

Colonel former mayor of Burundi capital, abducted

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BUJUMBURA, March 14 (AFP) - Two unidentified assailants have kidnapped a former mayor of Burundi's capital Bujumbura, Colonel Lucien Sabuku, police in the ethnically-troubled central African nation announced Wednesday.

One of Sabuku's employees, who was with him at the time but fled, said the two men, riding bicycles, forced the colonel to stop his car in the northern Kinama suburb of the city, boarded it and made him drive towards the Kamenge district on Monday.

Kamenge is a stronghold of the Hutu majority, while the army is dominated by minority Tutsis, who have frequently been locked in bloody strife with the Hutus both in this central African highland nation and neighbouring Rwanda.

Sabuku is an advisor to the ministry of the interior and security.

Kidnappings, like political assassinations,

have regular occurrences in Burundi for more than a year. Another senior officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard Kabwari, was kidnapped a year ago and has never been seen since. In January, security forces discovered a detention centre and a small cemetery in Kamenge.

Bujumbura was calm on Tuesday, three days after the assassination of Energy and Mines Minister Ernest Kabushemeye, whose body is due to be buried on Thursday. A period of official mourning has been declared until then.

But grenade explosions were heard in working-class districts of the capital on Saturday night, after the minister was murdered and at least three people were killed in conflict in the centre and northwest, officials said on Monday.

One of Kabushemeye's attackers died in hospital of his wounds Saturday after being shot by one of the

minister's bodyguards, and an injured bodyguard also died Sunday, national radio reported Monday.

Police Sunday said they had arrested two suspects over the unclaimed attack on the minister, who was shot as he was driving his car in the centre of the capital Bujumbura. At least one passer-by was hurt.

No further information has been released on the arrests, which were confirmed by President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, or on the identities of the assailants.

The Burundian government is a coalition linking parties of the Tutsi minority with moderate Hutu parties under an agreement reached last year to stave off mass ethnic bloodshed in the traditionally unstable nation.

In October 1993, more than 50,000 people died in massacres sparked by the assassination in a failed military coup bid of the first

Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, elected in Burundi's first multiparty elections that year.

Political parties across the board have condemned the assassination of Kabushemeye, who headed the Burundian People's Rally, a small party allied to the president's mainly Hutu Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU).

Last April, crisis struck when Ndadaye's successor Cyprien Ntaryamira died with Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana in a suspicious plane crash which sparked a bloodbath between Hutus and Tutsis in the neighbouring country.

Ntibantunganya, a Hutu, was named to office late last year following negotiations between the political parties, which agreed that the situation in the country was too tense for a vote to take place.

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