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Dissident Eritrean soldiers with tanks took over the information ministry on Jan- 21 and forced state media to call for political prisoners to be freed, a senior intelligence official said. The renegade soldiers have not gone as far as to demand the overthrow of the government of one of Africa's most secretive states, long at odds with the United States and accused of human rights abuses. Eritrea has been led by Isaias Afewerki, 66, for some two decades since it broke from bigger neighbour Ethiopia. The fledgling gold producer on the Red Sea coast has become increasingly isolated, resisting foreign pressure to open up. Soldiers forced the director general of state television to say the Eritrean government should release all political prisoners, the Eritrean intelligence source told Reuters on condition of anonymity. There was no immediate statement from the Asmara government. The mutineers were low- to mid-ranking soldiers who sought a change in the constitution rather than a coup, said one regional expert with close connections in Asmara. About 200 soldiers with two tanks were involved and they had also surrounded the ministry, diplomats in the region said. It was unclear whether loyalist troops were moving against them. On a strategic strip of mountainous land, Eritrea is a tightly controlled one-party state. It has more soldiers per person than any country except North Korea (Reuters, Jan. 21).

The 4th Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), who is living in exile in the US, has refused to dissolve the exiled synod and return home. His Holinesses Abune Merkorios refused to accept the invitation extended to him by the local synod to come home and serve the EOC. Abune Merkorios said he could not do that short of being given his previous position as patriarch. The local synod refused to accept this demand. However, the Holy Synod has offered to continue peace negotiations with the exiled synod led by Abune Merkorios (Reporter, Jan. 20). - The General Secretary of the Holy Synod, Abune Ezkiel, has submitted his resignation to the Patriarchate. Abune Ezekiel said his resignation was made in protest against the attitude shown by the Holy Synod towards the peace talks with the exiled synod. He said he is in favor of achieving peace with the exiled synod first and then going to the election of the sixth patriarch (Yegna Press, Jan. 22).

The emergency food reserve of Ethiopia has reached 460,000 MT, the Emergency Food Security Reserve Administration said. The Acting Head of Public Relations, Gizaw Abate, said that the reserve will feed six million people for six months. He said 50,000 MT of food was added to the reserve during the past six months. The Administration plans to build 200 new warehouses to raise its emergency food reserve to three million MT, which will feed 20 million people for a year. So far, the Administration has 67 warehouses in seven branches (ENA, Jan. 23). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ethiopia and DuPont to boost maize harvests through increased use of hybrid maize seed, improved seed distribution, and post-harvest storage. Maize is a significant contributor to Ethiopia's economic and social development, providing jobs, income and food. This collaboration will help more than 30,000 smallholder maize farmers increase their productivity by up to 50% and help reduce post-harvest loss of maize by as much as 20%. DuPont signed a Letter of Intent to work with Ethiopia as part of the G-8 New Alliance. Since pledging to work with Ethiopia in May 2012, DuPont has increased the number of smallholder farmers it will help from 16,000 to 32,000. DuPont will invest more than \$3m over the next three years to help improve the productivity of smallholder farmers in Ethiopia, which will lead to their enhanced ability to produce nutritious food for their families and communities (ENA, Jan. 23). Ethiopian highland smallholder farmers are expected to benefit from a project which will boost the productivity and marketability of livestock, and irrigated fruits and vegetables. Tuesday saw the launching of the "Livestock and Irrigation Value Chains for Ethiopian Smallholders" (LIVES) Project. LIVES plans to build the capacity of farmers and professionals, and contribute in knowledge management, promotion as well as commodity value chain development. The project promises to integrate gender and the environment as important components in the process. - Figures reveal LIVES will invest over 19m Can \$ over the coming six years; Canada fully finances the project. The project works at 31 districts of 10 Zones in Amhara, Tigray, Oromia and South States. The project targets

training around 200 graduate students through universities in the intervention areas to sustain the gains assumed to happen as relevant consequences of this project. According to LIVES' figures, 200,000 households are going to be engaged in the project which aims to document and scale-up best practices. The project is unique since it integrates livestock with irrigated fruits and vegetables development (state media, Jan. 23).