

Bloodshed Mounts in Rwanda.

Catherine Bond

The Times, April 18, 1994

By Catherine Bond in Kigali.

Fierce fighting continued in the Rwandan capital over the weekend spreading to the city centre and hindering efforts by United Nations forces to foster negotiations between Tutsi-led rebels and an army of the country's majority Hutu tribe.

Witnesses said Rwandan soldiers had hacked to death civilians who had been tied up then butchered. Some victims were being left to plead for their lives for up to half an hour before being shot dead, and women were being raped then killed.

The situation polarised further as the army announced the appointment of a new chief of staff, General Augustin Bizimungu, to succeed the former chief of staff who had died with President Habyarimana 12 days ago in a suspicious plane crash which also killed the newly appointed Hutu president of neighbouring Burundi.

At their headquarters in the city's parliament building, senior members of the Rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) said they were expecting reinforcements which were converging on the capital. A spokesman claimed that General Bizimungu was a Hutu extremist who was opposed to sharing power with the Tutsi.

A Belgian military officer who left Kigali yesterday said both warring

factions had agreed that the airport should be a neutral zone under UN control. A rebel spokesman confirmed that on Friday they had shelled the airport where a contingent of Ghanaian troops would take over to allow the Belgians to begin withdrawing tomorrow. The action, the spokesman added, had been taken in response to a rocket attack aimed at the rebels by a Rwandan army unit.

Willy Claes, the Belgian Foreign Minister, said reports of the rebel attack on the airport had reached Brussels. The decision to withdraw its 400 peacekeepers from the 2,500-strong UN force had been taken after the presidential guard had killed ten Belgian soldiers who had been protecting Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the Prime Minister.

The rebels have listed more than 20 conditions they want met before they will negotiate with the army, including the dismantling of the 1,000-strong presidential guard which they blame for initiating the slaughter in the capital in which about 20,000 people are believed to have died in less than two weeks.

More than 15,000 refugees from the hill-to-hill fighting around the city are taking shelter in a football stadium and a hospital, both of which are guarded by UN troops from Bangladesh.