን ይዘው መጥተው ነበር። የዛን ቀን መለስ ከፊት ለፊታችን ተቀምጦ ሪፖርት ሲያደርግ እየፎከረ ነበር። ስለ መቀሌ ውሳኔ ሲናገር «ጃኬታቸውን አስወልቀን ራቁታቸውን አባረርናቸው!» ነበር ያለው።

ያን ጊዜ ንግግሩ አንድ ነገር አስታውሶኝ፣ ከወትሮው በተለየ ሁኔታ በተመስጦ እያየኩት ነበር። የግንቦት 20 በዓል በተከበረ ቁጥር የሚታዩ የደርግ ፊልሞች አሉ። ከእነዚያ ውስጥ የኢህአዴግ ሰራዊት ሰሜን ሸዋ የደረሰ ጊዜ፣ መንግስቱ ኢ.አ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ውስጥ ተማሪዎችን ስብስቦ «ቁጣቸውን በሳንጃ!...» እያለ ነውረኛ ፉከራ ሲያሰማ የሚያሳይ ፊልም አንዱ ነው። መለስም «ጃኬታቸውን አስወልቀን!...» እያለ ሲፎከር ሳይ የመንግስቱ ፉከራ ትውስ ብሎኝ እጄን አነሳሁና «አስተያየት!» አልኩኝ። አከል አድርጌም «ይቅርታ!» አነጋገርህ መንግስቱ ኃ/ማርያምን አስታወሰኝ።

«መንግስቱን መንግስቱን መሰልከኝ!» አልኩት። ቤቱ በድንጋጤ ተናወ። በተለይ ከጎኔ ተቀምጣ የነበረችው ገነት ዘውዴ «እንዴት ከመንግስቱ ጋር ታወዳድረዋለህ?» ብላ ስቅስቅ ብላ አለቀሰች። ቤቱ ቀውጢ ሆነ። «ይቅርታ አድርጉልኝና አነጋገሩ ደስ ስላላለኝ ነው። ደግሞም መንግስቱን መሰልከኝ እንጂ ነህ አላልኩም» ስል ነበር ትንሽ ቤቱ የተረጋጋው።

ዶ/ር ነጋሶ ጊዳዳ

የነጋሶ መንገድ፣ በዳንኤል ተፈራ፣

ከሚለው አዲስ መፅሐፍ የተወሰደ።

«ጉድ ሳይሰማ መስከረም አይጠባም።» ብለው ተርተዋል አበው። ከልምድ ይመስለኛል። እያንዳንዱ ዓመት የራሱ ጉድ አለው። እያንዳንዱ ዓመት ዝናው ሲነገርለት የሚኖር ጉደኛ እንዳለው አላውቅም። አንዳንድ ዘመኖች ግን ተወርቶላቸው የማያልቁ ጉደኞች አሏቸው።

አለቃ ገብረሃና እንዲህ አይነት ሰው ይመስሉኛል። ስንቱ ተነግሮ ያልቃል ስለ እሳቸው? እኔ በግሌ የምወደው

የቤተመንግሥት ገጠመኛቸውን ነው።

እንዲህ ነው።

ግብዣ ይጠራሉ። እንደወትሯቸው ለብሰው ቤተመንግሥት ጎራ ሲሉ፣ በር ላይ ይከለክሏቸዋል። አለባበሳቸው ነበር ችግሩ። ፡ ተንደርድረው ወደቤታቸው ይመለሳሉ። በግነዋል። «ጨዋ» መሰለው ይመለሳሉ። ያለምንም ችግር ሰተት ብለው ይገባሉ። ፡ ጥሩ ቦታም ይሰጣቸዋል።

ከግራም ከቀኙም ጨዋታው ደርቷል። ጮማው በየሳህኑ ተከምሯል። ጥጥ ይመስላል። ጠጁ ይንቆረቆራል። ድል ያለ ድግስ ቀልጧል። አስተናጋጆች ተሯሩጠው የእጅ ውሃ አቀረቡላቸው። ሁለት እጃቸውን አልሰጧቸውም። ቀኝ እጃቸውን ብቻ ታጠቡ።

ሳህን ቀረበ። እንጀራ ቀጠለ። ሁለት ትላልቅ ቁርጥ አነሱ። ቀይ ወጥ ጨለፉ። ከአልጫውም ተደረገ። ሽንጡን ተሸክመው ነው የመጡት። የቤተመንግሥት ነገር። ቢለዋ ተሰጣቸው። ብድግ ብለው ከወደቀዩ ቆረጡ።

«ብሉ እንጂ፤» አሏቸው ከጎናቸው የተቀመጡ አንድ ጨዋ።

«አሺ፤» አሉ አለቃ፤ እንጀራ እየቆረሱ።

ከወደቀዩ ጀመሩ። አጠቃለላቸው ያምራል። ብድግ አደረጉ። እጃቸውን... ወደ... ወደ... ወደ ኪሳቸው ላኩት። ኪሳቸውን አጎረሱት!!

አጠገባቸው የነበሩት ክው ብለው ባሉበት ደርቀው ቀሩ። ጨዋታቸውን አቆሙ። አለቃ ቀጠሉ። አሁን ደግሞ፣ ከወደ ነጩ። ኪሳቸው ዛሬ አለፈለት። በላይ በላይ እየጎረሰ ነው። አዳራሹ በፀጥታ ተዋጠ። ዓይኖች ሁሉ በአለቃ ላይ አርፈዋል። «እንዴ፣ ምን ነካዎት?» ብሎ ጠየቃቸው፤ ተንደርድሮ አጠገባቸው የደረሰ አንድ አስተናጋጅ።

«ምን ነው?» አሉት፤ ቀና ብለው።

«የሚሰሩት ነዋ!» አላቸው ፊቱን ቋጥሮ። የጌታው ድግስ እየተበላሸ ነው።

«የሚበላው ማለትህ ነው?» አሉት፤ ፈገግ ብለው። «የተጋበዘው እሱ እንጂ እኔ መች ሆኜ?»

እንደአለቃ ዓይነቶቹ «ጉደኞች» የሕብረተሰቡ ሕሊና ናቸው። የሞራል እሴቶች ይገለፁባቸዋል። እያዝናኑ ያስተምራሉ።

በአርአያነት የተቀረፁ ናቸው። በምሳሌ ያስተምራሉ፣ ይመክራሉ፣ ይገስጻሉ። ሕፃኑም ትልቁም እኩል ይረዳቸዋል። ትውልድ ይማርባቸዋል።

ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር መለስ ዜናዊ ከአለቃ ጋር የሚመሳሰሉባቸው ብዙ ነገሮች የሉም። አለቃ፣ ሙሉ ለሙሉ የኢትዮጵያ ስልጣኔ ውጤት ናቸው። የቤተክርስቲያን ትምህርት ያውቃሉ፣ ግዕዝ አቀላጥፈው ይናገራሉ። መለስ ግን፣ ከኢትዮጵያ የወሰዱት እምብዛም ነው። ሁለመናቸው ከፈረንጆች የተቀዳ ነው፤ እንደብዙዎቹ የያ ትውልድ አባላት። አለቃ፣ ፈሪሃ እግዚአብሔር ነበሩ። መለስ፣ ማንንም አይፈሩም። (ከአዜብ በስተቀር ቂ... ቂ... ቂ... ይቺ ቀልድ መሆኗ ነው።) አለቃ፣ ከሚጠሉት የሚወዱት ያመዝናል። መለስ፣ ከሚወዱት የሚጠሉት ይበዛል። ብዙ ብዙ ልዩነቶች አላቸው።

በአንድ ነገር ግን ይመሳሰላሉ። ሁለቱም በተናገሯቸው ቃላቶች ሲታወሱ ይኖራሉ። የመለስ ብዙውን ጊዜ በአርአያነትና በጥሩ ነገር የሚታወስ ባይሆንም።

መስከረም ሳይጠባ ከመለስ ጉድ መሰማት የጀመርነው ገና ስልጣን ላይ ከመውጣታቸው በፊት አንስቶ ነበር። ሕወዓት ትግራይን ነፃ እንዳወጣ ወደ ሊቢያ ጎራ ብለው ነበር፤ በሻዕቢያ አቅራቢነት። ጋዳፊ ተቀብለው አነጋግረዋቸዋል። «እኛ የመኖሪያን ነን፤» አሏቸው መለስ። ጋዳፊ በደስታ ከነፉ። ለካ ኢትዮጵያውያንም አረቦች ናቸው። ኪሳቸው ወለል ብሎ ተከፈተ። መለስ እስከዛሬ ድረስ ይስቃሉ። ብዙ ሰዎችም አብረዋቸው ይስቃሉ።

«ባንዲራ ጨርቅ ነው፤» ሲሉ ግን ማንም አልሳቀም። እንዲያውም፣ ብዙዎች ለኢትዮጵያ አለቀሱላት። በአባባሉ የጊዜው አደጋ ተገልጾበታል።

«ለወላይታ አክሱም ምኑ ነው?» ያሉ ጊዜ ሕዝቡ አዝናደዋል። ለተዳከመው ኢትዮጵያዊነት መገለጫ ነበርና።

ቀጠሉና፣ «መሃይምም ሚኒስትር መሆን ይችላል፤» ብለው አረፉት። የኢሕአዴግን ፕሮግራም ካስፈፀመ ሌላው ትርፍ ነው ብለው እቅጩን ነገሩን። ድንኳን ጥለው ለማልቀስ የከጀላቸው ነበሩ። ዓለም ግን ሳቀብን። አይ አፍሪቃ! ጉድሽ መቼ ነው የሚያልቀው?

ሌላም ሌላም ብለዋል። ብዙረዝረው ብዙ ነው የሚሆነው። በየዓመቱ ቢያንስ አንድ ነገር ጣል ያደርጉልናል። እሳቸውም እኛም ሱስ ሆኖብናል። በቅርቡ እንኳን፣ ከምርጫ 2002 በኋላ፣ «ኢሕአዴግ፣ በፓርላማ ያለውን መቀመጫ በሙሉ ማሸነፉ፣ ዲሞክራሲ ከመቼውም ጊዜ በላይ ለመጠናከሩ ማስረጃ ነው፤» ብለውናል። ዓይናቸው እንኳን አልተርገበገበም። ይሄ አልበቃ ብሏቸው ደግሞ፣ «ዲሞክራሲያችን ለኢሰፓ አ

ባላት እንኳን የተትረፈረፈ ነው፤» ብለው ጨምረውልናል። ምርቃት መሆኗ ነው። ክረምቷን የምንወጣባት።

ይሄ ሁሉ በአደባባይ የተነገረ ነው። ከመጋረጃ በስተጀርባ ተጨማሪ እንደሚኖሩ ስንገምት ኖረናል። ያልጠረጠርነው፣ «በምርጫ ካርዳችን ደግመን ደጋግመን የመረጥናቸው» ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትራችን ጃኬት አስወላቂ መሆናቸውን ነው።

እድሜ ለዶ/ር ነጋሪ ጊዳዳ፣ ባለፈው ዓርብ እኝህን ጃኬት አስወላቂ ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትራችንን ተዋውቀናቸዋል።
ይቀጥላል

ፀሐፊውን ለማግኘት፡- serk27@gmail.com

9. ለህዝብ መሞት ክብር ነው! - በእስክንድር ነጋ

ዛሬ፣ ማክሰኞ፣ ሐምሌ 05 2003 አዲስ አበባ ውስጥ ከሚታተመው አዲስ ወሬ ጋዜጣ ጋር አጭር ቃለመጠይቅ አድርጌያለኩ። የጋዜጣው ማኔጄንግ ኤዲተር፣ ዳንኤል ኃይሉ፣ ባለፈው ሰሞን ከመንገድ ላይ ታፍኖ ተደብድቧል፣ ቢሮው ተፈትሷል።

በጋዜጦች ላይ ያለው አደጋ እየተባባሰ ነው። ፅናታችን ግን ዝንፍ አትልም። ይሄ ነው የቃለመጠይቅ ጭብጥ።

ድምፃችንን ለዴሞክራሲ ማስማቱን እንቀጥላለን!!

ቃለ መጠይቅ እነሆ፡-

አዲስ ወሬ፡- ሰሞኑን በጋዜጦችቱ ሥራ ላይ የተሰማሩ ወጣቶች ከፖለቲካ ፓርቲ አመራሮች ጋር በጋራ በሽብርተኝነት ተጠርጥረው ተይዘዋል። ይህ ሁኔታ በነጻው ፕሬስ ላይ ድንጋጤን እንዲፈጠር የሚናገሩ በርካታ ወገኖች አሉ ያንተ ሀሳብ ምንድነው?

መልስ፡- ከዚህ በፊት የሆነውን ልንገርህ። ፀረ-ፕሬስ ዘመቻው በማሸማቀቅ ጀመረ። ማሸማቀቁ ወደ ክስ አደገ። ክሱ ወደ ፕሬስና በክስ አደገ። ፕሬውና በክሱ ገልብጦ ወደ መግረፍ አደገ። ገልብጦ መግረፉ ወደ ጋዜጦች መዝጋት አደገ። ጋዜጦች መዝጋት ወደ ጋዜጦች ፍቃድ መከልከል አደገ። እዚህ ላይ ነው አሁን ያለው። እርቃኑን የቀረ ጭቆና ላይ ደርሰናል።

አሁን ደግሞ፣ ሁለት ጋዜጦችን በማሰር የተጀመረው ዘመቻ፣ የአዲስ ወሬን ሥራ አስኪያጅ ከመንገድ ላይ አፍኖ ወደ መደብደብ አድጓል። ይቀጥላል። በፕሬሱ ላይ ያለው ተፅእኖ የሀገር አቀፍ ጭቆና አንድ መገለጫ ነው። ፕሬስ ላይ ያለውን ችግር በአጠቃላይ ካለው የሥርዓት ችግር ነጥለን ልንመለከተው አንችልም። ፕሬሱ የነጻነት ደሴት መሆን አይችልም። የፕሬሱ ችግር መፍትሔ የሚያገኘው የዲሞክራሲ ጥያቄው ለአንዴና ለመጨረሻ ጊዜ ምላሽ ሲያገኝ ነው። እስከዚያው ድረስ መስዋዕትነት እየከፈልን መቀጠል አለብን። ታሪካችን የመስዋዕትነትና የጽናት ነው። አዲስ ነገር የለም። እስከመጨረሻው የመቀጠል ታሪካዊ አደራ አለብን። ከዚህ ድቅድቅ ካለ ጨለማ በኋላ ያለውን ንጋት ሁላችንም ላናየው እንችላለን። መንገድ ላይ መውደቅ አለ። የቆምነው ለተቀደሰ ዓላማ ስለሆነ ግን ይሄ ሊያስፈራን አይገባም። ከዚህ በኋላ መታሰር እድል ሊሆን ይችላል። ከእስር የባሰም ነገር ሊያጋጥመን ይችላል። ብዕራችን ግን መታጠፍ የለባትም። የአካል ሞት ፈርተን በመንፈስ መሞት የለብንም። ለእውነትና ለሕዝብ መሞት ትልቅ ክብር ነው። ፀጋ ነው። ጸዲቅነት ነው።

አዲስ ወሬ፡- የአሸባሪነት ሕጉ በፕሬሱ ላይ የፈጠረው ተፅእኖ አለ? ካለ ብትገልፁልን?

