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REBEL FORCES TIGHTEN NOOSE AROUND KIGALI.

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By Mark Huband in Kigali.

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Government troops cut off from officers in city centre

REBEL forces yesterday intensified their stranglehold on the capital, Kigali, cutting a road that links 3,000 troops in the last government-held barracks to their commanding officers in the city centre.

The road is the second route out of the city to be sealed in two days. On Sunday, the Rwandan Patriotic Front attacked a United Nations convoy on the road to Gitarama, the seat of the self-appointed interim government.

Yesterday, in response to UN complaints, the rebels said the site was a war zone. The day before it had been open to traffic.

The president of the government, based in Gitarama, 30 miles south of the capital, yesterday promised to try the perpetrators of massacres in which more than 200,000 have died. But he refused to condemn the killings, which are continuing only two miles from the town.

Theodore Sindikubwabo, a paediatrician who became president on April 8 after the suspected assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana, said both sides in the five-week conflict have been guilty of killings, although no independent witnesses have verified this.

Speaking from his office, a former managerial training centre, the president said: "We have demanded that the population remains calm. After the death of President Habyarimana there was a great shock among the population."

Scores of heavily-armed paratroopers, gendarmes and presidential guardsmen patrolled the grounds, harassing cameramen who tried to film what is, in effect, a military base with a civilian puppet government.

A few miles away, at the Virgin Immaculata Catholic mission in Kabgayi, up to 5,000 members of Rwanda's Tutsi minority shelter. They are terrified of nightfall - in the past week 30 people have been forced from the church after dark and never seen again.

"They have come every night," said a teenager. "They look for young people, or civilised, educated people, and take them outside. The teachers and administrators are the people they want. And the students. They want the people who are intelligent, and demand their identity cards." National identity cards clearly state a person's tribe.

The refugees fell silent as a gendarme strode over to a crowd gathered around a boy, aged 10, who had a five-inch gash across the top of his head.

"It happened yesterday morning," a man whispered, pointing to the boy. "He went to find water, because there's hardly any here. He saw some military and they attacked him. We thought he was dead, but instead he came back badly injured. It happened just outside the church."

All the people here are Tutsis expelled from their homes in Gitarama.

Two miles away, the prime minister, Jean Kambanda, was asked how many Tutsis he has in his 19-member cabinet. "I don't know. I have never asked," he replied.

But there are no Tutsis in government, because the entire Tutsi political establishment was slaughtered within days of the violence erupting.

He appeared unaware that Tutsis were still being murdered, every night near the church. It is few minutes drive away in his Mercedes.