

Rwandan rebels close in on chaotic capital

Hartley, Aidan

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MULINDI, RWANDA, April 11 (Reuter) - Rwandan rebels said on Monday their 20,000-strong guerrilla force was closing in on the chaotic capital Kigali from three sides and resistance from government units was disintegrating.

In Kigali, a top French military commander who declined to be identified, advised reporters to leave the city saying the rebels were within 10 kms (six miles).

"The rebels are just 10 kms outside the city. This place is going to get dangerous," he said.

Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) chairman Alexis Kanyarengwe told Reuters in rebel-held territory : "Our forces are advancing...government soldiers do not have the will to put up resistance so we shall know in days what the resolution is."

"We are hopeful that the strength of the RPF coupled with support of well-wishers among the Rwandan people will allow us to avoid the chaos of somewhere like Somalia," he said.

RPF officials said two battalions of some 1,200 rebels were on the outskirts of the capital in the area of Kabuye waiting to enter the city and reinforce a 600-strong battalion there.

"Those two battalions are just a vanguard of a much larger force," said RPF spokesman Wilson Rutayisire in the guerrilla headquarters of Mulindi in the hilly north.

The battalion has been in Kigali as part of a nine-month old peace agreement to end Rwanda's three-year old civil war.

The rebels say it has been under attack from government units since President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed when his plane was hit by rockets on Wednesday.

A further 1,200 rebels are bringing up the rear of the advance party in the district of Rutongo about 15 kms (nine miles) north of Kigali, Rutayisire told Reuters.

Since the RPF launched a fresh offensive on Saturday, its forces have crossed the U.N.-monitored demilitarised zones along a front about 150 kms (94 miles) across northern Rwanda and plunged into the valleys and hills further south.

Guerrillas in full combat gear could be seen through the mist on the move south in long lines.

Rutayisire said the RPF was moving on the northwestern road to the government garrison town of Ruhengeri, towards the capital from the northeast town of Gacibu and from the north.

He said government garrisons have been completely encircled and although the RPF is meeting resistance some government forces had indicated they did not want to fight.

The RPF regards as its main enemy the 2,000-strong presidential guard which it blames for most of the killings in Kigali.

Kanyarengwe said the RPF could have won the civil war on the battlefield a year ago when the rebels gained ground in an offensive that lasted days, but that it had previously believed a political settlement could be reached.

He said the RPF would now take control, restore order and begin fresh talks with other parties to establish a transitional government.

Kanyarengwe, a 57-year-old former interior minister from Habyarimana's government, said the RPF rejected an interim government set up in Kigali.

"They are just a screen for the killers. We do not accept their legitimacy. They are responsible for resumption of

He added that those the RPF believed were responsible for massacres in Kigali would be brought to justice once law and order had been restored.

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