መልስ፡- የፀረ-ሽብር ሕገ ሆኖ ተብሎ ሰላማዊ ተቃዋሚዎችንም ጭምር ለመጨፍለቅ ታስቦ የወጣ ነው። ከቢንላደን በላይ ማን ነው አሸባሪ? በየትኛው ሀገር ነው የቢንላደንን መልዕክት ማስተላለፍ ወንጀል የሆነበት? ቢንላደንን መደገፍና ስለቢንላደን መዘገብ የተለዩ ነገሮች ናቸው። የኢትዮጵያው ፀረ-ሽብር ሕግ በዚህ ልዩነት ላይ በሩን የዘጋ ነው። ለዚህ ነው በዓለም አቀፉ ደረጃ የተወገዘው። አሁን እኮ ስለ አነግ፣ ግንቦት 7፣ አብነግ መጻፍ አይቻልም። በአደባባይ መወያየት አይቻልም። ይህ ማለት ግን ሕዝቡ ስለእነዚህ ድርጅቶች መወያየትና መነጋገር አቁሟል ማለት እንዳልሆነ አስረጂ አያስፈልግም። ስለድርጅቶቹ መጻፍና መወያየት ስላልተቻለ ተነው ይጠፋሉ ማለት አይደለም። በተቃራኒው የሀገሪቱ ችግሮች የሚባባሱበት ሁኔታ ነው የተፈጠረው። ወደ መፍትሔ እየሄድን አይደለም። ስለሽብር ተግባራት የመጻፍና የመወያየት ነፃነት ሊኖር ይገባል። በጽሑፍና በውይይት ላይ ምንም ዓይነት ገደብ ሊጣል አይገባም። ይሄ ነጻነት በፈረንጆቹ ሀገሮች ብቻ አይደለም ተከብሮ የሚገኘው። ባለፈው ሰሞን ሂላሪ ክሊንተን እዚህ አዲስ አበባ ውስጥ ባሰሙት ንግግር እንደገለጹት፣ በአብዛኛው የአፍሪካ ሀገራት ተከብሯል። እነዚህ የአፍሪካ ሀገራት እኛ ለነጻነት ያበቃናቸው ናቸው። ከኋላ ተነስተው ቀድመውናል። ይሄ ሊቆጩንም ሊያሳፍረንም ይገባል። በምንም መለኪያ ከአፍሪካ ሀገራት አናንስም። እኛ ጋር የጎደለው የገዢዎቻችን ቅንነት ብቻ ነው። የመከራችን ምንጭ ራስ ወዳድነታቸው ነው።

አዲስ ወሬ፡- ኢትዮጵያ ወደሱዳን የሰላም አስከባሪ ሠራዊት ከላኩት አገራት ተርታ ተሰልፋለች። በሁለቱ አገራት መካከል ለሚኖረው ግንኙነትም ሆነ አገሪቱ በዓለም አቀፍ መልካ ምን ውጤት ያስገኛላታል?

መልስ፡- ሠራዊት ለመላክ እየቀረበ ያለውን ምክንያት አስተውል። «ሱዳን ውስጥ ጦርነት ከተነሳ ወደ ኢትዮጵያ ሊዛመት ይችላል» ነው የመንግስት ስጋት። ኬኒያ ከሱዳን ጋር ትደናበራለች። ይሄ ሥጋት ግን የላትም። ለምን? ለጦርነት የሚዳርግ ፖለቲካ ስለሌለ። ሌላ ምስጢር የለውም። በኬኒያ ዲሞክራሲ አለ። ስለዚህ፤ አይሰጉም። በኢትዮጵያ ግን የእርስ በእርስ ጦርነት እንዳይለኮስ ኢሕአዴግ አንድ ጊዜ ወደ ሶማሊያ ሌላ ጊዜ ወደ ሱዳን ይሮጣል። ምንጩን ማድረቅ የሚቻለው ግን እዚሁ ኢትዮጵያ ነው። ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ጭቆና እስከሌለ ድረስ የጎረቤት ሀገር እርስ በእርስ ጦርነት ወደሀገራችን ሊዛመት አይችልም። ቢበዛ የሚያስጋን ስደተኛ ነው። እሱ ደግሞ የዓለም አቀፉ ሕብረተሰብ ሽክም ነው የሚሆነው። ስደተኞች የእኛን ወጪ አይፈልጉም። የኢትዮጵያን ፀጥታ ወታደር ወደ ጎረቤት ሀገሮች በማዝመት ዋስትና መስጠት አይቻልም። ዋስትናው ዲሞክራሲ ነው። ዋስትናው ጭቆናንና አፈናን ማጥፋት ነው። ይሄ ነው እውነተኛ ሰላም የሚመጣው። እስከዚያው የዛፍ ላይ እንቅልፍ ነው የሚሆነው። ዛፍ ላይ ሆነህ እንቅልፍን ትታገለግለህ፤ መጨረሻ ላይ ግን ያሸንፋለህ። ያኔ መውደቅ ይመጣል።

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10. የሰኔ 1997 ጭፍጨፋ ሲታወስ (ወህኒ ቤት የተፃፈ) - በእስክንድር ነጋ

ሰሞኑን መፅሐፍ ለማሳተም ታች ላይ እያልኩ ነው። ያልታተሙ ሁለት ሶስት መጻሕፍት በእጄ አሉ። እድሜ ለኢሕአዴግ፣ ለመፃፍ ብዙ ጊዜ አግኝቻለኝ። የተጠቀምኩባቸውም ይመስለኛል። ለሕትመት የሚገቡት ግን እነዚህ መፃሕፍት አይደሉም። በቂ ምክንያት አለው።

«ለኢሥፓ አባላት እንኳን የተትረፈረፈ ዲሞክራሲ አለባት» ተብላ በጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር መለስ ዜናዊ የተወደሰችው ኢትዮጵያ፣ መፃሕፍትም በነፃ እንዳይታተሙባት የተከለከለባት ሀገር ናት። ዲስኩሩ ሌላ፣ እውነታው ሌላ። ከእውነታው ስለባዎች መካከል አንዱ ደግሞ እኔና ሠርክዓለም እንገኛለን። መፃሕፍት እንዳናሳትም ተከልክለናል።

በአጭሩ ላውጋችሁ።

ጊዜው ሐምሌ 1999 ዓ.ም። ከእስር ከተለቀቅን ጥቂት ወራት ብቻ ተቆጥረዋል። ሳምንት እንኳን አላረፍንም። እስር ቤት ያገባደድነውን መፅሐፋችንን ለአዲሱ ዓመት ለማድረስ እሩጫ ላይ ነን። ኮምፒውተር ተገዛ (የነበሩን በሙሉ በመንግሥት ተወርሰዋል)፤ ፀሐፊ ተቀጠረና የቤታችንን አንዷን ክፍል ጊዜያዊ ቢሮ አደረግናት። ጧት ሁለት ሰዓት ተኩል ስራ ይጀመራል፤ ስድስት ተኩል ምሳ ይወጣል፤ አስራ አንድ ሰዓት ተኩል ድረስ ስራ ይሰራል። ብዙ ጊዜ እስከ አስራ ሁለት ሰዓት ይቆያል። እረፍት የለም።

ከአስራ አምስት ቀናት በኋላ ፀሐፊዋ አቃታት። የኮምፒውተር ፀሐፊዎች ዘና ብለው ነው መስራት የለመዱት። የእኛን ጥድፊያና ውጥረት አልቻለችውም። ተሰናብታ ሄደች። ሌላ ፍለጋ አልሄድንም። መፅሐፍ መስራት ልምድ ወዳላት አንድ ወዳጆችን ሄድን። በጥቂት ጊዜ አቀላጥፋ አጠናቀቀችው።

ማተሚያ ቤት ስናፈላልግ፣ የግል የመንግሥት አላልንም። እስከ ነሐሴ መጨረሻ የሚያደርሱልንን ብቻ ለመለየት ሞክርን። የመንግሥቶቹ በሙሉ ከአዲስ ዓመት በኋላ ቀጠሩን። የትምህርት መፃሕፍት በማተም ተወጥረዋል። ከግሎቹ ውስጥ አማራጮች ነበሩ። አዲስ ማሸን ያስገባውን መርጠን፣ 60 ሺ ብር ቀብድ ተከፍሎ ስራው ተጀመረ። ቀሪው 60 ሺ ብር ስራው ሲያልቅ እንዲከፈል ተስማማን።

ማተሚያ ቤቱ ለሥራው ትልቅ ቦታ ሰጠው። ያኔ 120 ሺ ብር ትልቅ ገንዘብ ነበር። ቴክኖሎጂ ፊልም ተነሱ፤ ተሰባጥረው ተቀመጡ። ከ600 ገጾች በላይ ያለው መፅሐፍ በመሆኑ፣ ይህ ስራ 15 ቀናት ፈጀ። ተደክመን። የመፅሐፉ ሽፋን በጎን እየተጣደፈ ነው። ባለ 4 ቀለም ስለሆነ፣ ከፊል ስራው ወደ ሌላ ማተሚያ ቤት ተልኳል። ከ10 ቀናት በኋላ ተጠናቆ ሕትመት ተጀመረ። ቶሎ ቶሎ እየተመላለሰን መከታተል ነበረብን። አንድ ቀለም፣ ሁለት ቀለም፣ ሶስተኛ ቀለም ድረስ ሄደ። ቴክኖሎጂው ተጀመረ። ወደ 10 ገጾች ታተመ። እውነትም ለአዲስ ዓመት ሊደርስ ነው። በመካከሉ ግን፣ ያልተጠበቀ የስልክ ጥሪ አቃጩለ።

«አቤት!» አልኹኝ፤ በእጄ ላይ የያዝኩትን ሻይ ቁጭ አድርጌ።

«እስከንድር፣ እፈልግህለኹ» አለኝ የማተሚያ ቤቱ ባለቤት።

ከሠርክዓለም ጋር ተያይዘን ወደ ማተሚያ ቤቱ ከነፍን። ባለቤቱ ከምርት ክፍል ሥራ አስኪያጁ ጋር ሆኖ ተቀበለን።

«ምነው?» ብላ ጠየቀችው ሠርክዓለም።

«ሕትመት እንድናቋርጥ ታዘናል።» አለ ባለቤቱ፤ አንገቱን ደፋ አድርጎ።

«በማን?» ብላ ጠየቀችው። ከ1983 በኋላ፣ መፅሐፍ እንዳይታተም ስንሰማ ይሄ የመጀመሪያ መሆኑ ነው። ተገረምን!

«ደህንነቶች እዚህ ድረስ መጥተው ወደ ውጭ ይዘውኝ ከሄዱ በኋላ፣ ሕትመቱን ካላቆምክ በሕይወትህ ላይ መፍረድ ነው።»

ብለውኛል አለ ወጣቱ ባለቤት፤ ፊቱን ቁምጭጭ አድርጎ።

«የሚያስጠይቅ ነገር ካለው እኛ አለን። በስማችን ነው እኮ የሚወጣው። አታሚ የሚጠየቀው ፀሐፊው ካልታወቀ ብቻ መሆኑን በአዋጁ በግልፅ ተቀምጧል። አንተን የሚመለከት ነገር የለም፤» አልኩት።

«ከእነዚህ ሰዎች ጋር ያለኸን ግንኙነት አቋርጥ ተብያለኩ። ተረዱኝ። ቤተሰቤን አስደንግጠዋል፤» ብሎ መለሰልን።

ማፈግፈግ አስፈለገ። ቤተሰቡን ግምት ውስጥ ማስገባት የግድ ይላል። 60 ሺውን ብር እንዳለ መለሰልን። የሕትመቱን ወጪ እሱ ይክሰር፤ ደህንነት ይካሰው አላውቅም። ፊልሞቹን በሙሉ አስረከበኝ። አሁን ድረስ አሉ።

ስንወጣ፤ በር ላይ የደህንነት መኪና ቆማ ጠበቀችን። ሶስት ደህንነቶች እውስጧ ተቀምጠዋል። በቁጣ አፈጠጡብን። አንዱ መገናኛ አንስቶ መነጋገር ጀመረ። ማስፈራሪያ መሆኑ ነው። ፊታችንን አዙረን መንገዳችንን ቀጠልን።

ከሶስት ዓመታት በኋላ፤ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ ወደማተሚያ ቤት ላመራ ነው። አሁን ግን የማሳትመው በኢንተርኔት ላይ የወጡት ፅሁፎቹን ነው። አዲስ ነገር አይደለም። በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ የተነበቡም ያልተነበቡም አሉበት። በመፅሐፍ መልክ እንዳይታተሙ ክልከላ እንደማይኖር ተስፋ አደርጋለኩ።

እስከዚያው ድረስ ግን፤ ከታፈነው መፅሐፍ ውስጥ ለሕዝብ ልናካፍል የምንፈልገው አንድ ምዕራፍ አለ።

በምርጫ 97 ሳቢያ፤ በሰነድ በጥቅምት ወራት የተጨፈጨፉትን ንፁህን ዜጎች ጉዳይ እንዲያጣራ በፓርላማ ተሰይሞ የነበረው ኮሚሽን ቃሊቲ ወህኒ ቤት መጥቶ አነጋግሮን (በምርጫው ሳቢያ የታሰርነውን) ነበር። ይህንን ታሪካዊ ስብሰባ በተሟላ ገፅታው ሊታሪክ መዝግብን አስቀምጠነዋል።

ዘንድሮ፤ የሰነድ 1 ተጨፍጫፊዎች በአግባቡ አልተዘከሩም የሚል ስሜት አለን። በጋዜጣም ሆነ በሌሎች ሚዲያ ብዙም አልታወሱም፤ አልታሰቡም። በእኛ በኩል፤ ከታፈነፈው መፅሐፋችን ውስጥ ቀንጭበን ይፋ የምናደርገው የዚያ ታሪካዊ ስብሰባ ዘገባ ለዘንድሮ ማስታወሻቸው በረከት ይሁንልን።

አጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ በቃሊቲ ወህኒ ቤት ከታፈነው መፅሐፍ የተቀነጨበ

«ወደውጭ ትሄዳላችኩና ተዘጋጁ» ተባልን። ለባብስን ጠበቅናቸው። 8 ሰዓት ላይ መጥተው መኪና ላይ ጫኑን። ከግቢ ስንወጣ፤ መኪናዋ ወደግራ ተጠምዝዛ ወደ ፍ/ቤት አቅጣጫ በረረች። ጥበቃው ከባድ ነው። ከኋላችን ፌዴራል ፖሊስ ይከተለናል። መንገድ ላይም በርካታ ፌዴራል ፖሊሶች ቆመዋል። አንዳንዶቹ ክላሽንኮቭ ታጥቀዋል። ውጥረት ነግሷል።

