

Key facts about Burundi where army coup failed

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BUJUMBURA, April 25 (Reuter) - These are the key facts about Burundi, where army units attempted a coup on Monday.

POPULATION : An estimated 5.6 million. The largest tribe is the Hutu, a Bantu people who account for an estimated 85 percent.

The Tutsi, feudal overlords before colonial days, make up about 15 percent and there are small numbers of Twa, a group related to the pygmy people of Zaire. Hutu and Tutsi have no defined territories and speak the same language.

Systematic discrimination in favour of the Tutsi assured them control of the government and army for most of the time since independence from Belgium in 1962.

RELIGION : More than 60 percent of the people are Christian, mostly Roman Catholic. The rest mainly follow traditional religions, although one percent of the population is Moslem.

AREA : 27,834 square km (10,747 square miles). Burundi is bordered by Rwanda to the north, Zaire to the west across Lake Tanganyika, and Tanzania to the south and east.

CAPITAL : Bujumbura, population about 180,000. Gitega, with about 15,000 people, is the second largest town. There are few other towns or villages since most Burundians live in the densely-populated countryside. The World Bank estimates population density on arable lands at 210 per sq km (338 per sq mile), one of the highest rates in the world.

ARMED FORCES : The army has 5,500 men in two infantry battalions, one parachute battalion, one commando battalion and one armoured car company. The 150-man Air Force has three combat aircraft, while a navy of 50 men has three patrol boats, two of which are in reserve. There is also a 1,500-man gendarmerie.

ECONOMY : Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world with per capita income estimated by the World Bank at \$259 a year. Most people are farmers who essentially feed themselves and sell nothing. Burundi's biggest export is coffee. Like Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, it was hit hard by a slump in coffee prices and has been trying to diversify its exports by boosting tea production and exploring horticultural exports. The World Bank projects growth at between three and 4.4 percent until 1996. Foreign debt is more than \$530 million. Burundi embarked on a World Bank structural adjustment programme in 1986, liberalising trade and prices.

HISTORY : Tribal hatred has exploded several times since Burundi won independence from Belgium in 1962. An estimated 100,000 people, mainly Hutu, were killed in massacres in 1972. In August 1988 Hutu farmers along the border with Rwanda staged an uprising. An estimated 5,000 people had died by the time the army restored calm. Major Pierre Buyoya's military government, shaken by the killings, sought lasting political solutions.

Buyoya, who came to power in a bloodless coup in 1987, named a cabinet split between the two tribes, giving Hutus their first real voice in government in 20 years and naming the first Hutu premier since 1965. Buyoya was defeated by Melchior Ndadaye in legislative elections last June.

Until then, Burundi had been governed by military men ever since Captain Michel Micombero overthrew King Ntare V in 1966. His coup ended a monarchy which started in the 15th century and survived the German colonial administration and Belgian rule which followed the end of World War One. Micombero ended the old king's system of alternately appointing Hutu and Tutsi prime ministers and helped the Tutsi consolidate control over the government and army.

Micombero was overthrown in 1976 by Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, whose 1977 land reforms put an end to Tutsi feudal overlords. But Bagaza soon clashed with the Roman Catholic church, accusing it of aggravating tribal tensions. He banned weekday masses and nationalised church schools. In 1985, he expelled 90 missionaries and jailed several priests.

Buyoya's coup against him was largely aimed at ending those church-state tensions, which antagonised many of Burundi's western donors.

Melchior Ndadaye, Buyoya's successor and ths from the Tutsi-dominated army in a failed coup last October. His murder unleashed a wave of Hutu-Tutsi slaughter throughout Burundi in which up to 50,000 people were killed.

Cyprien Ntaryamira, elected in January to succeed Ndadaye, was killed on April 6 along with Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana in a rocket attack on their plane when they returned to Kigali f speaker Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, a Hutu, became interim president according to the constitution.

Burundi was spared much of the bloodbath seen in Rwanda after the presidents' deaths as the population still remembered killings that followed Ndadaye's death.

Overnight Monday, some soldiers in a Bujumbura barracks attempted a coup, but it failed after moderates who feared fresh ethnic bloodletting refused to rally to their side.

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