

## **Winners Who Disappoint - Nobel Peace Prize to Ethiopia's PM**

### **What is the issue?**

- The [Nobel Peace Prize for 2019](#) has been awarded to Ethiopia's PM Abiy Ahmed for resolving Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict.
- In this context, here is an assessment of the fairness of giving the Nobel Peace Prize to sitting prime ministers or presidents.

### **What is the contention?**

- Mr. Abiy until last year was hailed as a beacon for democratising Ethiopia and befriending Eritrea.
- It was in this backdrop that he was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.
- But with ethnic tensions spiralling, Abiy resorted to violent means to manage the nationwide turbulence.
- He launched a large-scale military offensive against separatists in the Tigray province.
- This led to the deaths of possibly thousands and forced tens of thousands to flee as refugees.

### **Had there been any such instances earlier?**

- **Juan Manuel Santos** - There was similar disappointment over President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia failing to live up to ideals.
- Mr. Santos won the Peace Prize in 2016 for ending the decades-long civil war with FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas.
- Despite his image as a peacemaker, Mr. Santos's presidency saw continuing paramilitary excesses and rampant human rights violations by agents of the state.
- **Barack Obama** - When the 2009 Peace Prize was given to U.S. President Barack Obama, it proved a controversial choice.
- Shortly after receiving the Prize, Mr. Obama ordered an American troop surge in Afghanistan, deepening a bloody war.
- In 2011, he also backed a disastrous military intervention in Libya and subsequently abandoned it when there was chaos.
- **Aung San Suu Kyi** - Another much-maligned Nobel Peace Prize winner is Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi.

- She was chosen in 1991 while in house arrest for her courageous activism against military dictatorship and her campaign for democracy.
- But she assumed the title of State Counsellor in 2016 under a power-sharing arrangement with the military in Myanmar.
- Soon after this, calls for revoking her Prize echoed in international public discourse.
- She teamed up with the repressive armed forces and defended her government at the International Court of Justice against charges of genocide of the Rohingya.
- This decision of her triggered a global uproar.
- Several other awards given to her have lately been rescinded, with Amnesty International slamming her for “shameful betrayal of the values she once stood for”.

### **What is common to all of them?**

- There is no question that Mr. Abiy, Mr. Santos, Mr. Obama and Ms. Suu Kyi have disappointed many of their admirers.
- But what is common to them is that they have been holders of executive state power.
- Their official position pushes these personalities to work under compulsions and make compromises.
  - Mr. Abiy has justified his war in Tigray as part of the Ethiopian government’s “responsibility to enforce rule of law” and the writ of the state.
  - Should his regime collapse, there could be anarchy or a return to the authoritarian regime.
  - Ms. Suu Kyi feels she has no option but to cooperate with the military if Myanmar’s democratisation transition has to eventually succeed.
  - If she openly challenges the military in the transitional period or steps down on conscientious grounds, the dream of full transfer of authority to civilian leadership could be lost.
  - Mr. Obama too rationalised that as a head of state sworn to protect and defend the nation, he believed that “force is sometimes necessary”.

### **What does this imply?**

- Giving the Nobel Prize to sitting prime ministers or presidents is inherently risky.
- These recipients should not be held to the gold standard of a Mother Teresa or Malala Yousafzai.
- An objective view would in fact reveal that all the problematic Nobel Laureates have done some good and some harm.

- Unless the Nobel Committee consciously avoids picking incumbent politicians altogether in the future, there will always be such disappointments.
- Understanding them in their political contexts and in particular moments may help reach a balanced final judgment.

**Source: The Hindu**