የጫኑን መኪናዎች ፍ/ቤት ቅጥር ግቢ እንደደረሱ፤ ወርደን ወደ አዳራሹ እንድንገባ ታዘዝን። መጀመሪያ የወረደው የእኛ ቡድን ነበር። ግቢውን አቋርጠን ወደ አዳራሹ ገባን። አዳራሹ ውስጥ ማንም አልነበረም። ከኋላችን የተከተሉን የእነ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ቡድን ነበር። ፈጠን ፈጠን ብለው ደረሱብን።

«ካሜራ ሊይዙ ይችላሉ። እንዳይቀርፁን እንጠንቀቅ» አለ አንድ ድምፅ ከኋላችን።

ባለንበት ቆመን ዞር አልን። የዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ቡድን ደርሶብናል።

«ሳንነጋገር ምን ብለን ነው የምንገባው? ማን ነው የሚፈልገን?» በማለት ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ጮኸ ብለው ጠየቁ። ወደ ውስጥ ገባ ያልነው፤ ወደውጭ ወጥተን፤ መተላለፊያው ላይ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑን ከበብናቸው።

«ምንም የነገሩን ነገር የለም እኮ። ዝም ብለው ነው እኮ ነድተው ያመጡን» አሉ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ።

ከኋላችን ሴቶች እስረኞች ደረሱብን። ብርቱካን ሚደቅሳ፤ ንግሥት ገብረህይወት፤ ሰብለ ታደሰ ብቻ ነበር የመጡት።

ሠርከዓለም የለችም። ደነገጥኹ። ምን ሆኖ ነው? ታመመች እንዴ? (በኋላ ላይ አመጧት)

«መግባት የለብንም። ለምንድን ነው የምንገባው? ማን ነው የሚፈልገን?» ብለው ብርቱካንም ተቃውሟቸውን ገለጹ።

ከዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ጋር ለመነጋገር ዕድሉ እንዳልነበራቸው አውቃለች። ሳይነጋገሩ የያዙት የጋራ አቋም ነበር። መተላለፊያው ተጠበበ።

ፖሊሶቹ ግራ ተጋቡ። ኃላፊያቸውን ጠሩ። አበበ ዘሚካኤል የሚባሉ የወህኒ ቤቱ አንድ ኃላፊ መጡ።

«ምንድን ነው?» አሉ አበበ ፊታቸውን ኮስተር አድርገው።

«ለምንድን ነው የመጣነው?» ብለው ጠየቁ ብርቱካን ከፍ ባለ ድምፅ።

«አጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ነው የፈለጋችኹ» አሉ አበበ ንዴታቸውን ለመቆጣጠር እየታገሉ።

«አስገድዳችኹ ልታቀርቡን ትችላላችሁ እንዴ? እኛን አስገድዶ ለማቅረብ የሚችለው እኮ ፍ/ቤት ብቻ ነው» ብለው ብርቱካን መለሱላቸው። ብርቱካን ፊት ላይ ቁጣ ይነበባል።

«ወደ ውስጥ ገብታችኹ ተቀመጡና ጥያቄያችኹን ልታቀርቡ ትችላላችኹ» አሉ አበበ እጃቸውን ወደ አዳራሹ እያወዛወዙ።

«ካሜራ የያዙ ሰዎች ያለፍላጎታችን ቢቀርፁንስ?» ሲሉ ጠየቁ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ። ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ሁኔታዎችን ለማረጋገጥ ጣልቃ መግባታቸው እንደነበር ተሰማኝ።

«ያለፍላጎታችሁ አትነሱም። ወደውስጥ ግቡና ቁጭ በሉ። ልታነጋግሯቸው ካልፈለጋችኹ መመለስ ትችላላችኹ።

የሚያስገድዳችኹ የለም» አሉ አበበ። ይሄኔ፣ የወህኒ ቤቱ አዛዥ አቶ አብርሃም ወልደአረጋዊ መጡ። ወደፊት ሊያልፉ ሞከሩ። ሊሳካላቸው ግን አልቻለም።

«ጥሩ፣ እንገባለን። ያለፍላጎታችን ካሜራ አንቀረፅም። ማነጋገር ካልፈለግንም መውጣት እንችላለን ማለት ነው?»

«አዎ» አሉ አበበ።

«ካሜራ እንደሌለ መጀመሪያ ይታይ» አለ አንድ ድምፅ ከወደኋላ በኩል። ታየ። ካሜራ የያዘ ሰው አዳራሽ ውስጥ አልነበረም።

«እሺ እንግባ፣ የሚሉትን ሰምተን እንወጣለን» አሉ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ። እነ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ፣ ብርቱካንና ፕ/ር መሥፍን ፊት ፊት እየመሩ፣ ቀሪዎቻችን ተከትለናቸው ገባን (ኢ/ር ኃይሉ ሻውል ሆስፒታል ስለነበሩ፣ አብረውን አልነበሩም)። ሰዓቴን ተመለከትኹ 8:19 ይላል። ቁጭ ብለን ብዙም ሳንቆይ፣ ፊት ለፊታችን ካለው መጋረጃ ጀርባ፣ 7 ሰዎች መጥተው በተዘጋጀላቸው ወንበር ላይ ቁጭ አሉ። ከመካከላቸው አንዱ የቄስ ልብስ የለበሱ ናቸው። ሌላኛው ሰው፣ የካቶሊክ ቄስ መሆናቸውን የሚያሳይ የደንብ ልብስ አድርገዋል። አንዷ ሴት ናቸው።

በሰዎቹ ላይ የዚያ ሁሉ ተከላሾች ትኩረት ያረፈባቸው መሆኑ የተወሰነ ጭንቀት እንዳሳደረባቸው ያስታውቅ ነበር።

ሰብሳቢያቸው ከእኛ በስተግራ በኩል ባለችው የመጀመሪያ ወንበር ላይ ቁጭ አሉ። በዕድሜ ከሌሎቹ ያንሳሉ። ሱፍ በሱፍ አድርገዋል። ቀጭን ከራሻትም አስረዋል። «ዕድሜያቸው ስንት ይሆን?» ብዬ ራሴን ጠየቅኩኝ። ከ30ዎቹ የሚያልፉ

አይመስልም። ሰብሳቢው መናገር ጀመሩ።

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II. «ከጅምሩ የተበላሸ ነው» ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ - በእስክንድር ነጋ

ባለፈው ሳምንት፣ እንዳይታተም ከተከለከለው መፅሐፋችን (ፀሐፊዎቹ እኔና ሠርከዓለም ፋሲል ነን) የተወሰነ ቀንጭቤ ማቅረቤ ይታወሳል። የተቀነጨበው ፅሁፍ የሚተነትነው በምርጫ 97 ሳቢያ የተጨፈጨፉትን ንፁሃን ዜጎች ጉዳይ እንዲመረምር በፓርላማ ተቋቁሞ የነበረው አጣሪ ኮሚሽን፣ በወህኒ ቤት ተገኝቶ የቅንጅት አመራሮችንና ጋዜጠኞችን ያነጋገረበትን ታሪካዊ ስብሰባ ነው።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ አባላት እስረኞቹን ከሰበሰቡ በኋላ ንግግር በማሰማት ጀመሩ።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

በመጀመሪያ ልንጠይቃችሁ የምንፈልገው፣ ይህ ስብሰባ በቪዲዮ ይቀረፅ ወይስ አይቀረፅ? የሚል ነው።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

ወደዚህ ስብሰባ ከመምጣችን በፊት፣ ለመነጋገር ዕድል አላገኘንም። ማን እንደሆናችሁ አናውቅም። አልተነጋገርንም። ለምን እንደመጣችሁ አናውቅም። የተወሰነ ጊዜ ስጡንና እንነጋገር።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ለምን እንደመጣን እንነግራችኋለን። ከዚያ በፊት ግን ራሳችንን ማስተዋወቅ እንፈልጋለን።

1. እኔ፣ ፍሬህይወት ሳሙኤል እባላለኹ። በደቡብ ክልል የጠ/ፍ/ቤት ፕ/ት ነኝ። የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ፕ/ት ነኝ።
2. አቶ ወልደሚካኤል መሸሻ፣ የፌዴራል መጀመሪያ ደረጃ ምክትል ፕ/ት ናቸው።
3. አባ ኤዋስጣጢዮስ ገ/ክርስቶስ፣ የምሥራቅ ሐረርጌ ሊቀጳጳስ ናቸው። የኮሚሽኑ አባል ናቸው።
4. ቄስ ደረጃ ጀምበሩ፣ ፕሮቴስታንት፣ የኮሚሽኑ አባል።
5. ወ/ሮ ሐረገወይን ጣሰው፣ በፌዴራል አገር ውስጥ ገቢ፣ ዐቃቤ ህግ ናቸው። የኮሚሽኑ አባል።
6. ምትኩ ተሾመ፣ ከካቶሊክ ቤተክርስቲያን፣ የኮሚሽኑ አባል።
7. ዶ/ር መኮንን ዲሳለኝ፣ የአዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲ መምህር፣ የኮሚሽኑ አባል። የኮሚሽኑ አባላት እኛ ብቻ አይደለንም። ሌሎች ሥራ ስለተደራረበባቸው መምጣት አልቻሉም።

ይህ ኮሚሽን የተቋቋመው በአዋጅ ቁጥር 478 1998 ዓ.ም መሠረት ነው። አዋጁ «በሰነድ በጥቅምት በተነሱት ግርግር፣ በመንግሥት የፀጥታ ኃይሎች የተወሰደው እርምጃ ተመጣጣኝ መሆኑን ማጣራት» ነው የሚለው። ኮሚሽኑ 11 አባላት አሉት። ዛሬ እዚህ የተገኘው ገሰዎች ነን። ጠዋት ነበር ለመምጣት ያቀድነው። አልተሳካልንም። ሥራችንን ለመሥራት ቅፅ አዘጋጅተናል። እዚህ የመጣነው ይሄን ቅፅ ልንሰጣችሁ ነው። የምትሰጡን መረጃ ካለ ልንቀበላችሁ ነው። ወደእናንተ ከመምጣታችን በፊት፣ ከዕድር ኃላፊዎች ጋር ተነጋግረናል። ከእነሱ ጋር ተከታታይ ስብሰባ አድርገናል። በእኛ በኩል፣ ስለተከሰተው ችግር ብዙ ልታስረዱን ትችላላችሁ ብለን ገምተናል። ሆስፒታሎች አነጋግረናል። ሆስፒታሎችን ብቻ ሳይሆን፣ በአዲስ አበባ የሚገኙ 560 የህክምና ተቋማትን አነጋግረናል። ከሰብዓዊ መብት አያያዝ ጋር የተከሰተ ችግር አለ ወይ? የሚጠቅመን መረጃ ካለ፣ እንድትሰጡን ነው የመጣነው።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ ምላሽ ሊሰጧቸው ብድግ አሉ።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

ሰምተናችኋል። ቅድም ባልነው መሠረት፣ ለመነጋገር ምንም ዕድል ስላላገኘን፣ ለመወያየት ትንሽ ጊዜ ስጡን።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ቅፅ አለ። ቅፁን እያንዳንዳችሁ ናችሁ የምትሞሉት (የምትነጋገሩበት ምክንያት የለም ዓይነት መንፈስ ይታይባቸዋል)።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

«ችግሩን ፈጥራችኋል» ተብለን ተከሰናል። እኛ በበኩላችን ደግሞ፣ «ችግሩን ፈጥረዋል» የምንላቸው ሰዎች ናቸው እናንተን የመረጧችሁ። ይሄ የፖለቲካ ጉዳይ ያደርገዋል። መነጋገር አለብን።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ቅፁን ውሰዱና እዩት።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ (አቋርጠዋቸው)

እሺ አልን እኩ። ቅፁን አሳዩን። የመጣችሁበትን ምክንያት ነግራችኩናል። ማን እንደሆናችሁ አውቀናል። ትንሽ ጊዜ ደግሞ ለእኛ ስጡን።

ብርቱካን ሚዲቅሳ

አዋጁንም ማየት እንፈልጋለን።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ጥሩ። ትንሽ ጊዜ እንሰጣችኋለን። አዋጁንም ማየት ትችላላችሁ። ከ10 ደቂቃ በኋላ እንመለሳለን።

ሰብሳቢው ሲወስኑ፣ የኮሚሽኑ አባላትን አላማከሩም። ሁሉም ብድግ ብለው ወጡ። ከመጋረጃው በስተጀርባ ባለው አዳራሽ ቆይተው ይሁን፣ ወይም ደግሞ ከአዳራሹ ውጭ ይውጡ አላወቅንም። «ከመጋረጃው በስተጀርባ መሆናቸው ይታይ» የሚል አንድ ድምፅ ከመ ከላችን ተሰማ። «ተው፣ተው» የሚለው ስለበዛ ግን፣ የትም አልደረሰም። ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ ከተቀመጡበት ብድግ ብለው (ፊት ወንበር ላይ ነው የሚቀመጡት) ፊታቸውን ወደእኛ አዘሩ።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

ጊዜ የለንም። ያላችን 10 ደቂቃ ነች። አጠር አጠር ያለ አስተያየት መሰንዘር ትችላላችሁ።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ ይህንን ተናግረው እንደጨረሱ ብዙ ተከሳሾች እጃቸውን አወጡ። ለመናገር ዕድል የተሰጣቸው አንድ ተከሳሽ እንዲህ አሉሃ፡

አንደኛ ተናጋሪ

ይህንን ኮሚሽን ህዝቡና ተቃዋሚዎች እውቅና አልሰጠውም። ሲቋቋም ቢፓርላማ ውስጥ ያሉ ተቃዋሚዎች ቅሬታቸውን ገልፀዋል። እኛን ለማነጋገር የመጡት በህዝብ ዘንድ አመኔታ እንድናሳድርላቸው ነው።

ሁለተኛ ተናጋሪ

ከዚህ አጣሪ ኮሚሽን 6 ሰዎች ለቀዋል። የለቀቁበት ምክንያት በቴሌቪዥን በግልፅ አልተነገረም። ኮሚሽኑን የለቀቁት ነፃ ይሆናል ብለው ስላላመኑ ብቻ ነው።

ከዚህ በኋላ ፕሮፌሰር መስፍን ወልደማርያም ለመናገር ከተቀመጡበት ብድግ አሉ።

ፕ/ር መሥፍን ወልደማርያም

ለየት ያለ ሃሳብ አለኝ። ወደድንም ጠላንም ተሹመዋል። ባለመናገር የምናተርፈው ነገር የለም። ምንም ቢጠይቁን መናገር አለብን። በእኔ በኩል፣ ማንም ቢጠይቀኝ፣ ምላሽ እሰጣለሁ። እውነቱን ለመናገር ዕድሉን መጠቀም አለብን። ፖለቲካ ውስጥ ሳንገባ፣ ከሰብዓዊ መብት አኳያ ብቻ ያለውን ጉዳይ መናገር እንችላለን። ቅፁን ሳየው፣ ይህንን በመሙላት

