

Rwandan rebels reject government, plan attack

Mseteka, Buchizya

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MULINDI, Rwanda, April 9 (Reuter) - Rwandan rebels rejected a new interim government and said on Saturday troops would attack the capital where violence erupted after the president was killed.

"We cannot accept the new president. He is among those who are linked to the murder of civilians in Kigali," Major-General Paul Kagame, leader of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), said after Venat Sindikubwabo replaced Juvenal Habyarimana, killed on Wednesday in a rocket attack on his plane.

Reuters reporters with RPF rebels 75 kms (48 miles) north of the capital reported heavy fighting had broken out across a frontline which snakes through the north and northeast of the remote central African state.

"Heavy shelling started early this morning, the rebels are now advancing on three fronts," reporter Buchizya Mseteka told Reuters in Nairobi by satellite telephone from rebel headquarters in Mulindi.

He said the sound of heavy artillery pierced the early morning air of the mountainous region, known to the outside world as one of the last homes of the rare mountain gorilla.

"Anyone who attempts to stop them is our enemy. We are moving on Kigali," Kagame told reporters at the bush camp. "Any government forces that want to join us are free to do so."

Kagame said his troops had made an irreversible decision to fight a clique he identified as two political parties close to the slain Habyarimana and to end bloodshed during which relief workers say several thousand people were killed.

Sindikubwabo, formerly parliament speaker, was a close ally of Habyarimana.

Top RPF official Patrick Mazimhaka said the heaviest fighting was raging at Byumba, some 50 kms (35 miles) north of Kigali.

He added that the rebels wanted to restore a transitional government in Rwanda, under a peace agreement reached in Tanzania last year, and would not let the anarchy which has reigned in Kigali for the past few days to go unpunished.

The installation of transitional institutions under that accord has been put back five times since last December.

Sindikubwabo's prime minister, Jean Kambanda, is from a faction of the splintered opposition Democratic and Republican Movement (MDR) dominated by the majority Hutu tribe. It opposes any cooperation with the RPF, dominated by the minority Tutsi.

The RPF launched its rebellion from neighbouring Uganda in 1990 with a force of about 10,000 fighters. It fought its way almost to Kigali until it was repulsed by Rwandan troops reinforced by soldiers from Zaire, and later joined in peace talks.

In an earlier broadcast on rebel radio, Kagame said anyone standing in the RPF's way would be considered an accomplice and dealt with accordingly.

Mazimhaka said he rebels had no objections to French, Belgian or American forces flying into Rwanda to rescue their nationals.

French forces on an evacuation mission landed in Kigali and headed downtown early on Saturday.

The RPF has about 600 men in Kigali and the announcement on Saturday morning seemed to give a clear signal of an RPF move on the capital from its stronghold in the north of the country.

A U.N. peacekeeping force, stationed in Rwanda to monitor a derailed peace accord between rebels and government forces, said late on Friday the security situation was "still precarious".

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) has appealed to both the RPF and government forces to cease hostilities and act to rescue the peace process.

UNAMIR said in a statement that the RPF rebels had captured several positions previously held by an elite presidential guard loyal to Habyarimana, a Hutu in power for more than 20 years.

Habyarimana died with Cyprien Ntaryamira, 38-year-old president of neighbouring Burundi, when a plane bringing them back from regional peace talks in Tanzania was hit by a rocket on Wednesday night.

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