

PRIME MINISTER HAILEMARIAM'S SUNSHINE MOMENT

By

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I was always mystified by the enduring exuberance of the revolutionary democrats; most importantly, their view of the proverbial half-empty glass overflowing with potential, fortified by their unshakable conviction that, making Ethiopia wealthy and glorious is on the horizon. Now I know why. It emanates from the confidence on their pool of leadership: which is primed with profound idealism and determination.

In the last few months Ethiopians have witnessed momentous events unfolding in our country. First, while citizens in the rest of the world keep marching en masse to chase their leaders out of power; Ethiopians on the other hand, poured to the streets in millions to mourn the passing of their loved one in unprecedented manner. Then, we observed a smooth and orderly leadership succession at the party and government level, also a first in the history of modern Ethiopia.

Those events have opened a new chapter for the ruling party as well as the country. They are also a testament to the strength of the pillars of the democracy and functional state; the emboldening of the various institutions that make up the state, that they are matured enough and sophisticated enough to be able to accommodate a leadership change without a hitch. This is a very positive development which should be credited to the ruling party **[EPRDF]**.

EPRDF is the most powerful political institution in the continent of Africa for a lot of reasons. Inter alia; it has build a credible political culture from the ground up, has the canning ability to read events current and future, and devise relevant policies. And is able to attract and recruit individuals with intellect and the will to anchor its course of action.

You can't find a better example of such a person than the current party leader and prime minister, **the honorable Hailemariam Desalegn**.

I first become aware of [saw] Mr. Hailemariam during my visit to Ethiopia back in 2005. Having been in the country in the last stages of the campaign, it was a time of heightened tension. I was shocked by the lack of civility in the political discourse, as debates were reduced to childish vulgarity by the opposition. It was obvious the leaders of the opposition [Kinijit] had perfected political evasion through intensive tutoring from experts of Diaspora Dergists.

But, the campaign and debates also exposed a lurking weakness within the EPRDF political machine, which unlike the opposition, opted for decent politics. There was a remarkable vacancy at the heart of their campaign. On the bright side, it was also a time when the party's next leadership stepped up to the plate and began to capture the people's imagination. Among those new leaders was our current prime minister. Back then Mr. Hailemariam was the president of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples [SNNP] state. However, not only was he running for a federal parliamentary seat, was also conspicuously defending his party's policies at a national stage. I had a chance watch him campaign, and I was instantly struck by his passion. When dealing with the opposition, he was humble but assertive, principled yet conciliatory.

As I dug deep in to his bio to satisfy my curiosity, it didn't take me long to learn his reputation; as intellectual social entrepreneur and courageous. During his tenure as the president of his state he had taken bold steps to push for new ideas for the betterment of the people. I was impressed by his commitment to social service, when I ascertained, he had waived a full scholarship, and do his doctoral degree abroad, instead chose to serve his country instead. It was then obvious to me, he possess all the quintessential values of a great leader.

His star power was consolidated during the painstaking interparty negotiation that led to the landmark agreement of the Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties; to which almost all political parties assented and was endorsed in Oct. 2009. He was one of those credited for successfully persuading the opposition to back the framework, which is meant to ensure peaceful, free and faire elections. That agreement heralded a new partnership with the peaceful legal opposition, and made Mr. Hailemariam a fixture of the party [EPRDF] and national politics.

Hence, no one was surprised when Mr. He was elevated to the deputy head of the party during the 8th EPRDF congress, held in Adama city, in sep. 2010. His compassionate idealism and dedication has impacted party members and consolidated their faith in him ever since.

The sudden passing of Prime Minister Meles meant for Mr. Hailemariam to step in to the helm sooner than expected, but has proven he is up to the challenge. In his first address to the nation, he reassured the public; the law and order that has brought peace and stability, respect for human rights at every level of the government will be maintained.

Since his colleagues conferred upon him the leadership mandate; on different occasions, he has addressed a variety of issues pertinent to the country. He articulated a broad and coherent vision for the nation; to sustain the momentum of democratization and economic growth, a view the Ethiopian people find appealing and worth safeguarding.

As the party leader: he expressed his commitment to build an inclusive atmosphere where all Ethiopians are guaranteed equal access to all opportunities so long as they respect the constitution and the will of the people. And so, promised to take bold steps to build a broader reconciliation strategy by reaching out to the legal opposition.

As the government head: he laid out his vision to represent the collective will of the Ethiopian people, to consolidate the current prospect of a prosperous and peaceful nation and maintain the holistic change and transformation plan to realize a middle income Ethiopia.

On foreign policy: acknowledging the changing environment in the region and the world, and being mindful of Ethiopia's relative importance in global affairs, --- plan to put an effort to pursue a good relationship with all the players, so long as it benefit our national interest.

As a populist: in his address aimed directly at the people, Prime Minister Hailemariam reminded them, that they must seek progress and open society while remaining vigilant and steady. He recognizes the resourcefulness of Ethiopians given a secure space to function, and expressed his government's determination to maintain a secure Ethiopia and continue the march to the bright future. Apparently, the people like what they see and hear. They seem to stand behind him and accord their whole hearted support to effect the policies he outlined.

The Sunshine Moment

During his appearance in parliament, to clarify and respond to MPs' queries on president Girma's speech to the opening of the joint session of the house of people's representative and house of federation, Prime Minister Hailemariam was inspiring.

He was fervent, feisty and straight. He covered a variety of issues, in fact the speech can be considered a summation of what has been said before; what I already have mentioned, but a bit spiced up. It was quite solid and daring to tackle big policy issues a head. The PM was rhetorically grand, with even bigger strategies and agendas, dominated by well defined goals. He emphasized, EPRDF is a party with protective agenda not change of agenda --- dedicated to defending the current policies in all their forms. According to him, his government's current policies are a perfect fit for a country like Ethiopia which is already firmly on track.

The P.M was also candid, not shying away from admitting mistakes in his government. He recognized the weakness of the government to effectively address the inflation which has exposed the debilitating flows in the monetary policy, and other exogenous factors. He then promised to address all economic and service problems, and set up a follow up mechanism to measure progress.

The premier got emotional when addressing the national security issue: he had a fierce warning to those internal and external enemies of the nation. In referring to religious extremism: he cautioned any one, not to tamper with the sacred value that defines us Ethiopians, as tolerant--- ***an overwhelming sense of being an Ethiopian.***

In dealing with the opposition; he expressed his government's readiness to enter in to an earnest political discussion. He reminded them [the opposition], mutual gains can only be achieved by collaboration and reciprocal altruism; and that, compromising is not capitulation, but a virtue that generate social capital.

However, he had a stern warning to those opposition groups who are in the habit of cajoling foreigners. He said the title wave of democratization is not only strong and irreversible but also shielded from any toxic alien influence. Some things need to be said out loud, even if one might think they go without saying; ***Ethiopia will never bow to the whims of other nations, and ignore what is best for her. This proud government will never let others even try dictate haw we run things.***

In the final analysis: If I have to consider the main theme of the prime minister's speech in the parliament; it is his moral matrix, which is, we should all band together, form a team and take on poverty. That is why he put more emphasis , not on himself, but the word "we" --- the idea that promotes a sense of patriotism that pervaded his address, a sense of mutual obligation as citizens and collective leadership at the executive level.

Furthermore, it was a speech that cemented the people's view that, Prime Minister Hailemariam has the intelligence, the dexterity and sense of balance to navigate through cross cutting challenges and Google us towards a brighter future.

I would like to express my gratitude, to the fallen and living EPRDF heroes whose epic struggle for justice, democracy and prosperity have made us realize today's Ethiopia.

God bless!