



## GOSSIP

For a change, and after several months of political doldrums, the landscape has begun to churn. Not surprisingly, the recent deal signed at the Sheraton Addis between leaders of the four political parties, including the incumbent's, has struck up the debate at the various gossip corridors across the city.

However, none of the political leaders is facing the sizzle of frying pan more so than Hailu Shawel (Eng.). It is fast becoming a trying task just to find defenders of his, these days, even as the number of his supporters-cum-critics is on the rise.

It seems apparent that the coming national election will hardly be harvest time for Hailu and party. The situation makes it painfully obvious that he will need to employ an abundance of damage control exercises in the few months ahead - all the while paying a huge price, much more so than any of the parties in the deal.

Negotiators from his party, the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP), did not surrender easily after what was an exhaustive, two-month long inter-party dialogue, according to gossip.

Negotiators from the ruling party [in large part] and those from the other opposition parties [to a certain extent] have demonstrated unusual patience in keeping AEUP's negotiators at the roundtable held inside Parliament, gossip disclosed. The latter were proven to be extremely woolly, with all the list of questions they would bring the following day, purportedly from Hailu. Gossip disclosed that the chief negotiator for AEUP was Yacob Leekie, brother of Senay Leekie, a Soviet trained Marxist. He was killed in the mid-1970s inside Menelik's Palace, during a shoot-out between those who had supported Mengistu Hailemariam (Col.) and others stood against him. Senay was a prominent personality in the early years of bloody political struggle within the junior military officers and the leftist politicians around them.

Yacob is also known to have been raised with the family of Kassa W. Mariam, president of the Addis Abeba University, during the Emperor's rule. His daughter, Yeshi, also a great granddaughter of the Emperor's, is married to Hailu's son, Shawel (PhD), gossip claims. Nevertheless, none of the four negotiators of AEUP were as forceful and close to Hailu as Mamushet Amare, disclosed gossip. Once a captain in the *Derg* army, he was calling the shots during the negotiations, gossip said.

Gossip corridor finds that revealing the identities of those on the negotiating front on behalf of the ruling EPRDF proves especially relevant: Bereket Simon, Hailemariam Desalegn, Sekutire Getachew and Muktar Kedir, disclosed gossip.

The Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), a parliamentary opposition composed of young leaders, had been represented by its president, Lidetu Ayalew, as well as Mushie Semu and Mesfin. Gossip learned that there was a huge uncertainty, down to the very last day, as to whether or not Hailu's party would actually sign the deal. They had threatened to drop out of the deal on several occasions. Reason being that they had wanted to talk about broader issues, they had felt would affect the coming election, and not simply the code of conduct. It came as a surprise to all when Yacob came around to agreeing to the signing at the end, according to gossip.

The final point of concern among negotiators was the supposed unpredictability of Hailu fearing he would go for a microphone in the presence of Meles Zenawi. Negotiators from the ruling party had gambled too. They were not to be disappointed as they watched Hailu say what has earned him onslaught from his supporters and appreciation from his opponents across the aisle.

Praised, he was, at a dinner party which the ruling party hosted. The party was hosted inside the Addis Top View Hotel, near Ras Amba Hotel at Arat Kilo. It was held to celebrate the deal on the electoral code of conduct the very night it was signed, Several political leaders from all

the four parties were seated mingled at tables which looked designed to let them feel one another out, gossip said.  
It sure is a sign that something is in the air!

Source: Addis Fortune