የምንገባው ነገር የለም፡፡

ፕሮፌሰር መሥፍን የተናገሩት ነገር የሁሉንም ተከሳሾች ስሜት ስለነካ፣ በተበታተነ መልኩ ለመናገር ዕድል እንዲሰጣቸው ለማሳየት ተቀስፈው የነበሩት እጆች እንደድንገት ጫካ ሆኑ፡፡

ቀጥሎ ዕድል የተሰጣቸው፡-

ሶስተኛ ተናጋሪ

ፍ/ቤት አንከራከርም ብለናል፡፡ ፍትህ አናገኝም ብለናል፡፡ በመርህ ደረጃ መናገሩ ጥሩ ነው፡፡ የኮሚሽኑን ጥያቄ ተቀብለን የምናነጋግራቸው ከሆነ ግን፣ የተጣራሰ (Contradiction) ነገር ነው የሚሆነው፡፡ በፍርድ ቤቱ ላይ ከወሰድነው አቋም ጋር አይሄድም፡፡

አራተኛ ተናጋሪ

እኛን የሚፈልጉን በህዝቡ ዘንድ ተቀባይነት (ለሊጂትመሲ) ለማግኘት ብለው ነው፡፡ ሆኖም፣ በቀጥታ እምቢ ልንላቸው አይገባም፡፡ ዲፕሎማሲያዊ አይሆንም፡፡ የማንተባበርበትን ምክንያቶች እንግለፅላቸው፡፡ ቅደመ ሁኔታ እናስቀምጥላቸው፡፡ እነዚህን ቅድመ ሁኔታዎች የሚያሟሉ ከሆነ፣ ልንተባበራቸው እንደምንችል እንግለፅላቸው፡፡

አምስተኛ ተናጋሪ

የተቋቋሙበት ዓላማ እኮ ዋነኛውን ጉዳይ የሚያቅፍ አይለም፡፡ የግጭቱን መንስዔ የማይመረምሩ ከሆነ፣ ሌላው ምን ትርጉም አለው? የግጭቱን መንስዔ እስካልመረመሩ ድረስ፣ እኛ ከእነሱ ጋር የምንሠራው ነገር ትርጉም የለውም፡፡

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

አሁን የሚታየኝ ሁለት ሃሳብ እንዳለ ነው፡፡ በአንድ በኩል፣ ማነጋገሩ ጥሩ ነው የሚል፡፡ በሌላ በኩል ደግሞ፣ ዋጋ የለውም የሚል፡፡ ስለዚህ፣ ያለው አማራጭ፣ ሰዎች ሲመለሱ፣ ሊያናግሯቸው የሚፈልጉ ባሉበት እንዲቆዩ፤ ሊያናግሯቸው የማይፈልጉት ደግሞ፣ አዳራሹን ለቀው ወደ መተላለፊያው እንዲወጡ ነው፡፡ አዳራሹን ለቀው የሚወጡት ሰዎች ለምን እንደወጡ ትንሽ ገለፃ ሊሰጣቸው ይገባል የሚል እምነት ነው ያለኝ፡፡ በዚህ ትስማማላችኹ?

አብዛኛው ተከሳሽ በዶ/ሩ አባባል ተስማማ፡፡ ልክ እዚህ ነጥብ ላይ ስምምነት ላይ ሲደረስ (የሚገርም አጋጣሚ) የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ ወደ አዳራሹ ተመለሱ፡፡ ብቻቸውን ነበሩ፡፡

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ጨረሳችኹ?

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

እሺ ጨርሰናል፡፡

ሰብሳቢው መለሰ ብለው ለቀሪዎቹ የኮሚሽን አባላት ምልክት ከመስጠታቸው በፊት ተከትለዋቸው ገቡ፡፡ ሰብሳቢው ቀደም ብለው ወደአዳራሹ ተመልሰው «ጨረሳችኹ?» ብለው ጠይቀው፣ ትንሽ ጊዜ እንዲጨመርልን ተጠይቀው ተመልሰው ስለነበር፣ ቀሪዎቹ የኮሚሽን አባላት ሰብሳቢውን ተከትለው የገቡት፣ ተጨማሪ ጊዜ እንደማይሰጠን ለማሳየት እንደሆነ ተስምቶኛል፡፡ ለስንት ደቂቃዎች እንደተወያየን ሰዓት አልያዝኹም፡፡ የኮሚሽኑ አባላት በየቦታቸው ቁጭ እያሉ፣ ዶ/ር በፍቃዱ ደግፌ እጃቸውን አወጡ፡፡

ዶ/ር በፍቃዱ ደግፌ

ለመድፈር አይደለም፡፡ ግን፣ ቁጭ ያላችሁት ራቅ ብላችኹ ስለሆነ፣ ለመደማመጥ እየተቸገርን ነው፡፡ ወደታች ወርዳችኹ ፊት ባሉ፣ ወንበሮች ላይ ብትቀመጡ ጥሩ መደማመጥ ይኖረናል፡፡

የኮሚሽኑ አባላት ጥያቄውን በመቀበላቸው ከፍ ካለው መድረካቸው ላይ ለቀው እኛ ተከላኾች ባለንበት አካባቢ የሚገኙ ወንበሮች ላይ ቁጭ አሉ። ዶ/ር በፈቃዱ ሌላ ሃሳብም ነበራቸው።

ዶ/ር በፈቃዱ ደግፌ።

ለመድፈር አይደለም፤ ስትናገሩ በደንብ እንድናዳምጣችኹ ቆማችኹ እንድትናገሩ ሃሳብ አቀርባለኩ።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ (ቁጭ እንዳሉ። የዶ/ር በፈቃዱን ጥያቄ አልተቀበሉትም)

ለእኛ ቃል የሚሰጠን ሰው በነፃነት ነው የሚያነጋግረን። መጥተው የምስክርነት ቃላቸውን የሚሠጡን መታወቂያ ይሰጣቸዋል። ይሄ መታወቂያ ችግር እንዳይደርስባቸው ለመከታተል የሚያመች ነው። ለእኛ የምስክርነት ቃሉን በመስጠቱ ብቻ ማንም ላይ ችግር መድረስ የለበትም። እኛ ስንሠራ፤ የታሪክ ተወቃሽነት፤ የህሊና ተወቃሽነት እንዳለብን እናውቃለን።

እኛን ላለማነጋገር ከወሰናችኹ፤ የጋራ ውሳኔ ከሆነ አላውቅም። እናንተ የምትሉትን ለመሥማት ነው የመጣነው።

የተከላኾችን አቋም ለመግለፅ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ ከተቀመጡበት ብድግ አሉ። ሰብሳቢውን እየተመለከቱ መናገር ጀመሩ።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ

ይህን የአጣሪ ቡድን የማቋቋም ጉዳይ፤ ቅንጅት ቀደም ብሎ የያዘው አቋም መሆኑ ይታወሳል። የሰኔው ግርግር ከተነሳ በኋላ፤ የችግሩን ምንጭ የሚያጣራ አካል እንዲቋቋም ቅንጅት በይፋ ጠይቆ ነበር። መንግሥት ግን እምቢ አለ። ለማንኛውም፤ ከእናንተ ጋር ምን ችግር እንደሚታየን ማስረዳት እፈልጋለኩ። ችግሩ የሚነሳው፤ ከሾማችኹ አካል ማንነት ጋር ነው። እኛ «የችግሩ ፈጣሪ ነው» የምንለው አካል ነው እናንተን የሾማችኹ። ይህ ሁኔታ እኛን ምን ያህል አስቸጋሪ ሁኔታ ውስጥ እንደሚከተን መገመት ትችላላችኹ። ችግሩ በዚህ አያበቃም። ሌሎችም አሉ፡-

1. ችግሩ እንዴት እንደተፈጠረ ማጣራት አትችሉም። ይህንን እስካላደረጋችኹ ድረስ ደግሞ፤ ዓላማችሁ ገና ከጅምሩ ተበላሽቷል ማለት ነው። የችግሩን ምንጭ ካላጣራችኹ፤ የምትነሱት ከየት ነው?
2. በኮሚሽኑ አባላት ላይ ጥርጣሬ አለን። ይህን ስንል፤ ሁላችኹንም ማለታችን አይደለም። በአንዳንዶቻችኹ ላይ ማለታችን ነው። የኮምሽኑ አባል ከሆኑት የሃይማኖት አባቶች መካከል አንዱ፤ «የቅንጅት አባላት ጥፋተኛ ናቸው» ብለው በቴሌቪዥን ላይ በግልፅ ተናግረዋል። ከእሳቸው ገለልተኝነት አንጠብቅም።

አሁን በጋራ የወሰነው፤ የተወሰነው ፎርምን ለመመላት ስለማንፈልግ አዳራሹን ለቀን እንወጣለን። የተወሰነው ደግሞ፤ ፎርምን ለመመላት የምንፈልግ ስለሆነ፤ ወደኋላ ቀርተን እናነጋግራችኋለን። ይህን ስልን፤ ለእናንተ ያለን ከበሬታ እንደተጠበቀ ሆኖ ነው። ህጋዊነታችኹን እናከብራለን። እናንተንም እናከብራለን።

ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ነጋ ንግግራቸውን እንዳጠናቀቁ፤ ሰብሳቢው፤ ቁጭ ባሉበት ምላሽ ሰጧቸው።

የአጣሪ ኮምሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ጥሩ። አንድ የምለው ነገር አለ። ፎርምን አሁን መመላት የምትፈልጉ፤ ትችላላችኹ። መመላት የማትፈልጉት ግን፤ ይሄ የመጨረሻው አይደለም። ፎርምን ውሰዱና፤ ቀስ ብላችሁ አስቡበትና፤ ሃሳባችኹን ከለወጣችኹ፤ በኋላ ላይ ሞልታተኩ ልትልኩልን ትችላላችኹ።

ሰብሳቢው ይህን ካሉ በኋላ፤ ፕሮፌሰር መሥፍን ወልደማርያም ከመቀመጫቸው ብድግ በማለታቸው፤ ሰብሳቢው የሚናገሩትን አቋርጠው እንዲናገሩ ፈቀዱላቸው።

ፕ/ር መሥፍን ወልደማርያም

ፎርሙን አይቼዋለች። ፎርሙ የሚጠይቀው ስለእኔ ብቻ ነው። የሰብዓዊ መብት ጥሰቱ ግን ሀገራዊ ነው። ጥያቄዬ፣ በሌላው ላይ ስለደረሰው የሰብዓዊ መብት ጥሰት መናገር አልችልም ወይ? የሚል ነው። በሌላ በኩል ደግሞ፣ እናንተን በሚመለከት ፣ ጥርጣሬው ቢኖረኝም፣ በእኔ በኩል ላነጋግራችኩ ፍቃደኛ ነኝ። በ3 ምክንያቶች፡-

1. እግዚአብሔር አለ። እሱ ይፈርዳል። እሱ ይመለከታል።
2. ህሊና አለ። እሱን ማምለጥ አይቻልም።
3. ህጉ አለ። ሀገመንግሥቱ አለ። የሞቱ ሰዎች፣ አካለ ጉዳዩ የሆኑ ሰዎች እውን ሀገ መንግሥቱን ጥሰው ነው? ህሊናችንን ይዛችኩ መፍረድ ትችላላችኩ።

እኔ የምፈልገው ህሊናችኩ ላይ መጫን ነው። ይህንን ጭነት እንዴት እንደምታራግፉት የራሳችኩ ፋንታ ነው። ፕሮፌሰሩ ከተናገሩ በኋላ፣ የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ ምላሽ ሰጧቸው።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

ለህሊናችን እንጠየቃለን። ከመካከላችኩ ማንም ሰው ፍቃደኛ ከሆነ እናነጋግረዋለን። እርስዎ እንዳሉን፣ ከህሊና የሚያመልጥ የለም።

ዶ/ር ኃይሉ አርአያ እጃቸውን ስላወጡ፣ እንዲናገሩ ዕድሉ ተሰጣቸው።

ዶ/ር ኃይሉ አርአያ

ፕ/ር መሥፍን ያነሷቸው ነገሮች፣ ክቡር ነገሮች ናቸው። የህዝብ እሴቶች ናቸው። የእግዚአብሔር ነገር ተነስቷል። ግን ዛሬ የእግዚአብሔር ፈራጅነት ጠፍቷል። የሃማይኖት አባቶች የሉም። ቢኖሩ ኖሮ፣ እዚህ ችግር ውስጥ አንገባም ነበር። የሀገመንግሥት ጉዳይ ተነስቷል። ችግሩ፣ ሀገ መንግሥቱን ማክበር የሚገባቸው ሰዎች፣ ሊያከብሩት አለመቻላቸው ነው። ካራገፍናቸው ነገሮች አንዱ ህሊና ነው። ይሄ ነው ስንቃችን። ከዚህ አኳያ፣ በኮሚሽኑ ላይ ምን ዓይነት አመኔታ ነው ሊኖረን የሚችለው?

ዶ/ር ኃይሉ አርአያ ተናግረው ከጨረሱ በኋላ፣ ከኮሚሽኑ አባላት መካከል አንዱ የሆኑት ቄስ ደረጀ ለመናገር ተነሱ። እሳቸው፣ የዶ/ር በፈቃዱ ደግጬን «ተነስታችሁ ተናገሩ» ሃሳብ የተቀበሉት ይመስላሉ።

ቄስ ደረጀ

የምለው አለኝ። እዚህ ያላችሁትን፣ በስማችኩ እናውቃችኋለን። እናከብራችኋለን። መጠራጠራችኩ ትክክል ነው። መጠራጠር አለባችኩ። በእኛ በኩል ግን፣ ምን ይዘን እንደምንሠራ ልነግራችኩ እፈልጋለኩ።

1. እግዚአብሔር አለ። እንኳን በአደባባይ የተደረገውን ይቅርና፣ በልብ ውስጥ ያለውን ነገር የሚያውቅ እግዚአብሔር አለ። ከእሱ መደበኛ አይቻልም።
2. ህሊና አለ። ከህሊና ማን ማምለጥ ይችላል? ህሊናችንን ይዘን ነው የምንሠራው። «እናምልጥህ» ብንለው እንኳን፣ ልናመልጠው አንችልም።
3. ታሪክ አለ። ታሪክ ይፋረደናል። የምንሠራውን ነገር ለታሪክ ነው ትተን የምናልፈው። ከታሪክ ማምለጥ አንችልም።
4. ህዝብ አለ። ይህ ሁሉ ሲደረግ የነበረ ህዝብ አለ። ይመለከተናል። ይታዘበናል። ከእዚህ ነገሮች ማምለጥ አንችልም። መረጃ ከሰጣችኩ፣ የእኛ ኃላፊነት ነው። «ንገሩን» የምንላችኩ፣ አክብረናችኩ ነው። ከተቀበላችኩን ጥሩ ነው። «እምቢ»

ካላችሁም ውሳኔያችሁን እናከብራለን። ስንመጣ ይህን ታሳቢ አድርገን ነው። ፎርሙን ሳትሙሉ የምትሄዱ ሰዎች፣ ሂደት ተነጋገሩበት። እግዚአብሔር ይስጥልኝ።

ቄስ ደረጃ ተናግረው ከጨረሱ በኋላ፣ ፎርሙን መሙላት የሚፈልጉ ሰዎች ወደኋላ ሲቀሩ፣ ብዙዎቻችን ወጣን። ከዚያ ሁሉ ተከላሾች መካከል የቀሩት ፕሮፌሰር መስፍንን ጨምሮ 7 ብቻ ነበሩ። ከቀሩት መካከል እርጉዚን ሠርክዓለምን ጨምሮ አንድም ጋዜጠኛ አልነበረበትም።

የአጣሪው ኮሚሽኑ አባላት የተሞሉትን ፎርሞች ከሰበሰቡ በኋላ፣ ውጭ ያሉት ሰዎች ወደ አዳራሹ እንዲመለሱ ተደርገው፣ የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ የመሰናበቻ ንግግር አደረጉልን።

የአጣሪ ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ

በስብሰባው ወቅት ላሳያችሁት ጨዋነት አመሰግናለኩ። ከፍተኛ ዲስፒሊን ነው ያሳያችሁት። የሰጣችሁንን መረጃ እናጣራለን። መረጃው ከእኛ ጋር ነው የሚቆየው። ችግር ከደረሰባችሁ ንገሩን።

የአጣሪው ኮሚሽኑ ሰብሳቢ ንግግራቸውን ከጨረሱ በኋላ፣ ፖሊሶች ከውጭ ተጠርተው ተረከቡ። ቢያንስ ለ2 ሰዓት ከጐናችን አልነበሩም። ግማሽ ፍቺ ልበለው? ቂ.ቂ.ቂ.

