

Rwanda fighting flares, rebels deny peace talks

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KIGALI, April 14 (Reuter) - Rwandan army units and infiltrating rebels battled in and around Kigali on Thursday for the second day running.

Mortar and artillery fire echoed around the capital's lush hills. The rebels denied a U.N. report they had agreed to truce talks.

"We are not going to negotiate a ceasefire with anyone," Rwanda Patriotic Front spokesman Wilson Rutayisire told a Reuter reporter at the rebels' base of Mulindi north of Kigali.

U.N. Security Council President Colin Keating of New Zealand said in New York late on Wednesday that talks would be held under U.N. auspices between the RPF and a recently-installed interim government, most of whose members have fled the city.

"That is the first optimistic sign we have seen perhaps since the beginning of this crisis, and the Security Council wants to welcome it very much and encourage that process," Keating told reporters.

But dawn brought more terror to a city paralysed by a week of tribal slaughter in which tens of thousands of people have perished.

"Mass hysteria is sweeping the town, they are sure the rebels will kill them. There is no control," said a witness.

A handful of Western journalists still in the capital saw fresh bodies littering the streets on Thursday.

New roadblocks sprang up all over the city, which was growing more dangerous by the hour.

Hutus tribesmen - drunk on banana beer and terrified of reprisal massacres by the Tutsi-dominated RPF - were threatening to kill anyone they did not recognise.

As morning mist cleared over the cool green hill of Central Africa, soldiers at one checkpoint stood swigging beer from two-litre bottles, proudly displaying three fresh corpses nearby.

Midway between two checkpoints, four more bodies were laid out. Two were men, one a young woman and the fourth a boy aged about 10, shot through the left eye.

The approaching rebels aim to take over a city bathed in the blood of thousands slaughtered in killings sparked by last week's killing of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana.

Belgian paratroopers protecting the French School evacuation point in downtown Kigali pulled out overnight. A hundred looters moved in to grab possessions left by fleeing foreigners.

The last Belgian soldiers planned to leave the city on Thursday, complying with an ultimatum by the RPF which says foreign troops sent to evacuate their own citizens must be out by midnight local time (2200 GMT).

The U.N. said in New York that Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had called for plans to be drawn up for a possible withdrawal of the 2,500-strong U.N. force in Rwanda.

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