

Return of Red Sea Port of Assab ‘A Matter of Time’: PM Abiy Ahmed

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Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) says it is only “a matter of time” before Ethiopia regains control of the Red Sea port of Assab, continuing his administration’s determined pursuit of a maritime access corridor.

The PM made the remark during an interview with state-media EBC this week, ahead of the inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), in which he emphasized that “it is time to correct past mistakes.”

Seated on the shores of the massive artificial lake created by GERD, dubbed ‘*Nigat*’, the PM described the loss of access to Assab as a mistake made three decades ago. He described projects like the GERD as a “game changer” that can crush centuries-long burdens weighing down the country, connecting Ethiopia’s absence from the Red Sea coast to a series of “little challenges” that have long troubled the nation.

“The Red Sea was part of Ethiopia before thirty years ago,” he said. “The mistake took place yesterday, and will be corrected tomorrow.”

Abiy also remarked that his administration would neither compromise on its interests nor negatively affect the interests of others.

Nonetheless, the quest for maritime access has already ruffled feathers in neighboring Somalia, where a tentative MoU with breakaway Somaliland signed in 2024 caused an uproar.

More recently, Eritrea has condemned Ethiopia's interest in Assab as a threat to its sovereignty. Still, Addis Ababa's long-standing ambition of gaining access to the sea is reflected in remarks from other senior government officials.

Last week, in an interview with a local radio station, State Minister of Finance Eyob Tekalign stated that "Ethiopia's national interest is more definitive than it used to be before three decades ago."

Acknowledging the completion of the GERD as a "turning point," Eyob added that the "shame" of discussing the tale of the two waters has ended, emphasizing that related sentiments only defined in the past thirty years.

"Today, such related sentiments have changed," Eyob said, adding that Ethiopia has raised access to the Red Sea as part of its geopolitical strategic agenda. "We are working aggressively and are ready to stand strong against anyone who opposes the country's national interest in terms of economic, diplomatic, and political missions."

In a similar remark, Teshome Gemechu (Brig. Gen.), director-general of international relations and military cooperation at the Ministry of Defense, stated that Ethiopia has a "historical" right to access the Red Sea and ownership of the Port of Assab.

He described access to the sea as a matter of "national survival."

"As a national defense force in the Horn of Africa, we have the responsibility to defend the interest of our sovereign nation," he said, adding that the Red Sea and Assab were once part of Ethiopia. "Assab was part of our territory. We lost it due to the illegitimacy of the then transitional government."

The Director-General said that a diplomatic solution remains Ethiopia's priority.

However, in a social media post on September 3, 2025, Eritrea's Minister of Information, Yemane Gebremeskel, dismissed recent remarks from Ethiopian officials as a "resurgence of reckless saber-rattling" and a "disdainful distortion of Eritrean history."

He characterized such statements, including those concerning Eritrea's 1993 referendum, as political fallacies that are "too boring and fallacious for serious discourse."

The Minister reiterated what he termed fundamental historical and legal facts, asserting that Eritrea's right to decolonization was an "inalienable and exclusive national political prerogative" that could not be vetoed by any other country.

He emphasized that the 1993 referendum was conducted solely on Eritrea's own unilateral decision and was in no way "predicated on the prior consent, endorsement or greenlight of the occupying power."

"The trite arguments—or political hogwash so to speak—are too boring and fallacious for serious discourse," reads Yemane's post.