የተቀነጨበው አበቃ!

ጠ/ሚ/ር መለስ ዜናዊ «ለኢሠፓ አባላት እንኳን ተትረፍርፏል» ያሉትን ዲሞክራሲ ተነፍገን ይሄንን ታሪካዊ መፅሐፍ ማሳተም ያለመቻላችን ሁልጊዜ ይቆጩናል። በውስጡ ብዙ ቁም ነገሮችን የያዘ መፅሐፍ ነው፤ ሕዝብ የማያውቀው። በዚህ አጋጣሚ መፅሐፉን ለማሳተም መንግሥት እንዲፈቅድ ጥሪያችንን እናቀርባለን።

ፀሐፊውን ለማግኘት፡- serk@gmail.com

12. ኢሕአዴግና በሽብርተኝነት የተፈረጁት 5 ድርጅቶች - በአስከገድ ነጋ

ዘንድሮ ዲሽ በየደሃው ቤት እንኳን ዘልቆ ገብቷል። ከኢትዮጵያ ቴሌቪዥን መደበኛ መሆኑ ነው እንጂ፣ ብዙሃኑ ህዝብ እንግሊዝኛውንም ሆነ አረብኛውን አይሰማም። አበው፣ «የቸገረው እርጉዝ ያገባል» እንዲሉ፣ በኢቲቪ ከመጨቅጨቅ ከአረብ ሳት ምስሎች ጋር መፋጠጡን መርጧል። የሚባለው ለምናባዊ ጨዋታ (imaginative conversation) የሚተው ነው። አስቂኝም አሳዛኝም ነው። ህዝብ የሀገሩ ባለቤት ሳይሆን እንዲህ ነው። ትራጂ ኮሚዲ ይሉታል ፈረንጆች። እየሳቁ ማልቀስ ማለታቸው ነው። ይህን ይመስላል የኢትዮጵያዊያን ኑሮ፤ በዘመነ ኢሕአዴግ።

እድሜ ለደጓ እናቴ (ነፍሷን ይማረውና)፤ እኔ እንግሊዝኛ በመጠኑ ከሚያወቁት መካከል አንዱ ነኝ። ዲሽ ማሳደድ የጀመርኩት ገና ድሮ ነው፤ ሲኤንኤን ብቻ በነበረበት ዘመን። መጀመሪያ የገባው ሂልተን እንደነበር አስታውሳለኩ። በጣም ብርቅ ነበር። በኋላ ላይ ትላልቅ የመንግሥት ሆቴሎችም እየተንጠባጠቡ አስገቡ። እጄይ አልን። ሂልተንን ትተን የሸበሌ ደንበኛ ሆንን። የሂልተን ዋጋ በእጅጉ አማሮን ነበር።

ሸበሌ በፍንዳታ እንደተመታ የሰማኩ ግዜ ከው ነበር ያልኩት። በርሬ ሄድኩኝ። እንደጠረጠርኩት ነበር። የተመታው ቡና ቤቱ ነበር፤ ቁጭ ብለን ዲሽ የምናይበት። የእግዜር ፍቃድ ነበረና፣ ከሞት ለትንሽ አመለጥን። አንድ የማውቀው ሰው

በፍንጣሪ መመታቱን ሰማኹ። ልጆች አሉት። ደግነቱ ሳይሞት ቀረ። ሌሎች የማላውቃቸው ሰዎች ግን ያቺን ቀን አላለፏትም፤ ተቀሰፉ። እነሱ አንደኛውን አረፉት፤ ለቤተሰቦቻቸው ግን ለማይረግብ ሀዘን የመጀመሪያ ቀን ሆነች።

ያን ቀን በጊዮን ሆቴልም ተመሳሳይ ፍንዳታ ተከስቷል። ከዚያ በኋላ፣ ፒያሳ የነበረውን ትግራይ ሆቴል አስታውሳለች። ከምርጫ 97 በኋላ ደግሞ፣ ታክሲዎችና አውቶብሶች ላይ የተጠመዱ ፈንጂዎች የንፁሃንን ህይወት ቀጥፈዋል።

የጭካኔ ድርጊቶች እንደነበሩ አያነጋግረንም። ዒላማቸው ሰላማዊው ህዝብ ነበር። እንደ እኔ አይነቱን። ይሄ ነው ሽብርተኝነት ማለት። አስረጅ አይፈልግም። ምሁርነትን አይጠይቅም። ትንታኔ አያስፈልገውም። ለህፃኑም ለትልቁም፤ ለመሃይምም ለምህሩም፤ ለከተሜውም ለገጠሬውም፤ ለሴቱም ለወንዱም ቁልጭ ብሎ የተቀመጠ ነው።

ሰላማዊውን ህዝብ ቀጥተኛ ዒላማ አድርገው የሚንቀሳቀሱ ድርጅቶች አሉ። ዋነኛው የቢንላዴኑ አልቃይዳ ነው። ፖለቲካዊም ኃይማኖታዊም ምክንያት ያቀርባል። ከፖለቲካው አኳያ፣ አሜሪካዊያን በፈቃዳቸው ያቆሙት መንግሥት የሙስሊሙን ዓለም እስከጨቆነ ድረስ፣ እያንዳንዱ የአሜሪካ ዜጋ ተጠያቂ ነው የሚል አቋም አለው። ስለዚህም፣ የታጠቀውም ያልታጠቀውም አሜሪካዊ ዒላማ ነው። በኃይማኖት በኩል፣ በጅሃድ ጊዜ ሙስሊም ያልሆኑትን መግደል ይቻላል ብሎ ያምናል። አልቃይዳ ደግሞ ጅሃድ ላይ ነው። የዚህ ሁሉ ድምር የኒዮርክ መንትዬ ሕንፃዎችን ጥቃት አስከትሏል። 3000 ሺ ንፁህን ረገፉ።

ኢትዮጵያ፣ አልቃይዳን በሕግ በሽብርተኝነት ለመፈረጅ 10 ዓመታት ፈጅተውባታል። በመጀመሪያዎቹ 8 ዓመታት የፀረ ሽብርተኝነት ሕግ አልነበራትም። በ2001 ዓ.ም በቁጥር 652 የፀረ ሽብርተኝነት ሕግ አፅድቃለች። ከሁለት ዓመታት በኋላ፣ ባለፈው ሳምንት፣ በአዋጁ ምዕራፍ 2፣ ንዑስ ቁጥር 4 መሠረት አልቃይዳ በሽብርተኝነት በይፋ ተሰይሟል።

ማናቸውም ሰው የዚህ ድርጅት አባል ሆኖ ከተገኘ፣ ከ5 እስከ 10 ዓመታት በሚደርስ ፅኑ እስራት ይቀጣል። በአመራርነት ለሚሳተፉት ቅጣቱ ከበድ ይላል፤ መነሻውን 20 ጣራውን እድሜ ልክ አድርጎታል።

አልቃይዳ ግን ኢትዮጵያ መጥቶ አያውቅም። የምምጣትም ፍላጎት የለውም። እልሁ በዋናነት ከአሜሪካዊያን ጋር ነው። ወረድ ሲልም በደፈናው ምዕራባዊያንን በጅምላ ይጠላል። ኢትዮጵያ የግርጌ ማስታወሻው ነች። ለዚህም ያበቃት ሱማሌ ውስጥ የአሜሪካ ጉዳይ አስፈፃሚ ናት ተብላ ነው።

ለግዜው፣ አልቃይዳ ለግርጌ ማስታወሻዎቹ ትኩረት መስጠት የሚችልበት ወቅት ላይ አይደለም። ከአሜሪካ ጋር የሞትና የሽረት ትንቅንቅ ላይ ነው። ባለፈው ሰሞን፣ በቢላደን ሞት እናቱ ተቆርጧል። በሞትና በሽረት መካከል እየተላተመ ነው ማለት ይቻላል። ድርጅቱን ይሄኔ በአሸባሪነት መፈረጅ፣ «ጅብ ከሄደ ውሻ ጮኸ» እንደሚሉት ያደርገዋል። ፋይዳው የት ላይ እንደሆነ ግልፅ አይደለም።

ከአልቃይዳ ሌላ፣ 4 ድርጅቶች የአሸባሪነት ካባ ደርበዋል።

አንዱ፣ የአልቃይዳን ያህል ባይርቅም፣ ኢትዮጵያዊ ድርጅት አይደለም። የጎረቤት ሀገር ሱማሊያ አልሸባብ ነው። ብሔርተኝነትና ኃይማኖትን አደበላልቆ የሚንቀሳቀስ የታጠቀ ኃይል ነው። ጥንስሱም፣ ውልደቱም፣ እድገቱም ለ1998ቱ

የኢሕአዴግ ወረራ ሀገር በቀል ምላሽ ሆኖ ነው። ወረራው ባይኖር አልሸባብ ባልተፈጠረ ኖሮ። የአባማ አስተዳደር ወረራውን ስህተት ነበር የሚለው ለዚህ ነው። መዘዙ ለአሜሪካን ተርፏታል። ለአልሸባብ፣ ከኃይማኖት ይልቅ ፖለቲካ (ሀገርን ከወረራ መከላከል) ዋነኛው መግለጫው ነው። ሆኖም፣ የኢትዮጵያ ጦር ከወጣ በኋላ ኃይማኖታዊ ገፅታውን ለማጥፋት ታግሏል። አዲስ ሀገራዊ አጀንዳ ፍለጋ መሆኑ ነው። እንደ ኢሕአዴግ ወረራ ግን፣ ሕዝብን ሊያሰባስብለት አልቻለም። አልሸባብም እንደ አልቃይዳ እየተንገዳገደ ነው። ኢትዮጵያን ለማጥቃት የሚያስብበት ጊዜ ላይ አይደለም ያለው። በዚህ አጋጣሚ፣ በሽብርተኝነት መፈረጁ ጥቅሙ የጎላ አይደለም። እንዲያውም፣ በተቃራኒው፣ ተስፋ እየቆረጡ ያሉትን አባላቱን ማነቃቂያ ሊሆነው ይችላል።

በሶስተኛነት፣ አነግ በሽብርተኝነት ተፈርጏል። እንደ ኢሕአዴግ ከሆነ፣ ከ1987 እስከ 2000 ዓ.ም ድረስ 106 የሽብር ጥቃቶችን ፈፅሞ፣ 56 ዜጎች ሞተዋል። 284 ደግሞ ከባድና ቀላል የአካል ጉዳት ደርሶባቸዋል። ከ2000 በኋላ ስላለው ጊዜ ምንም የተባለ ነገር የለም።

አነግ የተቋቋመው በ1967 ዓ.ም ነበር። ዘንድሮ 36 ዓመታትን አስቆጠሯል። 16ቱ በደርግ ዘመን መሆኑ ነው። ጦርነት ላይ ነበር። ወደ መጨረሻው፣ በብርጌድ ደረጃ እስከመዋጋት ድርሶ ነበር። አንድም ጊዜ ግን፣ ከተማ ውስጥ ፈንጂ በማፈንዳት ተወንጅሎም ታምቶም አያውቅም።

በ1984 የሽግግር መንግሥቱን ጥሎ ከወጣ በኋላ በለስ አልቀናውም። ነፃ መሬቶቹን አጥቷል። ሰራዊቱ ተመናምኗል። ዲፕሎማሲያዊ እንቅስቃሴውም ቀዝቅዟል። አመራሩም ተከፋፍሏል። ከዋናው አካል የተገነጠሉ አንድ ሁለት አንጃዎችም ተፈጥረዋል። እነዚህ አንጃዎች ሰላማዊ ሰዎችን ኢላማ እስከማድረግ እንደደረሱ ይታማሉ። የሽብርተኝነቱ ፍረጃ፣ ይህንን እውነታ ሆን ብሎ ግምት ውስጥ ያላስገባ ነው።

የአነግ ድርጅታዊ መዳከም እንደተጠበቀ ሆኖ፣ ፖለቲካ ተቀባይነቱ አሁንም ድረስ የገዘፈ ነው። አነግን ያገለለ የተሟላ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት ሊኖር አይችልም። የአነግን ችግር መፍታት የሚቻለው በፖለቲካ ነው። ለፖሊስም ሆነ ለሠራዊቱ የሚተው አይደለም። በሽብርተኝነት በመፈረጅ በሚሊዮኖች እንደሚቆጠሩ ከሚገመቱት ደጋፊዎቹ ልብ ውስጥ ፈንቅሎ ማውጣት አይቻልም። ትርፉ፣ በሰላማዊው በር ላይ በርን መዝጋት ብቻ ነው የሚሆነው።

በአራተኛነት የተፈረጀውን ኡብነግንም በአዋጅ ማጥፋት አይቻልም። እዚህም ያለው የፖለቲካ ችግር ነው። መፍትሄውም ፖለቲካዊ ብቻ ነው። ፍረጃው ሀገሪቷን ወደዚያ አያቀርባትም። ደርግ፣ በኤርትራ የሰራውን ስህተት ኢሕአዴግ በአጋዴን ሊደግመው አይገባም። የኢትዮጵያ አንድነት ታላቁ ፈተና በኢትዮጵያ ሱማሌ ክልል ውስጥ ተቀብሮ ይገኛል። መፍትሔው፣ ጥበብን፣ ብልሃትን፣ ብስለትን ይጠይቃል። ኃይል ቦታ የለውም። በኤርትራ ተረጋግጧል።

