

Army seals off Bujumbura district after clashes

AFP, March 24, 1995

BUJUMBURA, March 24 (AFP) - Burundi's Tutsi-dominated army on Friday sealed off part of the tinderbox capital Bujumbura where it fought armed Hutu militias as European politicians arrived for crisis talks.

The soldiers prevented any access to the southern Kanyosha district after the rattle of gunfire ceased overnight. Officials gave no details of casualties but observers said the army appeared to have been clearing out Hutu extremists.

No violence was reported in the rest of the city, where tension between the Tutsis and the majority Hutus has brought fears of a bloodbath, and police said business was "almost as usual" in the central market.

Hutu traders had abandoned their stalls since Sunday, fearing reprisals from Tutsis after Hutu extremists were blamed for an ambush on a road convoy Sunday in which five people were killed, including three Belgians

shot down in cold blood, one of them a small girl.

A team of three European government officials led by French Cooperation Minister Bernard Debre was set to hold meetings throughout the day Friday with Burundian leaders on ways to prevent the country plunging into carnage.

Some 50,000 people were slaughtered after Burundi's first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated in a foiled military coup of October 1993, which the government survived.

Ethnic tensions have mounted again since at the cost of hundreds of lives and a fragile coalition between Hutu and Tutsi politicians was formed late last year in a bid to prevent an explosion of violence.

Neighbouring Rwanda, which has the same ethnic mix of a Hutu majority and a Tutsi minority, plunged into a civil war in April last year, in which between 500,000 and a million people, mainly Tutsis and moderate

Hutus, were massacred by Hutu extremists before the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front seized power in June.
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