

# Burundi coup sparks mass bloodletting: refugees

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AFP, October 26, 1993

BUGARAMA, Rwanda, Oct 26 (AFP) - Refugees from Burundi on Tuesday said ethnic bloodshed was widespread in the central African country following last week's coup by the Tutsi-led army against the first president from the Hutu majority.

Members of the Burundi Democratic Front (FRODEBU) of assassinated president Melchior Ndadaye were fighting Tutsis and soldiers, witnesses who had just fled to this southwestern Rwandan village said.

Overnight Monday, several hundred refugees laid siege to a customs post here, suspecting that members of the family of one of the coup plotters, former interior minister Francois Ngeze, had taken refuge inside.

The furious crowd smashed the windows of the building before paramilitary policemen hurled tear-gas canisters and fired into the air to disperse them.

A customs officer said the refugees

thought they had recognised relatives of Ngeze, the head of a self-styled public salvation committee set up in Burundi's capital Bujumbura by the plotters after Thursday's coup, among passengers of a minibus that crossed the border.

They broke the windows of the minibus, forcing some of those aboard to flee and the others to take shelter in the customs post.

"They were wrong," the official said. "Neither Ngeze's brother or sister were there. All those aboard the vehicle, apart from the driver and his assistant, were Rwandans."

The incident highlighted the renewed tension between Hutus and their traditional Tutsi overlords and the dashed hopes of ending Burundi's endemic ethnic strife that had followed Ndadaye's surprise victory in the country's first multi-party election in June.

Tens of thousands of refugees con-

tinued to pour across the border, bringing with them tales of atrocities by the army, almost entirely Tutsi, and of heavy fighting between Hutu and Tutsi civilians.

"The fighting at home really started when we knew the president

was dead," one of the refugees declared. On Monday night, 8,000 people slept at the local administrative headquarters, most of them Burundis who had arrived since Saturday.

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