በአምስተኛነት የተፈረጀው ግንቦት 7 ድርጅት ነው። እነ ዶ/ር ብርሃኑን የኢሕአዴግ መሪዎች በደንብ ያውቋቸዋል። በየቡናቤቱ ፈንጂ ያጠምዳሉ ብለው እንደማይጠረጥሯቸው መገመት አያስቸግርም። በምዕራብ ሀገራት ለረዥም ጊዜ የኖሩት የግንቦት 7 መሪዎች፣ ለሰብአዊ መብት ደንታ የሌላቸው ሽብርተኞች ሆነው መቀመጣቸው ተዓማኒነቱ እምብዛም ነው። ከዚያ ይልቅ፣ እውነታው ያለው እነዚህ ሰዎች ወደ ሀገራቸው ተመልሰው የፖለቲካው አካል መሆን ለእውነተኛ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት እውን መሆን አስፈላጊ መሆኑ ላይ ነው። የኢሕአዴግ መሪዎች፣ እየመረራቸውም ቢሆን ከዚህ እውነታ ጋር የመጋፈጥ ኃላፊነት አለባቸው። አሁን የተያዘው መንገድ አያዋጣም፣ አያዛልቅም።

ፖሊስና ወታደር የፖለቲካ ችግር ፈቺዎች አይደሉም። የሀገሪቱን የዲሞክራሲ ፈተና የአነሱ ዕዳ አድርጎ ማስቀመጥ ከደርግ ስህተት አለመማር ነው። ችግሩን ከምንጩ ማድረቅ ያስፈልጋል። ምንጩ ደግሞ ፖለቲካ ነው።

የኢሕአዴግ መሪዎች ሆይ! ውንጀላውን ትታችሁ ተደራደሩ። ለሀገር የሚበጀው ብቸኛው መንገድ ድርድርና እርቅ ነው።

ፀሐፊውን ለማግኘት፤ serk27@gmail.com

13. ትግሉ ወደ ሰላማዊ ተግባር ይሸጋገር - በአስከንድር ነጋ

ነሐሴ 29ቀን 2003ዓ.ም. በአንድነት ፓርቲ ጽ/ቤት በተደረገ ሕዝባዊ ስብሰባ ላይ ወቅታዊ የሀገሪቷን ጉዳይ አስመልክቼ ያቀረብኩትን ፅሁፍ ከዚህ በታች ቀርቧል። – መለካም ንባብ። ሐሳባችሁን አካፍሉኝ።

የተከበሩ ዶ/ር ነጋሶ ጊዳዳ

የተከበራችሁ የአንድነት አባላትና እንግዶች

የነሃሴን ወር አገባደን ወደ ጳጉሜ ወር እየገባን ነው። ጳጉሜ ከየትኛውም ወር በተለይ ኢትዮጵያዊነት የሚገለፅበት ነው። በዓለም ብቸኛው 13ኛው ወር መሆኑ ከሌሎች ወራቶች ሁሉ የተለየ ያደርገዋል። ኢትዮጵያ ደግሞ 13 ወራቶች ያሏት ብቸኛዋ ሀገር መሆኗ ከሌሎች ሀገሮች ሁሉ የተለየ ያደርጋታል። ስለዚህም ጳጉሜ የኢትዮጵያ የተለየና ልዩ ማንነት መገለጫ ነው።

የኢትዮጵያ ልዩና የተለየ ማንነት ከ13ኛ ወሯ ሌላ በፊደሏ ይገለጻል። ለፅሁፍና ለንባብ ምቹ የሆነ ፊደሏ ከዓለም ታላላቅ ውርሶች መካከል በቀላሉ የሚመደብ ነው። ዓመተ ምህረቷና የሰዓት አቆጣጠሯም ከሌላው ዓለም የተለየ ነው። ጤፍ የብቻዋ ነው። የራሷ የሆነ ዜማም አላት።

ስለኢትዮጵያ ብርቅዬ ማንነት ብዙ መዘርዘር ይቻላል። ቁምነገሩ ግን ኢትዮጵያዊነት የዜግነት መገለጫ ብቻ አለመሆኑ ነው። ኢትዮጵያዊነት ራሱን የቻለና ልዩ የሆነ ስልጣኔ መገለጫም ነው።

የኢትዮጵያ ስልጣኔ የአውሮፓ፣ የአረብ፣ የኢራን፣ የቻይና፣ የህንድና የጃፓን ስልጣኔዎች የሚያሟሉትን መስፈርቶች የሚያሟላ ነው። በ8ኛው ክፍለ ዘመን የግብፅ ስልጣኔ በአረቦች ወረራ ከጠፋበት ጊዜ አንስቶ፣ ኢትዮጵያ በአፍሪቃ የብቸኛው የተሟላ ስልጣኔ ማዕከል ሆና ኖራለች። ስለዚህም ኢትዮጵያ ልዩ ቦታ የሚሰጣት ሀገር ነች ብሎ በድፍረት መናገር ይቻላል። በዓለም ዙሪያ ካሉት 200 ሀገራት መካከል እንደ ኢትዮጵያ ራሱን የቻለ የተሟላ ስልጣኔ ያላቸው ከ10 አይበልጡም።

የኢትዮጵያ ስልጣን የብሄር/ብሄረሰቦች የጋራ ውጤት ነው። የተለያዩ ሃይማኖቶች የጋራ ውጤት ነው። ኢትዮጵያ በታሪኳ አንድም ጊዜ አንድ ቋንቋ የሚነገርባት፣ አንድ ሃይማኖት የሚመለከባት ሀገር ሆና አታውቅም። ህብረ-ብሄራዊነትና ህብረሃይማኖታዊነት፣ በሂደት የመጡ የኢትዮጵያዊነት መገለጫዎች ሳይሆኑ ራሱ አፈጣጠሯ ናቸው።

የስልጣን አንዱ አበይት መገለጫ መንግስት ነው። የአሜሪካ የውጭ ጉዳይ ሚኒስቴር የነበሩት ዶ/ር ሄንሪ ኪስንጄር፣ የኢትዮጵያ ያልተቋረጠ የመንግስታትነት ታሪክ በዓለም ተወዳዳሪ የለውም ይላሉ። የኢትዮጵያን በአንደኛነት፣ የቻይናን በሁለተኛነት ነው የሚያስቀምጡት። ዶ/ሩ አሜሪካ ካፈራቻቸው ታላላቅ ምሁራን መካከል የሚመደቡ ስልሆነ ምስክርነታቸው ትልቅ ዋጋ የሚሰጠው ነው። ታሪካችን እኛ ከምንገምተው 3000 ዓመታትም በላይ ሊሆን ይችላል ማለት ነው።

የዶ/ሩን አባባል የሚቀበሉም የማይቀበሉም ምሁራን አሉ። ከቻይና የሚቀድም የለም ብለው የሚከራከሩ ብዙ ናቸው። ሁለቱም ወገኖች ማስረጃ ሊሆን የሚችል ሰነድ ማቅረብ ስለማይችሉ ክርክሩ የሚጠበቅና መኖርም ያለበት ነው። የክርክራቸውን ያህል ደግሞ ሁለቱም ወገኖች የማይጠራጠሩትና የማይከዱት ሃቅም አለ። ላለፉት 100 ዓመታት፣ በአዲስ አበባ ማዕከሉን ተክሎ የሚገኘው የኢትዮጵያ መንግስት ቢያንስ ቢያንስ ከ2000 እስከ 2500 ዓመታት የሚዘልቅ ቀጥተኛና ያልተበጣጠሰ ታሪክ እንዳለው ይተማመናሉ። በዚህ የረዥም ዘመን ታሪኩ ግዛቱ አንዳንድ ጊዜ ሲሰፋ ሌላ ጊዜ ሲጠብ ኖሯል። ጥንካሬው አንዳንድ ጊዜ ሲያይል ሌላ ጊዜ ሲላላም ኖሯል። ጥሩም መጥፎም መሪዎችን አብቅሏል። ኢትዮጵያን ከባዶዳን ወረራ ሲጠብቅ ኖሯል። ከሁሉም በላይ ደግሞ፣ በግምት ከ7ኛው እስከ 17ኛ ክፍለ ዘመን በነበሩት 1000 ዓመታት በተለያዩ ሀገራት የነበሩ መንግስታት፣ ህዝቦቻቸው አንድ ሃይማኖት እንዲከተሉ ሲያስገድዱ፣ ኢትዮጵያ የብዙ ሃይማኖቶች ሀገር መሆኗን አክብሮ ኖሯል።

ይህ የረዥም ዘመን ያልተቋረጠ የመንግስትነት ታሪክ የሚያረጋግጠው ነገር ቢኖር፣ ኢትዮጵያ የስልጣን ሀገር መሆኗን ብቻ ሳይሆን ህዝብ የእኔ ነው የሚለው መንግስት እንደነበራትም ነው። ህዝብ ያልተቀበለው መንግስት በቅብብሎሽ ለሺህ ዓመታት መዝለቅ አይችልም። የኢትዮጵያም ሆነ እንደ ቻይና የመሳሰሉ ጥንታዊ መንግስታት ለረዥም ዘመን ሊኖሩ የቻሉት በአብዛኛው እድሜያቸው በሚያስተዳድሯቸው ህዝቦች ፈቃድ ስለኖሩ ብቻ ነው።

ኢትዮጵያ የረጅም ዘመን የጭቆና ታሪክ የላትም። በኢትዮጵያም ሆነ በሌላው ዓለም እስከ 18ኛውና እስከ 19ኛው ክፍለ ዘመን ድረስ የዘውድ ስርዓቶች በህዝብ ፍቃድ የቆሙ ነበሩ። የሚፎካከራቸውና አማራጭ የሆነ ስርዓት አልነበረም። ከክርስቶስ ውልደት በፊት በአቴንስ ብልጭ ብሎ ድርግም ያለው የዴሞክራሲ ተሞክሮ፣ እንኳን ዓለምን ሊያጥለቀልቅ ቀርቶ፣ በመሳፍንት አገዛዝ ተበጣጥሰው ይኖሩ የነበሩትን ግሪኮች ማዳረስ አልቻለም ነበር። አቴንስ ስትወድቅ በፅንሰ ሀሳብ ደረጃ እንኳን በአውሮፓ ከ1000 ዓመታት በላይ ጠፍቶ ነበር። አውሮፓውያን እንደ አዲስ የተዋወቁትና ያዳበሩት «ሬናስሰና ኢንላይትንመንት» ወይም «የትንሳዔና የብርሃን ዘመናት» በሚሏቸው የ16ኛው የ17ኛው ክፍለ ዘመናት ነው። እስከዚህኛው ዘመን አውሮፓውያንም ዘውዳዊ ስርዓትን በፈቃዳቸው ተቀብለውና አቁመው ነው የኖሩት። ዴሞክራሲን በህዝብ ደረጃ መቀበል የጀመሩት ከ19ኛው ክፍለ ዘመን ጀምሮ ነበር።

የኢትዮጵያ ዘውዳዊ ስርዓት እስከመጨረሻው 100 ዓመታት ድረስ በህዝብ ነፃ ፍላጎት የቆመ ነበር ብሎ መናገር ይቻላል። ከአድዋ ጦርነት በኋላ ባሉት 100 ዓመታት ግን አውሮፓውያን «ሬናስሰና፣ ኢንላይትንመንትና ሪፎርሜሽን» ወይም የትንሳዔ፣

የብርሃንና የለውጥ ዘመናት» የሚሏቸው ወደ ኢትዮጵያ በአጭር ጊዜ ውስጥ ተጠቃለው ገብተው ተቀባይነቱ በመሸርሸሩ፤ ዘውዳዊው ስርዓት በህዝብ ፈቃድ ከቆመ መንግስትነት በህዝብ ትከሻ ላይ በጉልበቱ ወደ ተፈናጠጠ አምባገነናዊ ስርዓት ተቀይሯል። የ1966ቱ አብዮት የዚህ ለውጥ ውጤት ነው።

የ1983 ለውጥ ደግሞ የ1966ቱ አብዮት መጨናገፍ ውጤት ነው። ሁለቱም የህዝብ ፈቃድ የመንግስት ምንጭ እንዲሆን የተደረጉ ትግሎች ውጤቶች ናቸው። ምንጮቻቸው ዘውዳዊ ስርዓት የህዝቡን አመኔታ ካጣበት ጊዜ አንስቶ የተቀጣጠለው ትግል ነው።

የ1983ቱ ለውጥም ልክ እንደ 1966ቱ በመጨናገፉ ሀገሪቱ ይኸው ሌላ ለውጥ አርግዞ ትገኛለች። ይህ ማለት 50 ዓመታት ባልሞላ ጊዜ ውስጥ ኢትዮጵያ ለ3ኛ ጊዜ በለውጥ ሂደት የምትናወጥበት ቅድመ ሁኔታዎች ተሟተዋል ማለት ነው።

እነዚህ ቅድመ ሁኔታዎች ፖለቲካዊ፣ ኢኮኖሚያዊና ማህበራዊ ገፅታዎች አሏቸው። ከፖለቲካው አኳያ ከ2003 አጋማሽ ጀምሮ ኢትዮጵያ በአፍሪቃ ትልቋ አምባገነናዊ ሀገር ሆናለች። እስከዚህ ጊዜ ድረስ ክብሩ የናይጄሪያ ነበር። ከጥቂት ወራት በፊት ግን ነፃና ፍትሃዊ ምርጫ ለማካሄድ በቅታ የዴሞክራሲ ሀገራትን ተርታ ተቀላቅላለች። በታሪኳ አዲስና ተስፋ የተሞላበት ምዕራፍ ከፍታለች።

ናይጄሪያን በመከተል በአፍሪካ 2ኛዋ ትልቅ አምባገነናዊ ሀገር ግብፅ ነበረች። ከየካቲት ወር አንስቶ ግን ነፃነት የሞላበት ሀገር ሆናለች። ዛሬ በእስር ቤቶቿ አንድም የፖለቲካ እስረኛ የለም። ወደስደት የሄዱ ምሁሮቿ ወደ ሀገራቸው እየተመለሱ ነው። የሙያ ማህበራት ያለምንም ተፅእኖ መንቀሳቀስ ጀምረዋል። መንግስትን በጦር መሳሪያ ይፋለሙ የነበሩ ዜጎች ወደ ሰላማዊ ህይወታቸው ተመልሰዋል።

ግብፅን በመከተል የሶስተኝነት ደረጃ በነበራት ኢትዮጵያ ግን በ2003 ለውጥ አልተከሰተም። ስለዚህም ናይጄሪያንና ግብፅን በመተካት የአንደኝነት ቦታ ተገናኝቶታለች። በኢትዮጵያ ተቃዋሚ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች አሁንም እንደታፈኩባት ነው። በ2001ዓ.ም በፓርላማ ውስጥ ከነበራቸው 178 መቀመጫዎች በ2002 ወደ 1 መቀመጫ ዝቅ ብለዋል። ከ1977 እስከ 2002 ባሉት 5 ዓመታት ግን ተቃሚዎች የህዝቡን ዴሞክራሲያዊ መብቶች ለማስከበር ደፋ ቀና ሲሉ ከመንግሥታት፣ ከመታሰር፣ ከመደብደብ፣ ከመሰደድና ከመሞት ሌላ ከህዝብ የሚያጣላቸው አንድም ተግባር አልፈፀመም። በተገላቢጦሹ አሳሪ፣ ደበዳቤ፣ አሳዳጅና ተኳሽ የሆነው ኢህአዴግ ከህዝብ ልብ ውስጥ ንቅል ብሎ የወጣበት ወቅት ነበር።

