

Rwandan troops block Kigali runway as Belgian paras head for city

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BRUSSELS, April 9 (AFP) - Rwandan armed forces have blocked the runway of Kigali airport, a Belgian Defence Ministry spokesman said here Saturday, raising doubts about the mission of Belgian paratroopers bound for Rwanda.

The spokesman, Colonel Freddy van Deweghe, spoke after the departure from Brussels of two plane-loads of Belgian paratroopers to protect about 2,000 Belgian nationals in war-torn Rwanda, and prepare for their evacuation.

He said hardline elements of the Rwandan government were spreading an anti-Belgian hate campaign, which may have contributed to the slaying of 10 Belgian members of a United Nations contingent in Rwanda on Thursday.

The Belgian authorities are maintaining an official news black-out on the departure of about 800 Belgian paratroopers, refusing to say when

they leave or where they will land.

But one official confirmed the departure of two aircraft carrying the first contingents. A third aircraft carrying more paratroopers was due to leave later for Nairobi, an official of the state-owned Sabena airline said.

Van Deweghe said elements of the Rwandan presidential guard at Kigali airport had ordered vehicles onto the runway on Friday so that aircraft could not land.

He said they removed the vehicles to permit the landing of aircraft carrying 300 French troops in the early hours of Saturday, then blocked off the runway again afterwards.

The French troops deployed at Kigali airport early Saturday in preparation for the possible evacuation of 600 French nationals among the 3,000-strong foreign community in Rwanda.

Van Deweghe said the Rwandan Hutu authorities supported the

French presence because France, unlike Belgium, had not withdrawn its troops during a large-scale offensive of rebel Tutsis in 1990.

"There is a hardline minority element trying to make the public be-

lieve that the Belgians are the bad guys," he said, adding that this element had blamed Belgium for the deaths of the Rwandan and Burundi presidents last week.