

MELES'S CORRUPT REGIME FALLING APART

Tamerat Layne, the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia (1991 & 1994) and Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, until he was sacked in 1997, was convicted of corruption and abuse of power. He was found guilty in February 2000 and sentenced to 18 years on charges of corruption.

When the ex-Prime Minister Tamerat Layne was disgraced from the highest political office, was he the only corrupt official in Meles's government? Far from it! His sentence was supposed to be a warning for other "corrupt" officials in the country. If his punishment was meant to deter corruption in high public offices, it did not. In fact, over 3 million pounds worth of property is left in London for Tamerat Layne for his long-term investment. Indeed, public office has become a means of getting rich quickly. The extent of wide spread corruption is well known. Unfortunately, the extent of the destruction it has done in the Ethiopian society is hard to quantify. Except to say that it is immensely damaging for the development of our country.

Why is there corruption? Some times traditional practices [family ties, friendship, ethnic origin, etc.] are carried over to modern bureaucracy. In other cases, it is direct fraud such as false claims, or a simple weak administration that is unable to control, or a poor accountability. In short holders of public office, (are the main culprit) i.e., their official capacity allows them to bend the normal expected use of strict accountability, and efficiency to distort their decision making and fraudulent action. In any case, corruption introduces discrimination and arbitrariness in decision making so the rules, regulations and procedures become unimportant. "In the extreme cases decision making is not only transformed to the corrupters but it is totally hijacked, and arrogated to the corrupters. Where countries are concerned sovereignty is completely surrendered, as in the case of Ethiopia. Any corrupt politician will sell the country for the highest bidder, be it to a multi-national or an individual. As much as there is economic corruption, there is political corruption. While others are running to sell anything the country has, Meles sold out the sovereignty of Ethiopia for his personal political greed. In any case we oppose these twine vices.

To combat corruption, a commitment is needed at the top. Not the vindictive measures of Meles but a comprehensive and whole-hearted struggle against corruption. The current government under Meles is not only reluctant to fight corruption but has been unable to figure out the head and tail of corruption. In 1994, a document on fighting corruption was submitted to the Prime Minister's Office. Ever since, Meles has been sitting on such a document knowingly, for fear of retribution from the law (if at all there is one). This shows there is no willingness or intention from the government to combat corruption. On the other hand, who, among them, can wash his hands clean from corruption? The development of a coherent and holistic strategy involves a clear commitment by political leaders to combat corruption wherever it occurs. Since this includes submitting each one of them to scrutiny, Meles is shy to such commitment. In front of his nose, Meles is seeing corruption flourishing immensely. Right under his armpit, he can see people

(family and friends inclusive) abusing power and getting rich over night. At times, publicly defending them, (Like what he did in the case of Sebhate, Arkebe the notorious fraudsters).

Meles's Ministers and powerful officials are entangled in a web of corruption. In this article, we will take few episodes that explain the magnitude and extent of corruption in Ethiopia. This, of course is a tip of the iceberg. At the lower level, the traffic warden is accused of obstructing the flow of traffic. At the higher level, millions of US\$ is transferred everyday from public purse to private accounts. When Shiek Ali Amoudi bought Pepsi Cola, how much millions did he save by giving a small fortune to the right person?

Star Business Group: This is another miraculously booming business. This is a multi billion and multi pronged business that is flourishing from year to year. When the EPRDF came to power, the owners of Star Business group were merely, ordinary taxi drivers. The owners, Ato Muneyelet, Ato Abebaw & Co. were a decade ago ordinary people. Today Star Business Group is a multi-billion operating business. One may ask, did they hit the jackpot? It seems they were lucky to get the right persons of the TPLF. They are some how affiliated to Arkebe, Sebhate, Tedros Hagos, etc. They do get US\$100's of millions of credit from the Banks. They are so sure that they have controlled the banks that they can call the Bank to order millions of Eth Bir to friends and family without being collateral to any body. There are a number of evidences to support these allegations.

