RPF maintain pressure as army responds to ceasefire conditions

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KIGALI, April 18 (AFP) - Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels kept up the pressure on government forces in Kigali overnight, with fierce mortar and cannon-fire exchanges aimed to weaken the army's resolve, a military spokesman said.

"It's a classic technique, to weaken the opponent psychologically and physically, to keep him awake," he told AFP.

The spokesman was speaking at the Meridien Hotel in the capital, situated on the front line in the northeast of the capital, which is disputed by government and rebel forces.

Intermittent bursts of gunfire rang out during the night from the surrounding hills.

The African state was plunged into an frenzy of ethnic bloodletting following the death on April 6 of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyariamana, whose plane government troops say was shot down.

Most of the 20,000 people killed were members of the minority Tutsi tribe which dominates the RPF, hacked or clubbed to death by hardline government supporters from the majority Hutu group.

UN attempts to mediate a ceasefire – rebel and army commanders met Friday for the first time since the president's death – have so far failed to end the violence.

A second round of talks due Saturday did not take place.

Rwandan state radio said late Sunday that government forces had responded to a set of RPF preconditions for talks issued by the Tutsi-dominated movement on Saturday, but failed to indicate the tenor of the response.

Abdul Kabia of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda told AFP Sunday the armed forces had accepted a rebel demand for joint patrols by security forces and its guerril-

las to restore order. They also agreed to the principle of a judicial inquiry into the bloodshed in Kigali.

But it was unclear how they had responded to the rebels' insistence that the government and the presidential guard – accused of horrific atrocities – be disbanded.

Many of the RPF conditions are thought unacceptable to the new armed forces chief Augustin Bizimungu – branded a "Hutu hardliner" by the RPF – appointed Saturday to replace General Deogratias Nasabimana, killed with the president.

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