

Troops rampage in Rwanda after presidents killed

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KIGALI, April 7 (Reuter) - Troops, presidential guards and gendarmes rampaged through the Rwandan capital Kigali in a chaotic orgy of bloodletting on Thursday, following the killing of the presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi.

Gangs of youths bent on settling tribal scores joined the soldiers or roamed the streets of Kigali hacking or clubbing civilians to death with machetes, batons and knives or simply shooting them, diplomats or witnesses said.

Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, 57, and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira, 38, killed late on Wednesday when rockets downed their plane, were Hutu, the majority tribe in both countries long at odds with the Tutsi minority.

Ntaryamira's predecessor was murdered by Tutsi in October.

A U.N. spokesman, meanwhile, said members of the presidential

guard on Thursday abducted three government ministers, their families and three U.N. military observers.

"It is becoming messier and messier. There are a lot of people with a lot of guns taking different orders and shooting and detaining people," said a Western diplomat. "A casualty toll is impossible."

The diplomat and witnesses spoke of fighting all over the city. Security forces, at times at odds with one another, roamed the capital attacking people.

"Various clans are murdering others. There is a general score settling going on in Kigali," one diplomat said.

U.N. forces patrolled with security forces in some parts of the city while fellow peacekeepers elsewhere were ordered to withdraw or be shot, a U.N. spokesman said.

Witnesses reported a lot of shooting around the parliament building

in the centre of Kigali, where 600 rebels of the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) have been camped following the signing of a peace accord in Tanzania in August.

Bitter rivalry between Hutu and Tutsi, the former feudal overlords, predate Rwanda's and Burundi's independence from Belgium in 1962.

Rwanda, famed for its rare mountain gorillas, called itself the "Switzerland of Africa" before a 1990 rebel invasion.

Tens of thousands of Tutsi and Hutu have died in ethnic slaughter in both countries over the years. The death toll in Burundi since renegade troops killed its first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, on October 21 is up to 50,000.

Shooting raged in Rwanda on Thursday despite government appeals on state radio for calm and for people to stay at home.

Belgian BRTN radio said several ministers and top officials had been killed and the Tutsi-dominated army had mutinied.

"You really don't want to go out there when we can hear the shooting. No one knows who is in control," one resident said.

"There is shooting, people are being terrorised, people are inside their homes lying on the floor. We are suffering the consequences of the death of the head of state," Rwandan Prime Minister Agatha Uwilingiyimana told Radio France Internationale.

The Belgian news agency Belga said an attempt to arrest Uwilingiyimana failed after loyal soldiers stopped presidential guard taking her away.

Mukhtar Gueye, spokesman for the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda, said presidential guards had seized Rwandan Information Minister Faustin Rucogoza, Labour and Social Affairs Minister Landuard Ndasingwa and Agriculture Minister Frederic Nzamurambaho.

The identity of the killers of Habyarimana and Ntaryamira, returning from a peace summit in Tanzania, was a mystery.

A government official at Kigali airport to welcome Habyarimana home told Reuters two rockets hit the plane as it landed. "They did not have a chance, the plane just burned."

A government statement said two Burundi ministers, five senior Rwandan officials and the French crew of the Rwandan presidential jet also died on the plane.

A Rwandan Defence Ministry statement broadcast on Rwandan radio said the presidential plane "was shot down by unidentified elements in circumstances which are still unclear."

Habyarimana took power in Rwanda in a coup in 1973 and was blamed by the RPF for repeated delays in forming a new government

and parliament to end the civil war.

The RPF denied any involvement in the rocket attack.

Rwandan Foreign Minister Jean Marie Ngendahayo told reporters that the deaths of Habyarimana and Ntaryamira were no accident : "What happened was an assassination."

African and Western nations condemned the killing of the two presidents and called for peace rather than more bloodshed.

Professor Filip Reyntjens, an expert in Central African affairs at Antwerp University, said his sources in Kigali told him that military troops had arrested several leading Tutsis.

Government sources said Belgian

soldiers under the U.N. mission in Rwanda were guarding the airport, which was closed.

Gueye said the airport was quiet but elements of the presidential guard prevented U.N. troops from reaching the crash site to investigate and demanded that they hand over their weapons.

He denied a report quoting Germany's ambassador in Kigali, Dieter Hoelscher, as saying eyewitnesses had reported that mortar bombs were fired at the U.N. headquarters in the capital.

He also declined to give the nationality of the abducted U.N. observers.

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