

Eritrean mutineers surround information ministry

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January 21, 2013 (ADDIS ABABA) - Some 200 disaffected Eritrean troops with two tanks on Monday surrounded the Ministry of Information in the capital Asmara, sources in the Red Sea nation said.

The move comes weeks after Eritrean Minister of Information, Ali Abdu, reportedly deserted to Canada where he is seeking political asylum.

According to the [BBC](#):

The websites of key Eritrean state and ruling party media have been operating erratically, with the site for the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) party inaccessible for part of Monday.

State television and radio were reportedly cutoff shortly after the troops took control of the station. It was reported that a statement was read on the radio calling for the country's 1997 constitution to be reinstalled. It was also reported that the director general of Eritrean Television, Asmelash Abreha was forced to ask for the release of all political prisoners in Eritrea live on State TV.

Normal transmission resumed in the evening showing a delayed news bulletin that did not mention the incident.

Eritrea has the worst levels of press freedom in the world, according to media monitoring groups, and does not allow the international media to operate inside the country, making it difficult to verify the reports.

An Eritrean opposition official in Addis Ababa told *Sudan Tribune* that there has been a growing protest by the Eritrean army against the government due bad governance and corruption.

"What is going on now within the Eritrean military indicates that it is the beginning of the end for the President Isaias Afwerki led dictatorial regime" Ibrahim Haron, the Chairman of the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) said.

Human rights groups have repeatedly labeled Eritrea as one of the most politically repressive nations of the world. Right groups have in the past referred the country as "Africa's biggest prison".

During the past ten years, tens of thousands of Eritreans have fled to Ethiopia to escape the government's policies including the compulsory military service that can be hard to leave.

Members of the Eritrean Army periodically flee to neighbouring countries. In 2012, dozens of members of the Eritrean Navy fled with their speed boats to Yemen.

Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, however the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has since turned the country into a one party state.

The country has never had national elections and it doesn't allow any opposition groups operate.

(ST)