

Rebel forces move towards capital, western troops in Kigali

Serge Arnold

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NAIROBI, April 9 (AFP) - Rebel and government forces in Rwanda clashed north of the capital Saturday as the rebels marched on Kigali after rejecting an interim government set up amid the country's latest blood-bath.

French and Belgian troops were sent to Kigali where French soldiers secured the airport in preparation for evacuation of foreign nationals while US troops arrived in Bujumbura, the capital of neighbouring Burundi.

Rwandan diplomats here said Rwanda Patriotic Front (FPR) rebels were marching towards the capital from their northern bases, and an FPR spokeswoman in neighbouring Uganda warned the French troops "not to stand in the way" of the rebels.

An FPR statement, broadcast by its radio monitored here, vowed the troops would "restore order" in Kigali and said the situation had made

it "impossible to pursue application" of a peace agreement signed last August to end three years of civil war.

Some 200 US Marines arrived in the capital of neighboring Burundi Saturday as France, Belgium, the former colonial power, and Washington were working "extremely closely" on a military operation to protect – and possibly evacuate – foreign residents stranded in Rwanda, French officials in Paris said.

Germany, Italy, Britain and the Netherlands were also in contact with Paris and Brussels for the possible evacuation of their expatriates by French and Belgian troops. But by midday Saturday none of the western countries had given the order for their nationals to leave.

In Paris, the French military chief of staff, Admiral Jacques Lanxade, said the situation "had deteriorated" Saturday morning – after the United Nations said it had mediated a cease-

fire Friday and announced the formation of an interim Rwandan government – and "there is shooting" in Kigali.

An AFP correspondent in Kigali confirmed the sporadic firing.

Lanxade said no evacuation operation had begun "because conditions would not allow a (safe) transfer" of foreigners to the airport.

Thousands – including Rwanda's prime minister – have been killed in the ethnic warfare that erupted in Kigali after the Rwandan and Burundi presidents were killed in a plane crash there late Wednesday after their craft was reportedly shot down.

Burundi has remained calm, despite the same history of ethnic warfare between each country's Hutu majority and Tutsi minority.

Some 280 French paratroopers secured Kigali airport after landing their Saturday morning and a further 120 French troops were to arrive from the Central African Republic later in the day.

Lanxade said the military operation "is exclusively aimed at allowing the departure" of foreign nationals.

He said a French junior officer and his wife who had sheltered some Hutus at their home were "most probably" killed by rebels from the largely Tutsi FPR, while voluntary French worker in Kigali was missing.

A French priest was also killed Wednesday night by FPR forces in

the north, he said.

Some 40 Belgian soldiers in the UN mission in Rwanda assisted the landing of French troops in Kigali, while Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo said Saturday in Brussels that military planes had left Belgium to protect its 1,500 nationals in Rwanda.

A military spokesman at Melsbroek airbase near Brussels said seven Belgian air force C-130 Hercules planes left Saturday for Rwanda, while the Netherlands flew one of its own Hercules planes out with the Belgian craft.

The commander of Belgian UN troops, Colonel Luc Marchal, who spoke from Kigali on Belgian radio, said Saturday that fighting in Kigali appeared to be concentrated around a presidential guard camp and a zone occupied by FPR troops near the national assembly.

The Rwandan diplomats in contact with the Rwandan military command meanwhile said that FPR forces had crossed a buffer zone set up under a ceasefire accord between the rebel FPR and government in March 1993.

They said the FPR troops were advancing in a broad front and "have already reportedly engaged in skirmishes with government troops" in several places.

The bulk of the FPR forces, estimated at some 20,000, are based in

Mulindi near the Ugandan border. Front, and "executed" politicians
The FPR communique from rebel who supported the Front, which was
chief Commander Paul Kigame said to have been brought into a future
the Rwandan presidential guard had transitional government.
killed "numerous supporters" of the sa/ns/ap