

Rwandan capital plunges back into war

Reuters, April 8, 1994

KIGALI, April 8 (Reuter) - Soldiers killed at least 11 Belgian U.N. peacekeepers and the woman prime minister as Rwanda's capital plunged deeper into civil war following the downing of a plane carrying the country's president.

The scream of mortar bombs and crackle of rifle fire raged on in parts of Kigali and around the rebel-held parliament building on Friday with the country gripped by a power vacuum.

U.N. officials feared that violence between Rwanda's Hutu majority and Tutsi minority tribes would spread outside the capital, battered by its worst battles since the start of civil war four years ago.

President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu who took power in 1973, and Cyprien Ntaryamira, the president of neighbouring Burundi, died when a plane bringing them back from regional peace talks in Tanzania was hit by a rocket on Wednesday night.

U.N. officials said casualties on Thursday from fighting and a ram-

page by unruly government forces following the killing of the presidents were "surprisingly high". Casualty figures were due to be issued on Friday.

A U.N. spokesman said at least 11 Belgian peacekeepers were shot after being disarmed by presidential guards on their way to the airport to investigate the plane crash.

He said the bodies of 11 of 13 Belgian soldiers detained had been recovered with bullet wounds. "You can call it an execution," he said. The last two were unaccounted for.

The U.N. spokesman in Kigali said Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana was killed on Thursday near the presidential palace in an area where U.N. forces had been denied access.

Belgium said after an emergency cabinet meeting it had analysed the situation "particularly with a view to taking appropriate measures for the protection of our compatriots".

Belgian authorities had made the necessary contacts with other interes-

ted governments and the United Nations, it said.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman would not elaborate when asked whether the government was about to arrange the evacuation of Belgian nationals from Rwanda.

Belgium, the former colonial power in Rwanda and Burundi, has about 1,500 civilian nationals and 800 troops in Rwanda.

Commanders of the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), whose 600 fighters in Kigali joined fighting, told U.N. peacekeepers RPF reinforcements would move to the capital from their strongholds in northern Rwanda, U.N. officials said.

Battles around parliament between troops and RPF fighters shattered a peace agreement hammered out in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha last August to end the civil war and install a transitional government before elections in 1995.

Members of the 700-strong presidential guard abducted opposition leaders and their families, including three government ministers, the president of the Constitutional Court and president of the national assembly, U.N. officials said.

Residents said many killings were being carried out by members of the army who were searching house-to-house for Tutsi RPF sympathisers and their Hutu political allies.

Youths wielding machetes, knives

and clubs stalked Kigali, settling tribal scores by hacking and clubbing people to death or simply shooting them, witnesses said.

Hatred between Hutu and Tutsi, former feudal overlords, predate Rwandan and Burundi independence from Belgium in 1962.

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 was estimated at up to 50,000.

A U.N. official said the prime minister was "evidently" murdered by members of the presidential guard. U.S. President Bill Clinton said he was horrified that "elements of the Rwandan security forces" had sought out and murdered officials.

Her husband, two children and Prime Minister-Designate Faustin Twagiramungu were said to be under U.N. protection.

Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu, was appointed in July last year and was one of Africa's first woman prime ministers.

Asked in a telephone interview with Belgian RTL-Television earlier if she feared for her life, she replied: "I fear for the security of everyone. The international community must act."

Families trapped in single-storey homes and terrified shells would plunge through flimsy roofs spent

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listening to explosions.