ናይጄሪያዊያንና ግብፃውያን የነፃነት አየር በተነፈሱበት 2003ዓ.ም በኢትዮጵያ ያሉ ነፃ የሙያ ማህበራትና ሲቪክ ተቋማት ድቅድቅ ወዳለ ጨለማ ተገፍተው ገብተዋል። በዶ/ር ታየ ወልደሰማያት ይመራ የነበረው ኢመማ ሙሉ ለሙሉ ተዘግቷል። አመራሮቹ አዲስ ማህበር እንዳያቋቁሙ ከህግ ወጭ እግድ ተጥሎባቸዋል። የዋጋ ግሽበቱ ዋነኛ ሰለባ የሆኑትን ሰራተኞች ይወክላሉ በሚባሉት ማህበራት ላይ ያለው ቁጥጥርና ክትትል ከመቼውም ጊዜ በላይ ጠበቋል። ከሩሲያው ጠ/ሚኒስትር ፑቲን እሳቤ ተቀድቶ የፀደቀው አዲሱ መንግስታዊ ያልሆኑ ድርጅቶች ህግ፣ ለዴሞክራሲ ስርዓት ግንባታ ቁልፍ ሚና የሚጫወቱትን እያቆጠቁጡ የነበሩትን የሲቪክ ድርጅቶች አጥፍቷል። ታዋቂው ኢሰመጐ እንኳን አልተረፈም። ዛሬ በሞትና በሽረት መካከል ይገኛል። በክልል የነበሩት ቢሮዎቹን ሙሉ በሙሉ ዘግቷል። አዲስ አበባ የነበሩት ሰራተኞችንም ከሞላ ጎደል ሙሉ ለሙሉ አሰናብቷል።

ሀሳብን በመግለፅ ረገድ ያለው አፈናም ተባብሷል። ጋዜጠኛ ውብእሸት ታዬ እና ጋዜጠኛ ርዕዮት ዓለሙ በሽብር ክስ ሽፋን በእስር እየማቀቁ ይገኛሉ። ጋዜጦች በከፍተኛ የፍርሃትና የመሸማቀቅ ድባብ ውስጥ ሆነው ነው የሚሰሩት። ኢትዮጵያ አሁንም በፖለቲካ ጉዳዮች ላይ የሚያተኩሩ ነፃ ፌዴራል ቴሌቪዥን ጣቢያዎች ከሌለባቸው ጥቂት የአፍሪቃ አገራት አንዷ ናት።

እነዚህ ሁሉ ተደማምረው በፖለቲካ እስረኞች ብዛት ኢትዮጵያ በአፍሪቃ የአንደኝነት ቦታ እንድትይዝ አድርጓታል። በሰሜንም፣ በደቡብም፣ በምስራቅም፣ በምዕራብም ያሉ ወህኒ ቤቶቿ በፖለቲካ እስረኞች ተጣበዋል። ከመካከላቸው በሞት እንዲቀጡ የተወሰነባቸው በርካታ ናቸው።

በአንፃሩ፣ ኢትዮጵያ ለነፃነት ካበቃቻቸው ጥቁር አፍሪቃ ሀገራት መካከል ከግማሽ በላይ የሆኑት ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሆነዋል። ነፃና ፍትሃዊ ምርጫ እየተደረገባቸው ነው። የሙያ ማህበራት በነፃነት እየተንቀሳቀሱባቸው ነው። ሀሳብ በነፃነት እየተገለፀባቸው ነው። ኢህአዴግ ከዛሬ 20 ዓመታት በፊት ስልጣን ሲይዝ ግን ከቦትስዋና በቀር ሁሉም በአምባገነኖች ቀንበር ስር ነበሩ።

ባለፉት 20 ዓመታት ነው ምንም አይነት የሽግግር ጊዜ ሳያስፈለጋቸው ዴሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓቶችን የገነቡት። የእነዚህ ሀገራት ዝርዝር በእጅጉ የሚያስደንቅ ነው። አንዷ ማሊ ናት። ምዕራብ አፍሪቃ ውስጥ የምትገኝ በረሃማ ሀገር ናት። ድህነቷ ከኢትዮጵያ ባይብስም የሚሻል አይደለም። አብዛኛው ህዝቧ በገጠር ነው የሚኖረው። ህብረብሄራዊ ናት። ኢኮኖሚ አላት ማለት አይቻልም። በምሁራን ብዛት ኢትዮጵያ ትበልጣታለች። ለዴሞክራሲ ስርዓት ጠቃሚ ግብአቶች ናቸው በሚባሉት ታሪካዊና ባህላዊ እሴቶች ኢትዮጵያ የሰማይ ያህል ትርቃታለች። ልብ በሚሰብር ሁኔታ ግን ለዴሞክራሲ የታደለችው ማሊ፤ በአምባገነኖች እየማቀቀች ያለችው ኢትዮጵያ ሆነዋል።

ከኢኮኖሚው አኳያም የተሻለ ነገር የለም። ሩቅ መሄድ ሳያስፈልግ ባለፉት 20 አመታት ኢትዮጵያ ከብድርና ከእርዳታ ከ30 እስከ 50 ቢሊዮን ዶላር አግኝታለች። ወደውጭ ከላከቻቸው ምርቶቿ ተጨማሪ 30ቢሊዮን ዶላር ገደማ አግኝታለች። ከዚህ ውስጥ ግን 8.4 ቢሊዮን ዶላር በመንግስት ባለስልጣናትና ነጋዴዎች ተመዝብረው ምዕራባውያን ባንኮች ውስጥ ገብቷል። 24 ቢሊዮን ይቀራል ማለት ነው። ከእርዳታውና ከብድሩ ጋር ሲደማመር ከ30 እስከ 75ቢሊዮን ዶላር ይደርሳል። ብዙ ገንዘብ ነው። በገሃድ የምናየው ልማት ይሄን ያህል ገንዘብ የሚያወጣ ነው ብሎ ማመን ይቸግራል። ገንዘቡ የት ገባ?

ባለፉት 20 ዓመታት የኢትዮጵያ ኢኮኖሚ ማደግ የሚገባውን ያህል አላደገም። እዚህም ያለው ምክንያት ፖለቲካው ጋር ያለው ነው። ኢህአዴግ የገበያውን ነፃነት ለማክበር ዝግጁ አይደለም። በገቢያው ገለልተኛ ብይን ምትክ እሱ ጣልቃ ገብቶ ማዘዝ ነው የሚፈልገው። በቁጥጥር ያምናል፤ የምንም ነገር ነፃነት ያስፈራዋል። ውጤቱ ኢትዮጵያን የላኪዎች ወይም Exporters ሀገር ሳይሆን የአስመጪዎች ወይም Importers ሀገር አድርጓታል። ይህ ደግሞ ለደሃ ሀገር የማያዛልቅ ቅንጦት ነው። ጊዜውን ጠበቆ ሀገሪቱን ከባድ ችግር ላይ መጣሉ አይቀርም።

ከ30 እስከ 50 ከመቶ እየዋዠቀ የሚገኘ የዋጋ ግሽበት ደግሞ፣ የስርዓቱ ብልሹነት መገለጫ ሆኗል። የግሽበቱ ምንጭ መንግስት ነው። የዓለም ባንክ እንዳረጋገጠው ገንዘብ እያተመ ይረጫል። ምርት ግን አይጨምርም። ስለዚህም ብዙ ገንዘብ ትንሽ ምርት ያሳድዳሉ፤ ፉክክሩም ለመሸጥ ሳይሆን ለመግዛት ሆኗል።

በመሰረቱ የዋጋ ግሽበት ለማንኛውም ኢኮኖሚ ቀሳፊ በሽታ ነው። ትንሽ ህሊና ያለው መንግስት የሚፈራውም የሚከላከለውም ነው። የህዝብን ኑሮ በማቃወስ ረገድ የሚብሰው የእርስ በእርስ ጦርነት ብቻ ነው። ለዚህም ነው የኢህአዴግ መሪዎች የዋጋ ግሽበቱን አቃሎ የማየት አባዛ ለህዝብ ያላቸው ንቀት መገለጫ የሚሆነው። ያስከተለው ችግር እነሱ ጓዳ ባይገባም፤ በአማካኝ ያለውን ኢትዮጵያዊ ህልውና ግን እየተፈታተነ መሆኑ ህሊናቸውን ሊከሰኩሰው ይገባ ነበር። የኑሮው ውድነት ረሃብን ከገጠር ወደ ከተማ እያስገባ ነው። የአንድ ኪሎ ሽሮ ዋጋ 25 ብር ገብቶ በሀገሪቱ ታሪክ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ ደሃና ሽሮ ተራርቀዋል። የደሃው ማዝገሚያ ከሽሮ ወደ ጎመን ተለውጧል። ድሮ ደሃው ስጋ ሲያምረው ከእሱ ወደተሻለው ጎረቤቱ ጎራ ይል ነበር። ዘንድሮ ሽሮ እያማረው ጎራ ማለት ጀምሯል። በዋጋ ግሽበቱ ሳቢያ በሚሊዮኖች የሚቆጠሩ ኢትዮጵያውያን ከድህነት ወለሉ በታች እየተገፉ ናቸው።

በአንፃሩ፤ ጥቂቶች ደግሞ ከጮማ በዶላር ብቻ ወደ ሚገዛው ካሺያር ተሸጋግረዋል። የኢህአዴግ ልማት ብዙሃኑን እያደከሰ ለጥቂቶች ደግሞ ሀብት እየጨመረላቸው ነው። ይሄ ለሀገር የሚበጅ አካሄድ አይደለም።

በማህበራዊው መስክም ያለው አንገት የሚያስደፋ ነው። ገጠር የሚታረስ መሬት እየጠፋ ወደከተማ የሚፈልሰው ወጣት ቁጥር የሚያስደነግጥ ነው። የሴቶቹ መሰደጃ የአረብ ሀገራት ሆነዋል። የትምህርት ጥራት ከመቼውም ጊዜ በላይ አሸቆልቋል። የከተማውን ወጣት የጫት ጥገኛ የማድረግ ያልተፃፈ ህግ አለ ማለት ይቻላል፤ ከፖለቲካ ለማራቅ ሲባል። ይህ ሁሉ ተደማምሮ ኢትዮጵያን ለውጥ አፋፍ አድርጏታል። ዛሬ ኢትዮጵያ ለውጥ ትሻለች። ኢትዮጵያ ለውጥ ያስፈልጋታል። የኢህአዴግ አመራሮች ይህንን ተገንዝበው የለውጡን ጥያቄ በሰላም ማስተናገድ ይጠበቅባቸዋል።

በ3 ምክንያቶች፡-

1. ኢህአዴግ በስልጣን ላይ 20 ዓመታት ቆይቷል

ኢህአዴግ ስልጣን ከያዘበት ጊዜ አንስቶ በአሜሪካ 4 ፕሬዝዳንቶች ስልጣን ተቀባብለዋል። በእንግሊዝ እንዲሁ 4 ጠ/ሚኒስትሮች ተለዋውጠዋል። ቻይና እንኳን የኮሚኒስት ፓርቲው ስልጣን አይልቀቅባት እንጂ 3 መሪዎች አይታለች። በኬኒያ ነባሩ ካኑ ፓርቲ ለተቃዋሚዎች ስልጣን ለቋል። ደቡብ አፍሪካ 3 መሪዎች ለዋውጣለች። በዛምቢያም 3 መሪዎች ስልጣን ተረካክበዋል። በአጠቃላይ በአፍሪቃም ሆነ በሌላው አለም ባለፉት 20 ዓመታት ቢያንስ ሶስቱ እና አራቱ፤ አንዳንዴም ከዚያም በላይ፤ የመሪዎችና የፓርቲ ለውጥ ተስተናግደዋል። የቀሩት ኢትዮጵያ፤ ሰሜን ኮሪያ እና ኩባን የመሳሰሉ ጥቂት ሀገራት ናቸው። በእነዚህ ሀገራት አንድ ፓርቲ ስልጣን ላይ ለረዥም ጊዜ መቆየቱ ያተረፈላቸው መስናን፤ ኋለቀርነትና ድህነትን ብቻ ነው። እነዚህ በሽታዎች የሚፈወሱት የስልጣን ቅብብሎሽ ሲኖር ብቻ ነው። ኢህአዴግ ደክሞታል። ሌላው ቢቀር ቢያንስ ቢያንስ ከ20 አመታት በኋላ እረፍት ያስፈልገዋል። ህዝቡ ህጋዊና ሰላማዊ ለውጥ ይፈልጋል። የኢህአዴግ አመራሮች ፍላጎቱንና መብቱን ሊያስከብሩለት ይገባል። ጊዜው የዓለም አቀፉ ሁኔታም መብቱን እንዲያከብሩ የሚያስገድድ ነው።

2. የዴሞክራሲ ተስፋ ተቀጣጥሏል

በአረብ ሀገሮች የተቀጣጠሉት ሰላማዊ ህዝባዊ እምቢታዎች በሰላማዊ መንገድ ለውጥ ማምጣት እንደሚቻል ለታፈኑ ህዝቦች ማስረጃ ሆነዋል። ከእነዚህ ህዝቦች መካከል ኢትዮጵያውያን ይገኙበታል። በሰላማዊው እና ህጋዊ የፖለቲካ ሂደት ላይ ታላቅ ተስፋ ጥለዋል። ለእነዚህ ዜጎች ሰላማዊ ጥያቄ ምላሹ ጭቆና መሆን የለበትም። ጥፋት መሆን የለበትም። እስር መሆን የለበትም። ለሰላም ምላሹ ሰላም መሆን አለበት። የዴሞክራሲ ተስፋ አንድ ጊዜ ከተቀጣጠለ በፖሊሲና ወታደር ፈፅሞ ሊዳፈን አይችልም። በግብፅ ታይቷል፣ በሊቢያ ታይቷል፣ በቱኒዚያ ታይቷል። በሶሪያና በየመን እየታየ ነው። ጭቆና እንደ ትላንት አይሰራም። ከቤን አሊ፣ ከሙባረክ፣ ከጋዳፊና ከአሳድ ተሞክሮዎች መማር የግድ ይላል።

3. ኢትዮጵያ ከጥቁር አፍሪቃ ሀገራት አታንስም

የጥቁር አፍሪቃ ሀገራት ከኃላ ተነስተው ኢትዮጵያን መቅደማቸው በኢትዮጵያውያን ዘንድ ሀገራዊ ቁጭት ፈጥሯል። ጋና ዴሞክራሲ ሀገር መሆን እንደቻለች እየታየ ኢትዮጵያ ዴሞክራሲያዊ መሆን የማትችልበት ምንም ምክንያት የለም። ትላንት የተፈጠሩት ማላዊና ዛምቢያ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሀገራት ለመሆን በቅተው የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ስልጣን መቀበል ከቻሉ፣ ጥንታዊቷ ኢትዮጵያ የተሻለች ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሀገር መሆን ትችላለች።

አፍሪቃውያን ያለምንም የሽግግር ዘመን በቀጥታ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት መገንባት ከቻሉ ኢትዮጵያውያን የሽግግር ጊዜ ያስፈልጋችኋል ሊባሉ አይችሉም። ኢትዮጵያ የአፍሪቃ መሪ እንጂ ጭራ ሆና አታውቅም። ታሪኳ ምስክር ነው። ኢትዮጵያውያን ለሌሎች አፍሪቃውያን ሞዴል የሚሆን ዴሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት ለመገንባት ፍላጎቱም አቅሙም አላቸው። ሩጫው አውሮፓና አሜሪካ ላይ ለመድረስ ሳይሆን ከጥቁር አፍሪካ ዋናነት ጋር ለመስተካከል ሆኗል። ከዚህ በላይ ሀገራዊ ቁጭት ሊፈጥር የሚችል ነገር ፈፅሞ ሊኖር አይችልም። የኢህአዴግ መሪዎች ኢትዮጵያዊ እንደመሆናቸው መጠን የህዝቡን ቁጭት ሊረዱና ሊጋሩት ይገባል። የተከበራችሁ ወገኖቼ!

