

The rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front: who they are

AFP, April 12, 1994

PARIS, April 12 (AFP) - The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which reportedly marched into Rwandan capital Kigali on Tuesday, is estimated to have 20,000 members around the country.

The rebel RPF, drawn from the minority Tutsi tribe, first emerged in October 1990 when it tried to overthrow Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu.

An RPF official said the attempted overthrow marked a "return home" for mainly Tutsi Rwandan refugees, who had fled to Uganda in 1959 to escape massacres perpetrated by majority Hutus in Rwanda.

The movement was first headed by Major Fred Rwigyema - a former deputy to the commander-in-chief of the Ugandan army.

Rwigyema died at the start of the October 1990 offensive and was replaced by Major Paul Kagame, former Ugandan army security chief.

Since December 3 1990, the RPF's president has been Colonel Alex Kanyerengwe, a Hutu and former Rwandan interior minister.

A ceasefire accord was signed on March 29, 1991 between the Rwandan government and the RPF but it did not hold. Finally a peace agreement was signed between the warring sides in August 1993 in Arusha, Tanzania.

As well as a ceasefire agreement, the accord provided for rebel Tutsis to be brought into the government and for a transitional national assembly including the RPF to be set up for an interim period of two years.

The accord had not been instituted when Rwanda's president was killed in a plane crash near Kigali airport last Wednesday, along with Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira, sparking off savage ethnic fighting in Kigali and reportedly leaving thousands of people dead.

Rwandan authorities said the plane had been shot down. Kagame denied that the RPF was responsible for the plane crash. up of people opposed to the Arusha peace agreement, and said it was no longer possible to try to implement the accord.

Kagame also said that Rwanda's new interim government was made bl/jub/dw