

Rwanda tribal rampage feared after two politicians are killed

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Fears of a new wave of tribal killings in Rwanda rose yesterday after gunmen shot dead a government minister and vengeful mobs killed the leader of a hardline Hutu party. The minister of public works, Felicien Gatabazi, was killed by gunmen as he drove from a political meeting to his home in the capital, Kigali, on Monday night. Yesterday morning a mob of Mr Gatabazi's supporters in his home town of Butare dragged a rival politician, Martin Bucyana of the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), from his car and chopped him to pieces with machetes. These are the most significant political murders since President Juvenal Habyarimana signed a peace accord with the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) last August, ending three years of civil war.

A transitional government should have been formed in September, but politicians, squabbling and vying for power, have failed to agree on the distribution of ministerial positions among the parties.

The conflict in Rwanda is primarily tribal, between the majority Hutus

- including the president - and the minority Tutsis, who form the backbone of the RPF. Mr Gatabazi, although a Hutu, had fostered links with the RPF while Mr Bucyana's party is strongly pro-Hutu.

The atmosphere in Kigali was already tense as yesterday's revised date for the formation of the new government approached. On Monday, supporters of the CDR besieged the foreign ministry and held 40 civil servants captive. The siege was broken by police using tear gas, supported by members of the United Nations peacekeeping force.

'It is very very quiet and tense,' said Brigadier General Romeo Dallaire, the UN commander, whose forces surveyed the city by helicopter.

The UN secretary-general's special representative in Rwanda, Jacques Roger Booh-Booh, has warned that if a coalition government is not formed soon the Security Council may withdraw the 2,000-strong peacekeeping force sent to oversee the implementation of the peace accord and the formation of a transitional government.