

# TIGRAY'S WOES: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA'S NORTH

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

When Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops to Tigray, the country's northern-most region, in November 2020, he promised it would be a short campaign against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Seven months later, when [Ethiopia declared a unilateral ceasefire](#) and withdrew, Mr. Abiy was indirectly accepting defeat. Government troops are now facing serious allegations of war crimes as bodies wash up in a river in Sudan that borders Ethiopia. The federal troops had initially ousted the TPLF from Mekele, the Tigrayan capital, and established a parallel government. But the TPLF retreated to the mountains, and then struck back. In June, it [recaptured Mekele](#), forcing the federal troops to pull back. At least in defeat, Mr. Abiy could have accepted his mistakes and sought a settlement. But instead, he announced a blockade on Tigray, with even international aid deliveries stopped. The UN says at least 3,50,000 people are facing a "severe food crisis" in the region. The TPLF says it will not stop fighting unless the government lifts the blockade and pulls back all opposing troops. The conflict has already spilled over into the Amhara and Afar regions, threatening the very regional make-up of ethnically divided Ethiopia. An influx of refugees has raised tensions with neighbouring Sudan.

Mr. Abiy, [a Nobel Prize winner](#), went to war in Tigray as part of an ambitious plan to rewrite the country's power balance. Since Ethiopia embraced democracy in 1995, the TPLF, which led the resistance against the military dictatorship, the 'Derg', had played a key role in the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Mr. Abiy, an Oromo, rose to power in 2018 amid growing ethnic tensions and protests as the EPRDF's nominee. He ended the war with Eritrea, released political prisoners and promised more freedoms. But he also moved to end the TPLF's clout in Addis Ababa, which led to a split in the EPRDF. He formed a different coalition, the Prosperity Party, and retained power, by cutting the TPLF off federal government networks. When a defiant TPLF challenged the government, he declared war on Tigray. He may have hoped that the federal troops could oust the TPLF from power and establish order quickly. But he seemed to have overlooked Ethiopia's complex history of ethnic relations and the TPLF's guerrilla warfare. The war may have helped him politically — his coalition won a huge majority in the delayed June Parliamentary elections which were held in all regions except in Tigray — but it has pushed Tigray into an endless rebellion and shaken up the country's ethnic balance. It is time for Mr. Abiy to act like a statesman. He should stop the collective punishment of the Tigrayan people, end the blockade and be ready for talks with the TPLF for a mutually agreeable cessation of all hostilities.

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From the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, to the landmark Ayodhya verdict, 2019 proved to be an eventful year.

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