

Presidents of Rwanda, Burundi killed in plane crash: French embassy

AFP, April 6, 1994

KIGALI, April 7 (AFP) - The presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, Juvenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, were killed in a plane crash at the airport here in the Rwandan capital late Wednesday, the French embassy said.

The embassy said none of the dozen people on the plane survived the crash.

The embassy also said it was unclear if the plane had been shot down or had crashed accidentally. Witnesses reported hearing heavy weapons fire near the airport.

The plane was bringing the presidents back from a meeting with other African leaders in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on means to curb ethnic violence in Rwanda and Burundi.

In Brussels, the Belga news agency quoted the Rwandan ambassador there as saying the Rwandan presidential plane was shot down while approaching the airport and had "burned to a cinder."

A United Nations official here reported that there had been an explosion near the airport but not gunfire. The blast was heard just after 9:00 p.m. (1900 GMT), the official said.

Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana said she had been briefed on the crash by the United Nations but had no further details.

The streets of Kigali were deserted. State-run radio had not reported on the crash as of nightfall.

Both Rwanda and Burundi have been torn by ethnic violence between the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu tribes.

In Rwanda, a peace agreement was signed in August of last year to end three years of civil war between the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front, made up of Tutsis, and the Hutu-dominated government.

The agreement called for the creation of a transition government, but it has not been implemented, with the rebels accusing Habyarimana of authoritarianism and refusing to take part in any government appointed by him.

Habyarimana took power in a 1973 military coup.

In Burundi, massacres involving the Hutus, the majority group there too, and the Tutsis, who control the military, have killed tens of thousands since an attempted coup on October 21 in which Melchior Ndadaye, Burundi's first Hutu president, was killed.

Ntaryamira was appointed by Burundi's national assembly in January.
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