Ethiopian leader says he will bury foes 'with our blood'

Prime minister marks one year of war

ADDIS ABABA Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed pledged on Wednesday to bury his government's enemies "with our blood" as he marked the start of the war in the Tigray region one year ago.

Abiy, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, was speaking a day after a state of emergency was declared in the country and with Tigrayan forces threatening to advance on the capital Addis Ababa.

"The pit which is dug will be very deep, it will be where the enemy is buried, not where Ethiopia disintegrates," he said in a speech at an event at the military's headquarters in Addis Ababa.

"We will bury this enemy with our blood and bones and make the glory of Ethiopia high again," said Abiy, who won the Nobel Prize for settling Ethiopia's longtime conflict with Eritrea.

Amomentofsilencewasobserved at the candlelit ceremony to commemorate those killed on Nov. 3, 2020, when forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — including some soldiers — seized military bases in Tigray. In response, Abiy sent more troops to the northern region. The TPLF led Ethiopia's ruling coalition for nearly 30 years but lost control when Abiy took office in 2018 following years of anti-government protests.

Relations with the TPLF soured after they accused him of centralizing power at the expense of Ethiopia's regional states — an accusation Abiy denies.

The conflict in Africa's second most populous country has killed thousands of people, forced more than two million from their homes, and left 400,000 people in Tigray facing famine.

A joint investigation by the United Nations and Ethiopia's state-appointed Human Rights Commission published on Wednesday found that all sides fighting in the



Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed attends a campaign event in Jimma, Ethiopia, on June 16. REUTERS FILES

war had committed violations that may amount to war crimes.

The African Union said on Wednesday that AU chair Moussa Faki Mahamat was following the escalation in Ethiopia with deep concern. He urged the parties to engage in dialogue.

Ethiopia's neighbour Kenya, meanwhile, said its police had heightened security along the border.

Will Davison, senior analyst at the International Crisis Group think tank, said the Tigrayan forces' gains had increased the pressure on Abiy government, as reflected by the State of Emergency. "Right now, it looks difficult for the federal coalition to hold off the Tigray forces' advance, and some of their leaders have recently said that at this late stage they are not looking to negotiate with Abiy," he said.

TPLF spokesperson Getachew Reda did not respond to calls to his satellite phone on Wednesday.

A regional analyst in touch with the parties to the war and who spoke on condition of anonymity told Reuters the TPLF was likely to hold off on any advance on Addis Ababa until they secure the highway running from neighbouring Djibouti to the capital. That requires seizing the town of Mille. On Tuesday, Getachew told Reuters that Tigrayan forces were closing in on Mille.

Abiy's government imposed a six-month state of emergency on Monday with immediate effect.

The order came after the TPLF claimed to have captured several towns in recent days and said it might march on Addis Ababa, about 380 km to the south of their forward positions.

The state of emergency enables the government to order citizens of military age to undergo training and accept military duty. *Reuters*