Weizero Yeshe Zewdie: She is a very talented woman who was trained in sex espionage by the previous regime under the supervision of the KGB, to infiltrate unsuspecting political opponents and for counter-espionage purposes. When the Derg regime collapsed in May 1991, she used her talents for personal enrichment. Her talent and training of influencing higher officials by any means was applied for the new bureaucrats of the EPRDF/TPLF. When the EPRDF came to power, officials of the TPLF became her game objects. She was /is 100% successful. Arkebe, Sebhate, Yemane Kidane (Jamaica), Kenfe gebre Medhin, Tedros Hagos, and many others became constant visitors of Weizero Yeshe Zewdie's brattle of sex and alcohol orgies. Weizero Yeshe's residence became the final destination of many powerful figures as a pick-up point of high class prostitutes, which she was always ready to offer on a platter. When Weizero Yeshe entertained these and other TPLF/EPRDF Officials to the best of her capacity in fulfilling all varieties of their obsessions. She was rewarded with corrupt business dealings, favours were exchanged, and not surprisingly Weizero Yeshe became notoriously rich.

Sebhate Nega, the past master of corruption is above the law and untouchable. While Officials like Ato Haile Asegedia, head of Construction, who also became head of Fuel Distribution during the last Ethio-Eritrea war, are immersed in corruption until their nose. As head of Fuel Distribution during the war, when the entire Ethiopian people were hand in glove fighting the enemy to ascertain the sovereignty of Ethiopia, the unscrupulous Officials like Ato Haile Asegedia, Arkebe and others were profiting while the war was ragging. However, Ato Haile Asegedia's main kickback comes from foreign construction

companies setting their feet in Ethiopia. Therefore, it is easier to deposit the bribe in foreign currency and safe from being traced at when the bad time comes.

Arkebe Equbai, the veteran Central Committee (CC) member of the TPLF was disgraced twice for being corrupt but not properly punished for his accepted crimes. Due to lenient punishment, he bounced back to higher Office, twice. Because he is affiliated to those in power and position. In short, he is married to Berhane Gebre Cristos's sister [Berhane G. Cristos is a loyal servant of Seyum and Meles Zenawi]. Thus, because of his influence and money, Arkebe easily came back to power and prominence.

When Arkebe was the head Mesfin Engineering, a TPLF company, he sold over two hundred tracks to Weizero Yeshi Zewdie & Co. at a reduced price. One may say nothing is wrong in selling hundreds of tracks to a single person! However, he also facilitated in arranging Bank credit to buy the tracks from Mesfin Engineering. Still one would say, so what? The irony is that, Arekebe, earns double kickback from selling tracks and from arranging the credit facilities to Weizero Yeshi. We are not sure how much money Wiezero Yeshi gave to Arkebe. It is said a lot of money was syfened. We recently met a person who informed us that he through a third person deposited \$100,000 in one of Arekeb's bank account in London (nothing to do with the previous theft). Today, Weizero Yeshi Zewdie has become the owner of flotilla (over two hundred of them) of tracks, runs a multi million-dollar construction business, and she is a proud owner of high rising buildings, and a number of factories.

When the Wogagen Bank was set up, Prime Minister Meles was advised on the criminal background of the partners that were signing with the TPLF/EPRDF. It was an open secret that the partners of Wogagen were drug dealers, contrabandists, pushers, racketeers, in general people who made their money through criminal activities. Meles Zenawi was informed of the background of these partners. However, he chose to pursue business with such criminals as if they were decent citizens.

In April 2001, General Samora Yunis (now Chief of Staff) gave a frank admission on what the TPLF/EPRDF is. Concerning the overwhelming nature of corruption, the ignoramus General divulged the extent of corruption in the country and he said that most of the TPLF leaders are involved in corruption. To our astonishment, he said it is the degree of how much millions TPLF officials take and not whether we have taken or not. He accepted saying, "From a ten million Birr that was given to two of us (Samora did not state who his partner in crime is), our disagreement is that I got 4 million and the other got 6 million.". The other blatant exposition was according to General Samora, "The TPLF had been summarily executing, it summarily executes today and it will summarily execute for the near future. " He said it is an accepted norm of activity in the TPLF and that he is proud of it. According to the normal practice of the TPLF, "The expelled TPLF leaders should have been by now executed". In a way, he is saying they are lucky they have survived so far. This rings the bell of how Tekelu Hawaz and others were executed

by Meles's/TPLF authorization.

