



Eritrea's President Isaias Aferworki (left) and Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed in talk during the inauguration of the Tibebe Ghion Specialised Hospital in Bahir Dar, northern Ethiopia, on November 10, 2018. The neighbouring countries and longtime foes reached a peace agreement in July 2018. PHOTO | AFP

MANAGE DIVERSITY TO RESCUE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONS IN THE HORN

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Countries in the Horn are proving their mettle as resilient and are increasingly able to resolve internal conflicts, manage and promote diversity to rescue democratic revolutions and consolidate their gains with home-grown efforts without any external intervention.

Globally, liberalism is tottering, and retreating. But in the Horn of Africa, democracy appears to be on the march. Here, the state is as fragile as ever. But countries in the region have proven their mettle as resilient and increasingly able to resolve internal conflicts and heal their own wounds without external intervention.

The region is awash with home-grown experiments that seek to manage and promote diversity to rescue democratic revolutions and consolidate their gains.

In Ethiopia, politics is on the threshold of a new dawn. On November 22, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali unfurled a new Prosperity Party.

This is a merger of three of the four ethnically-based parties in the governing coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), that currently controls every seat in parliament and has ruled the country since 1991.

Upon coming to power in April 2018, Abiy introduced sweeping liberal reforms, which have exposed the promise and perils of democracy in ethnically divided countries.

The new party pushes the Abiy "democratic revolution" to higher notch, but not without risks.

Abiy faces his first electoral test next year when his vision of a country that is unified on the one hand and ethnically diverse on the other will be tested in a public and palpable way.

Abiy hailed the new party, his electoral vehicle, as a "crucial step in harnessing our energy to work toward a shared vision".

As a liberal corollary of China's Communist Party, the Prosperity Party will carry Abiy's liberal vision of order in Ethiopia, reflected by his philosophy of medemer (meaning "addition" or "synergy") itself a clarion call to Ethiopians to come together to end ethnic separatism.

But the merger has its sworn challengers. The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a key partner in EPRDF, refused to join the new party, highlighting challenges to Abiy ahead of next year's election.

But the real challenge comes from within Abiy's ethnic Oromo, from Jawar Mohammed, the founders of the Oromia Media Network, a leading organizer of the 2016 Ethiopian protests and the key intellectual inspiration for the International Oromo Youth Association, popularly known as Qeerroo that, paradoxically, propelled Abiy to power.

In Kenya, the long-awaited report of the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) to Unity now is done and

dusted, to be released to the public on November 26.

As an offshoot of the March 2018 peace deal ("handshake") between President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader, Raila Odinga, BBI is a home-grown effort to manage the perils of diversity and rescue democracy from cycles of ethnic-based electoral violence.

For nearly two years, the deal has calmed the nation after months of political tensions and violence in the wake of the protracted double-election in August and October 2017. Its also prevented the recurrence of the 2008 post-election cataclysmic violence.

But BBI should not be more than a simple choice between systems, parliamentary or presidential. For, the world is replete with examples of successful parliamentary systems across culture (Britain or Japan) and triumphant presidential systems (America and China).

The historic mission of the "Uhuru Generation" is to tackle the inclusion-deficit in the 2010 liberal constitution. This calls for a careful management of diversity to stem political violence and instability in future elections.

BBI should also be about economic inclusion and justice. While protecting our inalienable right to vote based on the "one-man-one-vote" tenet, it must uphold the principle of equal taxation, equal services based on the "one-vote-one-dime" tenet.

In Somalia, the UN Special Envoy James Swan addressed the Security Council on the situation in Somalia on 21 November 2019 in what appeared like the State of the nation's democratic experiment. Here, a unique partnership between President Mohamed Farmaajo and Prime Minister Hassan Khayre has guaranteed relative stability in Government, putting the country on the path to debt relief and economic recovery and enabling some 125,000 Somali refugees to return home.

Discernibly, political dynamics in Somalia are increasingly driven the imperatives of the 2020/2021 election. As one Africa's genuine nation state with a one 'tribe', religion, language and shared history, Somalia faces the unique problem of hewing a state for diverse and antagonistic clans.

The 2020 battle-ground is shaped by the twin-issues of an electoral code and amendments to the political parties law that Parliament must pass before the end of December 2019.

The country must also agree on an amended Federal Constitution by June 2020 to settle the core issues of the federal model, including the allocation of powers, the structure of government, the status of Mogadishu as the capital and women's representation.

Ahead of 2020, Somalia faces the challenge of forging effective cooperation between the Central Government and key Federal Member States.

Lingering tensions between the center and periphery have undermined efforts to defeat terrorism, restore security and economic recovery.

In Galmudug, intense competition over the composition of the parliament threaten to tear the state apart. In Jubaland, tensions arising from the concluded August election that President Ahmed Madobe won, but Villa Somalia virulent contests, reveals the viciousness in the struggle between

the "centrists" in Villa Somalia and federalists in regional states.

But even more sinister is the potential of the Jubaland crisis escalating into a region-wide conflict. Uncannily, the UN Envoy warned in his speech to the Security Council that if not carefully managed, the Jubaland impasse poses the risk of "even external intervention".

On November 21, the office of President Ahmed Madobe put the world on notice that Jubaland is "experiencing an illegal invasion by non-AMISOM Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) in the Northern parts of Gedo region."

The logic is raw power, linked to the 2020 election strategies. "The overall objective of the invading Ethiopian force", the statement claimed, "is to expand the Farmajo regimes sphere of influence...for the sole purpose of providing an opportunity for President Farmaajo to redo the recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Jubaland".

Be that as it may, unbridled militarism and external interventions can only imperil democracy and regional peace.

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