

Tribal murders ahead of Rwanda peace talks

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RULINDO, Rwanda, March 2 (AFP) - A five-month-old baby was hacked to death as a new round of tribal bloodletting killed at least 15 people and Rwandan government forces exchanged fire with rebels Tuesday.

Ahead of peace talks starting next Friday aimed at ending 28 months of civil war, Rinyulimanana rasped his last breath in the remote hamlet of Rulindo, about 30 kilometres northwest of the capital Kigali, at 2:45 p.m. (1245 GMT).

Mortars boomed and heavy machine guns rattled as soldiers battled rebel guerrillas 1.5 kilometres (less than a mile) away in Mbogo commune.

Blood from deep gashes in the baby's head soaked into the earthen floor of the mud-walled shack just inside government lines where his Tutsi parents and five relatives were murdered with machetes by attackers believed to be from the majority Hutu tribe on Monday night.

No one shed a tear for the boy, survived by his brother, born in October 1990, when rebels of the mainly Tutsi Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded this tiny central African state from neighbouring Uganda.

Neither boy had a Christian name, for their family of peasant farmers had yet to baptise them.

A member of the Rwandan human rights group ADL, who accompanied this reporter and a Belgian journalist to the scene of the killings, said Hutu attackers had certainly massacred the family.

"The killers are there, they're looking at us," said the human rights activist, gesturing at a group of bare-foot peasants squatting nearby.

Crosses of twigs marked the graves of the family, dug by neighbours in nearby banana plantations on a green hillside.

The attackers first tried to break down the wooden door of their two-room hut.

When that failed, they used ma-

chetes to cut a hole in the wall of the boys' parents bedroom. They then set the parents' bed of tree branches on fire, cutting them down as they fled outside.

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