

Drunken Hutus threaten strangers in Rwanda capital

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KIGALI, April 14 (Reuter) - Marauding gangs of drunken Hutu tribesmen, in fear of advancing Tutsi-dominated rebels, threatened on Thursday to kill any strangers entering their slum areas in the rambling Rwandan capital Kigali.

The threats came as the United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali considered withdrawing a 2,500-strong U.N. peacekeeping force from the tiny central African state.

Gangs of Hutus, scared of reprisal massacres from the advancing rebels and drunk on banana beer, erected roadblocks across the city and threatened to kill anyone they did not know or recognise, including government soldiers.

"Mass hysteria is sweeping the town, they are sure the rebels will kill them. There is no control," said a witness.

The approaching rebels aim to take over a city bathed in the blood of thousands slaughtered in a tribal bloodbath sparked by last Wednesday's killing of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana.

Belgium wants all its nationals out of the battered capital before a deadline from the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) runs out. But it was not clear if the ultimatum expires on Wednesday or Thursday night.

Most of the drunken men were from the Nyamirambo areas, a patch of slums on the outskirts of the city, where Belgian paratroopers came under fire on Wednesday.

The men tried to disarm two Belgian paratroopers escorting a convoy evacuating the last foreigners from Kigali and then threw hand grenades at them.

The Belgian troops returned fire before racing out across the area's potholed, sandy streets. No-one on the convoy was injured.

The slum area saw heavy fighting earlier in the day between infiltrating rebels of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and regular army soldiers.

There was a lull in fighting late on Wednesday although rebel officers said more of their units were pouring into the areas surrounding Kigali ready to make the last attack on embattled government soldiers.

"It's a question of when we decide to do it. But let no-one doubt the fact that we are taking the city," an officer with the RPF told Reuters.

The rebels say they were waiting for all foreign troops to leave the country and evacuations to be completed before making the final move on a heavily

demoralised government army.

“We do not want any foreign soldier caught in our battles. We would rather they left before we launched our final decisive move on the enemy,” another rebel officer who declined to be named told Reuters.

Belgium said it was pulling out its 440-man contingent, part of the U.N. peacekeeping mission, and Boutros-Ghali immediately called for plans to be drawn up for a possible withdrawal of remaining U.N. troops.

“In light of the decision by the government of Belgium, it is my assessment that it would be extremely difficult for UNAMIR (the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda) to carry out its tasks effectively,” Boutros-Ghali wrote in a letter to the Security Council.

“The continued discharge by UNAMIR of its mandate will become untenable unless the Belgian contingent is replaced by another equally well-equipped contingent or unless the government of Belgium reconsiders its decision to withdraw its contingent,” Boutros-Ghali added.

The U.N. force also includes about 940 troops from Bangladesh and 840 from Ghana and much smaller contingents from more than 20 other countries. The United Nations also has a large humanitarian operation in Rwanda.

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