Why is corruption so wide spread and encouraged by the current government? In Ethiopia, corruption is flourishing immensely. It has been provided with main sources of growth, by the authoritarian government, by a poorly developed press, by ill-informed public, by lack of democratic tradition, which alone can provide checks and balances in the exercise of power by government. Nevertheless, what is corruption? Corruption is defined as a conduct or practice by a public official or private individual done in flagrant violation of existing rules and procedures for the realization of personal or group gains. Thus, the blatant violation takes many forms including bribery, unofficial commission, kickbacks, pay-offs, buy and sale of "air", embezzlement, etc. Although the root problem is corruption in public office, it is not confined to that sector alone, but has equally affected, the aid agencies, Non Governmental Organizations (NGO)etc..

However, what are the underlying causes of corruption besides a weak government? Few causes could be mentioned for our purpose. The disparity between income and expenditure is one of the main causes of corruption.. Government employees with the meager salaries have to pay rent, electricity, water, in addition to feeding and clothing the family, education, health, etc. Extremely low salaries/wages paid to members of the public, is one of the main contributory factor to corruption Thus, the income and the expenditure of the low earning sector of society are not compatible, it is supplemented by other means. In other cases few have access to the sever shortages of consumer goods. The limited access to major imported goods also could lead to corruption. The demand and supply of consumer goods are not compatible. The other main cause is that Public Officials, instead of serving the public, possess unlimited power that is not questioned. With their omnipotent power, they protect friends, relatives, the unfit, and the thieves. When the government lacks ethical and moral superiority, accountability and transparency, corruption becomes rampant.

Corruption will continue so long as the corrupt people such as Arkebe, Sebhat, etc. are not severely punished. Bribery, extortion, illegal use of public assets for private gain, nepotism and patronage (tribalism/ sectarianism) are all forms of corruption that are prevalent in many developing countries but by no means exclusive to them. The only way they are combated in the developed countries is by enhancing the role of investigative journalism. In the developing countries like Ethiopia, dictators and semi-dictators have an evil eye to the press. Ethiopian government is known for its abuse of journalists. Meles's government is on the record for having the highest number of journalists killed and imprisoned. It is a country where the press freedom is given a lip serves in the capital while the rest of the country is completely denied even that smidgen of democracy.

Lack of democracy is one of the reasons for corruption to proliferate. If there is no democracy and good governance, corruption will become built-in in the system. The irony is there is no law enforcement, except only when one opposes the government, like the University Students of whom 41 were shot to death in 12 April 2001.

Although, corrupt officials (like Arkebe, Sebhat, Tewodros Hagos, & co. and

surrogates.) and followed by the drunkards Yemane Kidane, Dawit Yohannes, etc abuse power, corruption will have no deterrence from spreading further than what it is today. Of course, they are all innocent until proven guilty. However, a government that is deliberately incubating and nurturing criminals will not have any breathing lung left. Ethiopia under Meles is, therefore, tumbling deep and fast with malignant corruption. So long as corruption is rampant, development is a myth.

To show how vindictive he is, Meles has imprisoned Seye with the rest of corrupt businesspersons. However, Meles left the apostles of corruption, officials like Arkebe, Sebhate, Tewodros, Dawit Yohannes, & co. to ravage the Ethiopian society on behalf of Meles.

The question is, if we from far away know so much of the corruption that is devastating Ethiopia, it is incomprehensible the daily suffering that the people are going through on their activities?

The half hearted attack on corruption shows itself everywhere. Does it make sense that Star Business Group owners and Yeshe being under custody, and leaving Arkebe, Sebhate, Haile Aseged, etc at large would precipitate in getting at the bottom of the corruption scandal? Or are they left to cover up and destroy incriminating evidences that might implicate them?

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