

Rwanda violence may have spilled into Burundi

Mseteka, Buchizya

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NAIROBI, April 10 (Reuter) - More than 500 refugees arrived in Tanzania on Sunday from Burundi, radio Tanzania said, after signs that turmoil that has engulfed Rwanda had spread into its central African neighbour.

The radio, monitored by the BBC in Nairobi, quoted a student among the 570 refugees as saying the Burundian capital Bujumbura was tense, with attacks on residential areas occupied by members of the majority Hutu tribe.

The attacks were the first evidence of renewed violence in Burundi since President Cyprien Ntaryamira and his Rwandan counterpart, Juvenal Habyarimana, both Hutus, died in a plane crash last week.

The deep rivalries between the Hutu and the Tutsi tribes in both tiny states have given them bloody histories since before independence from Belgium in 1962.

The student told officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the remote northwestern Tanzanian town of Kibondo that he had been forced to run away from the University of Burundi to avoid being killed by an army of Hutu students, the radio added.

The death of the Rwandan president in the air crash threw Rwanda into chaos with thousands of people killed in the worst tribal bloodletting the country has seen.

Neighbouring Burundi, itself the scene of tribal killings in recent weeks, was quiet immediately after losing its own leader in the crash, but the attacks in Bujumbura indicated that the initial calm may have been deceptive.

Burundi has been unstable since renegade soldiers from the minority Tutsi tribe murdered Melchior Ndadaye, the country's first elected leader in October last year. Ndadaye was a Hutu.

Up to 50,000 Tutsis and Hutus have been slaughtered across Burundi since Ndadaye's death.

The Hutu account for an estimated 85 per cent of the estimated 5.6 million population. The Tutsi, feudal overlords before colonial days, make up less than 15 per cent.

Tribal hatred has exploded repeatedly since Burundi became independent, with an estimated 100,000 people, mainly Hutu, killed in massacres by the Tutsi army in 1972.

In August 1988 Hutu farmers along the border with Rwanda staged an uprising. Some 5,000 people died before the army could restore calm.

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