

Challenges to Peace in the “Horn of Africa”

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Resolution of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict brings hope for stability and development in the region.

\n

- But there are credible political challenges in both the countries that need to be sorted out to further the peace initiative.

\n

\n\n

What is the context of the conflict?

\n\n

\n

- Eritrea was a region in Ethiopia that seceded from it in 1993 after a prolonged violent guerrilla war.

\n

- Both have since been independent countries that lie in close proximity to the Red Sea in the Horn of Africa.

\n

\n\n



\n\n

\n

- They were engaged in a conflict for territorial control over the economically insignificant border town of Badme since the late 1990s.

\n

- A peace agreement signed by the two countries in December 2000 and a subsequent border commission awarded Badme to Eritrea.

\n

- But Ethiopia refused to honour the pact and continued to exercise control over Badme by treating it as part of its own territory.

\n

- This resulted in a prolonged standoff between the two countries for almost 2 decades and claimed more than 50,000 lives.
- \n

\n\n

What is the political situation in Ethiopia?

\n\n

- \n
- **Positives** - The decision to honour the terms of the peace accord is credited to Ethiopia's current popularly elected Prime Minister "Abiy Ahmed".
- \n
- The Eritrean outreach is one of the many democratic reforms that Mr. Ahmed has unleashed since assuming office a few months ago.
- \n
- Significantly, he lifted the emergency, released many political prisoners, and delisted some opposition parties that were classified as terrorists.
- \n
- **Challenges** - Nonetheless, rumblings in the ruling "Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front" is posing problems to the government.
- \n
- Traditional tensions between the country's ethnic Oromo majority and the politically dominant Tigrayan minority are playing out as always.
- \n
- Notably, Mr. Ahmed (who is an Oromo) was strategically chosen to ease the churn and ensure a better political balance in the country.
- \n
- Unless managed tactfully, these internal tensions within the governing coalition could impede the peace process.
- \n

\n\n

What is the political situation in Eritrea?

\n\n

- \n
- **History** - Eritrea is ruled by an autocratic president Isaias Afwerki, who rose from through the country's secessionist guerrilla war with the Ethiopia.
- \n
- He has been at the helm since independence by resisting elections and

even failed to even honour the 1997 constitution.

\n

- Notably, Ethiopian aggression also provided strong grounds for Eritrean masses to fall in line with the dictates of its dictatorial ruler.

\n

- **Oppression** - Mr. Isaias used the conflict as a pretext to expand his army and suppress dissent with force, thereby triggering a socio-political crisis.

\n

- This led to mass exodus of people from Eritrea, who has sought refuge in Europe and other countries.

\n

- **Future** - The end of hostilities could mean a diminishing role for the military and a loosening of President Afwerki's grip over the state apparatus.

\n

- This could open up a Pandora's Box in Eritrea and the resulting power struggle needs to be managed well to avoid a violent conflict.

\n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n

- Restoration of peace and democracy is an urgent priority in both countries, which are among the poorest in the world.

\n

- Peace will allow landlocked Ethiopia to access Eritrean ports, and tie the two countries into greater economic cooperation.

\n

- Greater political accountability at home is a prerequisite for stability across the borders, which demands both sides to display better political wisdom.

\n

- The international community must also step up to engage Ethiopia and Eritrea on fairer terms than it has during the course of the bitter conflict.

\n

- Notably, Ethiopia and Eritrea are strategically located, both as gateways for global trade and for counter-terrorism operations.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

