

Fighting erupts in Rwandan capital

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KIGALI, April 12 (Reuter) - Fighting flared soon after dawn on Tuesday between government troops and fighters of the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), who threaten a push into the capital Kigali already ravaged by tribal bloodletting.

"There are clashes with machineguns and recoilless rifles. Everyone is waiting to see what the RPF will do," one resident told Reuters.

The rebels are drawn largely from the minority Tutsi tribe, whose kinfolk have been the main victims of Hutu tribespeople in nearly a week of carnage in which thousands have died.

Tuesday's clashes broke out after a fairly quiet night, residents said.

RPF commanders, declaring they want to save the city from a "clique of murderers", have said their forces will soon unleash "a lot of military activity".

The RPF has rejected a new interim government as null and void. It also says it is not party to any ceasefire.

"The RPF cannot sign an agreement with a government it does not recognise," the RPF said in a radio broadcast. "As far as the RPF is concerned there is no government in Rwanda."

It accuses interim ruler Venat Theodore Sindikubwabo of opposing the peace deal that ended a civil war sparked when the rebels invaded from neighbouring Uganda in 1990.

The RPF regards as its main enemy the 2,000-strong presidential guard, which it blames for most of the killing in Kigali since the death in an air crash last Wednesday of President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu.

A French military commander said on Monday RPF fighters were within 2.5 km (1 1/2 miles) of the capital.

Late on Monday, government forces began deploying around the city with machineguns and rocket launchers and even French paratroopers, who are among troops evacuating hundreds of terrified Westerners, set up defensive positions.

RPF chairman Alexis Kanyarengwe has pledged that his movement will restore order and begin fresh talks with other parties to establish a transitional government.

Tribal violence has been a bloody theme in the history of both Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi, which became independent from Belgium in 1962.

Red Cross workers believe tens of thousands of civilians may have died in the latest violence. Those killed included the prime minister and several cabinet

ministers, as well as African nuns, priests and aid workers.

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