

Fighting rages in Rwandan capital.

Reuters, April 8, 1994

KIGALI, April 8 (Reuter) - Fighting raged for a second day in the Rwandan capital Kigali and around its rebel-held parliament early on Friday as rival tribes and political groups battled for control in renewed civil war.

With the country in a power vacuum following the killing of Rwanda's president on Wednesday night and its woman prime minister on Thursday, a new day began with the scream of mortar bombs and crackle of rifle fire.

A Rwandan resident said there was "an orgy of killings out there".

Fires raged in the city as rebels and soldiers battled around parliament and people from the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu tribes fell to slaughtering each other.

"They fight, then rest, then resume. It's calm one moment, then suddenly there are explosions," the resident said.

In Brussels, the Belgian government - former colonial power in Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi - said soldiers had killed 10 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers on Thursday.

U.N. officials feared violence between Rwanda's Hutu and Tutsi tribes would spread outside the capital, battered by its worst clashes since the start of civil war four years ago.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) appealed to Rwandans to end violence and urged countries that helped broker a peace accord between the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government last year to act to restore order.

The rebels already in Kigali had been based in parliament since December after they entered the city peacefully to take part in the peace plan.

In one incident the Kigali resident saw government soldiers hack to death a young man they accused of being an RPF fighter.

President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu who took power in 1973, and Cyprien Ntaryamira, president of neighbouring Burundi, died when a plane bringing them back from regional peace talks in Tanzania was hit by a rocket on Wednesday night.

It was the first time in modern history that two heads of state were assassinated together. Who killed them was not clear. The predominantly-Tutsi RPF denied involvement.

U.N. officials said casualties from Thursday's violence were "surprisingly high", but further details were due to be issued on Friday.

A Belgian statement said the 10 murdered soldiers, members of the second commando battalion of Flawinne in Belgium, were in charge of the security of Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana.

A U.N. official earlier reported at least 11 Belgian peacekeepers were killed after being disarmed by presidential guards on their way to the airport to investigate the crash.

A U.N. spokesman in Kigali said Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu, was killed on Thursday near the presidential palace in an area where U.N. forces had been denied access.

Members of the 700-strong presidential guard abducted opposition leaders and their families, including three government ministers, the president of the Constitutional Court and president of the national assembly, U.N. officials said.

Residents said many killings were being carried out by members of the army who were searching house-to-house for Tutsi RPF sympathisers and their Hutu political allies.

Youths wielding machetes, knives and clubs stalked Kigali, settling tribal scores by hacking and clubbing people to death or simply shooting them, witnesses said.

The Belgian news agency Belga said on Thursday that troops had killed 17 Rwandan priests.

Belgium said it was planning ways to protect its 1,500 civilian nationals and 800 troops in Rwanda.

A late night cabinet meeting had analysed the situation "particularly with a view to taking appropriate measures for the protection of our compatriots", said a government statement.

Asked by reporters at the United Nations in New York whether Brussels would mount a rescue operation, Belgian ambassador Paul Noterdaeme said: "We will see, everthing is possible.

The U.N. Security Council denounced the violence.

The council took no fresh decision on whether to leave U.N. troops in place. It asked Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to gather information as soon as possible.

U.S. President Bill Clinton expressed horror that "elements of the Rwandan security forces" had murdered officials.

U.N. officials said the RPF, whose 600 fighters in Kigali joined the fighting, told U.N. peacekeepers its reinforcements would move to the capital from their strongholds in the north.

Battles between troops and the RPF shattered a peace accord made in the Tanzanian town of Arusha last August, aimed at ending a civil war that erupted in October 1990.

Hatred between Hutu and Tutsi, former feudal overlords, predate Rwandan and Burundi independence from Belgium in 1962.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994