

EPRDF Says ‘Transitional Government’ Unthinkable

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ADDIS ABABA (Feb 17) – A senior government official told Addis Standard on Saturday that there will be no need for a transitional government, an idea widely entertained by many to stem growing fears of rupture within the ruling EPRDF. This comes as a trail of chaotic events preceded the announcement February 17 of the reinstatement of another state of emergency, leaving many Ethiopians suspect a deliberate tactic to pave ways for a military takeover in the wake of the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. Ethiopians also suspect the move to declare a state of emergency as a deliberate move by the TPLF apparatchik to replace the outgoing PM with another weak “puppet.”

But a senior government official who wants to remain anonymous disputed the claims in an interview with Addis Standard Saturday morning and said that it was nothing more than a “disorganized” trail of events due to the unexpected suggestion by the executive committee of the EPRDF to re-instate the emergency rule. He also ruled out the idea of a transitional government saying the government in power is still a “constitutionally mandated government.” The re-reinstatement of the state of emergency was first suggested during an emergency meeting by the EPRDF executive committee on Thursday, the same meeting PM Hailemariam used to announce his resignation. The council of ministers was then called to convene on Friday afternoon to discuss and announce the re-reinstatement of the state of emergency, as per article 93 of the constitution, which mandates the council the right to declare a state of emergency in extreme cases such as invasion by a foreign enemy and breakdown of law and order, among others.

However, the eventual announcement was followed by a trail of confusing events, including a statement by Ethiopia’s minister of communication, Dr. Negeri Lencho, on the VOA Afaan Oromo denying reports of another state of emergency; a presser called at the office of the Prime Minister for early afternoon and was called off again late in the evening on Friday (local journalists were told to convene at 9 am on Saturday to attend another presser to be given by Siraj Fegessa, the minister of defense); and an unexpected announcement of the state of emergency by the state broadcaster EBC barely 40 minutes after the presser at the PM office was called off. The announcement on the state TV appeared to be incomplete as it did not specify a crucial detail on the time frame for the state of emergency. Within a span of half an hour, the official Facebook pages of EPRDF, and ANDM, issued a statement saying the state of emergency was declared for six months.

These events have made many Ethiopians take to their social media to express their fears and speculations of a government trick, a deliberate tactic of a possible military takeover or a tactic

to intimidate the OPDO leadership, which is vying, and is widely speculated to replace the outgoing PM.

“Govt playing tricks. After waiting for 7 hours at the palace for an announcement, journos were told to leave & not to expect anything tonight. 40 mins later, govt announces emergency rule,” wrote Aaron Masho, Reuter’s correspondent based in Addis Abeba, on his twitter page.

“The state of emergency just declared via the state broadcaster is quite bizarre. The declaration stated that the SOE will take effect as of today, and yet it said nothing about the conditions of the SOE, its restrictions, and how long it will last. The ministers convened today to discuss the SOE reportedly couldn’t agree on a final decision. Although they were expected to make announcements to journalists later today, they failed to do so as they haven’t yet made a decision. Meanwhile, a certain group has decided to declare state of emergency unilaterally and announce it via the state broadcaster,” wrote Dr. Wondwossen Teklu, who is known for providing critical comments reflecting on various political events in Ethiopia. “TPLF is quietly assuming absolute power via its military proxy in ways that excluded ANDM and OPDO.”

Hassen Hussein, Assistant Professor at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota’s Undergraduate College, on his part reflected in his twitter post suggesting the events indicate TPLF’s tactic to “intimidate” the OPDO leadership. “PM resigns & it’s sign of deepening democracy? Declare state of emergency & it’s to aid reform? All these to intimidate OPDO to settle for a puppet PM? The follies of TPLF’s top brass & security apparatus & oligarchy! Fortunately this is 2018; not 2006 nor 1992. God save Ethiopia.”

However, the senior government official who gave the interview to Addis Standard this morning insisted that the statement by Dr. Negeri Lencho denying the re-reinstatement of the state of emergency was a mere coincidence of “information gap” because Dr. Negeri, along with Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, the foreign minister, (both from the OPDO), are currently on a working tour to the US.

Nevertheless, confusion continues. The presser by Siraj Fegess, which was scheduled for today at 9:00 AM local time was postponed to 12:00 PM. According to the official, this is due to delays on the details of the State of emergency to be explained by Siraj Fegessa. He also said that yesterday’s meeting by the minister of council lasted until 7:30 PM and the work to write the details of the decree were ongoing “pretty much the whole night.” But he hinted that the state of emergency would be less imposing than the previous one.

Siraj Fegessa is expected to provide information that a command post, similar to the previous one, is set up to enforce the state of emergency. He is also expected to explain more details including the tabling to the national parliament of the decree within 15 days, corroborating Addis Standard’s breaking news and to dismiss fears of a military takeover. Addis Standard could not verify if Siraj will be providing the entire details on the scoop of the emergency rule, but the state media will be announcing the details during the evening bulletin.

But some have already expressed skepticism on whether the national parliament would give the decree a blanket pass like the previous one. It is expected that MPs from the OPDO and ANDM will resist endorsing the decree.

The fast unfolding events in the last three days have drawn several international media headlines, as well as comments from diplomats expressing concerns. “Rush of events. Release of many prisoners, resignation of the Prime Minister. Now State of Emergency. We hope the situation remains peaceful,” said Georg Schmidt, Regional Director for Sub-Saharan Africa & Sahel at the German Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Meanwhile, Ethiopians are nervously waiting for the details of the emergency decree and sections of their constitutional civil liberties that are to be suspended by the emergency decree for at least six months.