አዲሱን አመት ለመቀበል እየተዘጋጀን ነውና ለ2004 የሚሆን ሰላማዊና ህጋዊ ጥሪ በማቅረብ ላጠቃል። በ2004 ኢትዮጵያ በታሪኳ ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ የተሟላ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሀገር እንድትሆን ሰላማዊና ህጋዊ ትግል ከቃላት ወደ ተግባር የሚሸጋገርበት ይሁን። ከዚህ በኋላ ቃላት ትርጉም የላቸውም። የሚባለው ሁሉ አልቋል። የቀረው ሰላማዊና ህጋዊ ትግል ነው። ተግባር ነው።

በሰላማዊና ህጋዊ መንገድ ታሪክ ይሰራ።

ፀሐፊውን ለማግኘት serk27@gmail.com

14. የህሊና ሽክም አለባቸው - በእስክንድር ነጋ

በዚህ ሳምንት የማካፍላችኹ ዛሬ ማክሰኞ ሐምሌ 19 ቀን 2003 ዓ.ም አዲስ አበባ ውስጥ ከሚታተመው መስናዘሪያ ጋዜጣ ጋር ያደረግኩትን ቃለመጠይቅ ነው። በዋናነት የሚያጠነጥነው በፀረ ሽብር ሕጉና ባስከተለው የፍርሃት ድብብ ዙሪያ ነው።

መስናዘሪያ፡- የፀረ ሽብር ህጉን እንዴት ታየዋለህ? ከፕሬስ አንፃርስ?

አቶ እስክንድር፡- የፀረ ሽብር ህጉ ሰላማዊ ተቃውሞን ጭምር ለማዳከም ሆነ ተብሎ የወጣ ነው። ህጉ የወጣው ከምርጫ 97 በኋላ ነው። ሲረቅም፣ ሲፀድቅም ምርጫ 97 እንዳይደገም እየታሰበ ነው። በህጉ ምንም ነገር «ሽብር» ተብሎ ሊፈረጅ ይችላል። ህጉን ሙሉ ለሙሉ ተግባራዊ እናድርገው ብለው ከተነሱ፣ ኢህአዴግን በሀሳብ ደረጃ መቃወሙ በራሱ ሽብር ነው። ቀላል ምሳሌ ልስጥህ። ፓርላማው አልቃይዳን የሽብር ድርጅት ብሎ ባለፈው ሰሞን ፈርጆታል። ይሄ ድርጅት ከአሁን በኋላ በየትኛውም ሀገር የሚፈፅመውን ጥቃት መዘገብ በፀረ ሽብር ህጉ ያስጠይቃል። የሽብርን ተግባር ማስተዋወቅ ነው የሚሆነው። ይሄ ደግሞ አንድን ጋዜጠኛ ቢያንስ አስር ዐመታት ያስቀጣዋል። በምን መለኪያ ነው ይሄ ፍትሃዊ የሚሆነው? በኦጋዴን፣ በመንግስትና በኦብነግ መካከል ውጊያ አለ። ኦብነግ የሽብር ድርጅት ስለተባለ ስለዚህ ውጊያ እንዳትዘግብ ህጉ ይከለክላል።

ታዲያ እንዴት ነው ስለሀገራችን የምንነጋገረው? እንዳደርግ ግዜ በየዳዳችን እንድንወያይ እያስገደደን ነው የፀረ ሽብር ህጉ። ይሄ ለሀገር የሚጠቅም ህግ አይደለም። ሀገርን የሚጎዳ ህግ ነው። ኢትዮጵያውያን የሚያስፈልጓቸው የሚያቀራርባቸው ህግ እንጂ የሚያራርቃቸው ህግ አይደለም።

ይህ ማለት ኢትዮጵያ የፀረ ሽብር ህግ አያስፈልጋትም ማለት አይደለም። ያስፈልጋታል። ይህ ህግ ግን በሰላማዊ ተቃውሞና በሽብር መካከል ሆነ ብሎ ብዥታን የሚፈጥር ህግ መሆን የለበትም። ህጉ ችግር እንዳለበት በዐለም አቀፍ ማህበረሰብ ዘንድ የጋጠመው ተቃውሞ አይነተኛ ማስረጃ ነው። ብዙ ሀገሮች የፀረ ሽብር ህጎች አላቸው። እንደ ኢትዮጵያው ግን አላከራከሩም፣ አላጨቃጨቁም፣ አልተወገዙም። የኢትዮጵያው ገና ከመነሻው ነበር ችግሩ። ከፖለቲካ ወገንተኝነት የፀዱ ባለሙያዎች ነበሩ ሊያረቁት የሚገባው። በተግባር የረቀቁት ግን በፖለቲካ የተነከሩና ለሹመት የቋመጡ ግለሰቦች ነበሩ። ኢህአዴግን እንጂ ሀገራቸውን አያስቡ አላረቁትም። ሁላችንም ሊያስማማን የሚችል ህግን በጥልቀት እንዲከፋፍሉን አድርገዋል። እነሱ የፈለጉትን ሹመት አግኝተዋል። ሀገራችን ግን የሚያስከብራት የፀረ ሽብር ህግ የላትም። የህሊና ሽክም እንዳለባቸው አምናለሁ።

መስናዘሪያ፡- በምስራቅ አፍሪካ ብሎም በሀገራችን የፕሬስ ነፃነት ምን ይመስላል? መሻሻል አሳይቷል? ካላሳየስ ለምን?

እስክንድር፡- ከመልክአ ምድራዊ አቀማመጥ አኳያ፣ ምስራቅ አፍሪቃ ሰፋ ያለ አካባቢ ነው። በውስጡ ያሉት ሀገሮች ከሚመሳሰሉባቸው ይልቅ የማይመሳሰሉባቸው ያመዝናሉ። ከፖለቲካ፣ ከታሪክ፣ ከሥነልቦና አኳያ ጠበብ አድርገን ስለአፍሪቃ ቀንድ ነው መነጋገር የምንችለው። ይህ ማለት ሱዳን፣ ኤርትራ፣ ኢትዮጵያ፣ ጅቡቲና ሱማሊያን ነው። ቀሪዎቹን የምስራቅ አፍሪቃ ሀገራት ኬንያ፣ ታንዛኒያ፣ ኡጋንዳን ነጥለን ማውጣቱ የግድ ይላል። እነዚህ ከሌሎቹ የአፍሪቃ ሀገራት ጋር እየተራመዱ ናቸው። ታንዛኒያ የአፍሪቃ ዲሞክራሲ አይነተኛ ምሳሌ ናት። ኬንያ ውስጥም ጭቆና የለም። ለረዥም ጊዜ በስልጣን ላይ የኖረው ካኑ (KANU) በምርጫ ተሸንፎ ስልጣኑን ለተቃዋሚዎች ካስረከበ ቆይቷል። የኬንያ ዋነኛ ችግር የሙስና ችግር ነው። ከካኑ አምባገነናዊ አገዛዝ የተወረሰ ችግር ነው። ለኢትዮጵያ ትልቅ ትምህርት ነው። ካለፉት ሁለት አስርት ዓመታት የምንወርሰው የሙስና ችግር ይኖራል። በዩጋንዳ ዲሞክራሲ የለም። በማንኛቸውም መለኪያ ግን ከአፍሪቃ ቀንድ ትሻላለች። በተለይ የፕሬስ ነፃነትን በሚመለከት በርካታ ነፃ ጋዜጦችና ሬዲዮኖች አሉባት። የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶችና የሲቪክ ተቋማትም የተሻለ ነፃነት አላቸው።

የአፍሪቃ ቀንድን የተመለከትኩት እንደሆነ ግን ዴሞክራሲ የታመመበት ቀጠና ነው። የአምባገነኖች መጨረሻው የአፍሪቃ ቀጠና ነው። ከ6 ወራት በፊት ሰሜን አፍሪቃም እንዲሁ ዴሞክራሲ የታመመበት አካባቢ ነበር። በቱኒዚያ የተነሳው ሕዝባዊ ቁጣ ግን በቀጠናው ያሉትን አምባገነኖች ጠራርጎ ወስዷቸዋል። በግብፅና በሊቢያ የሆነውን ሁላችንም እናውቀዋለን። ሞሮኮ በሰላማዊ መንገድ ዴሞክራሲያዊ እየሆነች ነው። የቀረችው አልጄሪያ ብቻ ናት። ለአምባገነኖች ምሽግ በመሆን የአፍሪቃ ቀንድ ብቸኛው ቀጠና ነው። አንድም ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሀገር የለበትም። በሌላኛው ጫፍ ግን በደቡብ አፍሪካ ካሉት ሰባት ሀገራት መካከል ዚምባብዌ ብቻ ናት ዴሞክራሲነቷ የሚያጠራጥረው። እንደዚያም ሆኖ፣ ከአፍሪካ ቀንድ ጋር የምትወዳደር አይደለችም። ቢያንስ ቢያንስ የተቃዋሚዎችና የሙጋቤ ጥምር መንግስት ያለባት ሀገር ናት።

በአፍሪካ ቀንድ እንኳን የጥምር መንግስት ይቅርና አንድ ነፃ ሬዲዮ የለም። ቴሌቪዥንም አይታሰብም። ጋዜጦች ትንሽ ይሻላሉ። በዚህ ረገድ ከምርጫ 97 በኋላ ኢትዮጵያ ወደ ኋላ ተጉዛለች። ነፃ ጋዜጦች በሙሉ ተዘግተዋል። እንደገና ሀ ብሎ መጀመር አስፈልጓል። ምርጫ 97 የነበሩበት ቦታ ለመመለስ ገና ብዙ ጊዜ፣ ብዙ ትግል ይጠይቃል። ከኢትዮጵያ ይልቅ የሱዳንና የጅቡቲ ጋዜጦች የተሻለ ነፃነት አላቸው። በጥቅሉ በዴሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት ግንባታ ኢትዮጵያ ከጅቡቲና ከሱዳን እኩል መራመድ አልቻለችም። ይሄ ማለት የአፍሪካ ጭራ ሆናለች ማለት ነው። እኛ ለነፃነት ባበቃናቸው የአፍሪካ ሀገራት ተቀድመናል። እኛ ባዋለድናቸው ሀገራት። በግሌ ይሄ ሁኔታ እንደ እግር እሳት ሆኖ ያንገበግበኛል። እኛ ለእነሱ አርአያ መሆን እንጂ እነሱ ለእኛ አርአያ መሆን አይገባቸውም። ለስልጣኔ እኮ እኛ እንቀድማለን።

ለማንኛውም ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ሀሳብን የመገለፅ መብት አልተከበረም። ለዚህም ደግሞ የአኔና የሌሎች ሰዎች ጋዜጣ ፈቃድ መከልከል ጉልህ ማስረጃ ነው። የአንድ ሰው መብት ሲገደብ የሁሉም መብት ተገድቧል ማለት ነው። መብት የሁሉም መሆኑ ቀርቶ በስጣታ የሚታደል ውለታ ሆኗል ማለት ነው። መሰናዘሪያ፡- የሀገራችን ሚዲያዎች በተለይ ነፃው ፕሬስ በብዙ መንገድ አደጋ ተጋርጦበታል? ለምሳሌ የህትመት መቀነስ፣ በተለያዩ ህጎች መገደብና የመሳሰሉት ምክንያቱ ምንድነው ትላለህ? ምንስ መደረግ አለበት?

አቶ እስክንድር፡- በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ከመድብለ ፓርቲ ስርዓት በተቃራኒ በአንድ ፓርቲ አምባገነናዊ አገዛዝ ዙሪያ ስርዓት የመገንባት ምኞትና ተግባራዊ እንቅስቃሴ አለ። በተለሳለሰ ቋንቋ ሲገለፅ የአውራ ፓርቲ ስርዓት ግንባታ ማለት ነው። ይህ ስርዓት ለነፃ ፕሬስ ቦታ የለውም። ልማታዊ ጋዜጠኝነት ነው የሚያስፈለገው ተብሏል። በአንፃሩ ነፃ ፕሬስ የሊብራል ዴሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት አንድ መገለጫ ነው። እንደ አብዮታዊ ዴሞክራሲ ከሆነ ደግሞ፣ ኢትዮጵያዊያን እንደሌሎቹ የአፍሪካ ህዝቦች የሊብራል ዴሞክራሲያዊ ስርዓት ለመገንባት ብቁ አይደለም። ምን እንደሚጎድለን ግን ገና አልተገለፀልንም። በደፈናው ግን ሀሳባችንን እንዳንገልፅ ተከልክለናል። የፈለግነውን መንግስት በምርጫ ካርዳችን እንዳንሾም ተከልክለናል። የሙያ ማህበራትን በነፃነት እንዳናደራጅ ገደብ ተጥሎብናል። ስለልማት ወይም በሌላ አነጋገር ስለሆዳችን እንጂ ስለመብቶቻችን እንዳናስብ መመሪያ ተሰጥቶናል። ፈጣን እድገትና ዴሞክራሲ እንደእሳትና ውሃ አይጣጣሙም ነው የሚሉት የኢህአዴግ መሪዎች። ሀሳብን በነፃ በመገለፅ መብት የተገደበውና ነፃ ምርጫ የተከለከለው ህዝብ ጠግቦ በልቶ እንዲያድር ነው የሚሉት። ችግሩ፣ መብታችንም ታፍኖ ኢትዮጵያ በሚሊዮኖች የሚቆጠሩ ዜጎቿ በረሀብ አለንጋ የሚጠበሱበት ሀገር በመሆኗ ነው። ችግሩ፣ ኢትዮጵያ ረሀብ ከገጠር ወደ ከተማም እየተዛመተባት የምትገኝ ሀገር መሆኗ

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