

## Bujumbura [Inter-ethnic clashes left 15 dead]

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BUJUMBURA, Dec 21 (AFP)- Burundi's cabinet met in crisis talks Wednesday as the capital Bujumbura ground to a standstill amid sporadic shooting after inter-ethnic clashes left 15 dead, sparking fears of civil war.

No official toll was released, but witnesses said several people were killed overnight Tuesday in the Bwiza district of the city in inter-ethnic clashes involving Hutus and Tutsis.

The presidency said the cabinet was studying means of imposing a return to calm.

President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya visited the Bwiza quarter before presiding over the government meeting. Three ministers of the majority Tutsi principal opposition party, the Party for Unity and National progress (UPRONA) took part in the crisis meeting, the presidency said.

The rival Burundian parties in the government coalition have been bitterly divided since the beginning of the month. The Tutsi opposition has threatened to walk out if the

new speaker of the national assembly, Jean Minani, keeps his post.

The opposition accuses him of orchestrating the killing of Tutsis last year after the October 1993 attempted coup d'Etat during which Melchior Ndadaya, the first Hutu president of Burundi, was assassinated by the military.

The military, mainly made up of minority Tutsis, have been accused by members of the majority-Hutu Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), of supporting Tutsi militia, who destroyed houses occupied by the Hutus. The chief of staff had not responded Wednesday to the accusations.

The Hutu inhabitants left the area Wednesday, while FRODEBU denounced the "ethnic cleansing" of the capital.

Tension between the tribes is at breaking point, raising fears that Burundi may plunge into a savage civil war like that which left between 500,000 and a million dead in its northern neighbour, Rwanda, where the

ethnic mix is identical – 85 percent Hutu and 14 percent Tutsi.

That war broke out after the presidents of both countries were killed when their plane was shot down over Kigali on April 6.

The current round of violence began on Sunday, when armed men, suspected of being Hutu militia, killed about 10 people in the Musaga quarter, an area which is almost entirely Tutsi.

Reprisals followed Tuesday, in the central market area of Bujumbura where about 15 people were killed,

according to Communications Minister Germain Nkeshimana. The victims were mostly Hutus.

That led to clashes spilling over into the Bwiza district where shots and grenade explosions could be heard throughout the night.

The city was almost paralysed Wednesday. Public transport ground to a halt, and shops and offices remained shut as people stayed at home fearing renewed violence.

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