

Shooting continues as airlift from Rwanda speeds up

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KIGALI, April 11 (AFP) - Mortar explosions and automatic gunfire resounded Sunday night in Kigali where French forces are leading a major evacuation operation to help foreigners flee the country torn by bloody ethnic strife.

A French paratrooper said there had been "more shooting" in the town Sunday than in previous days, though some city residents said the situation had calmed down somewhat after three days of carnage sparked by last Wednesday's death in a plane crash of Rwanda's long-time president Juvenal Habyarimana.

Habyarimana, a member of the Hutu ethnic majority was killed along with the president of neighbouring Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira.

Rwandan officials said the plane was shot down, sparking widespread slaughter mostly of the Tutsi minority. Those killed included the prime minister Agathe Uwilingyamana.

Captain Millet, one of 280 French paratroopers who arrived in Kigali on Friday, attributed the heavy artillery fire to fighting between Hutu-led government forces and rebels of the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front.

He said it was believed the government forces were trying to capture a base given to the RPF in Kigali under a UN-brokered peace accord on power-sharing signed last August.

The whereabouts of some 4,000 RPF reinforcements said to have been heading for the capital on Sunday were not known. "We don't know what front they have reached," Millet said.

He said that since Sunday morning, "we have evacuated 392 people in six rotations" between Kigali and Bujumbura in neighbouring Burundi. On Saturday night, 43 French nationals were evacuated to Bangui in the Central African Republic.

"We were told there were 600

French to evacuate, so we should be through soon," he said. But he said between 2,000 and 2,500 other European Union citizens still had to be evacuated as well as non-EU citizens.

"Our mission should take 15 to 30 days at the least," Millet said. He added: "We are in control of the airport. There are no problems."

Shoots rang out on the hill opposite where Millet sat on the lawn of the French school. Looking through his binoculars, he said: "See over there on the road. That white form lying there is a man who has just been killed."

All the hotels in Kigali are jam packed with people waiting to be evacuated including some Rwandans. Other people are lying low in their homes.

Few people dare venture onto the streets, some of which are littered with corpses and the wreckage of looted shops.

Motorists are stopped at road

blocks by soldiers but French passport holders are generally allowed through without difficulty. The main danger is from the gun-toting looters roaming the streets.

There are more than 500 dead bodies at the city mortuary and probably thousands more bodies elsewhere in the capital and in other towns.

The Belgian foreign ministry Sunday said three Belgian civilians had been murdered in Rwanda, in addition to 10 Belgian parachutists killed trying to protect the former prime minister.

The Belgian news Belga, quoting church sources in Rwanda, said that 61 people had been massacred outside a church in Gikundo region. In other incidents, soldiers killed eight Rwandan priests and nine young women and another two people at a Jesuit mission in Kigali.

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