

Rwandan rebels claim 250 government soldiers killed

David Chazan

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NGARAMA, Rwanda, Feb 12 (AFP) - Rwandan rebels said they killed 250 government soldiers and captured a hydroelectric dam, but renewed calls for a ceasefire after four days of heavy fighting.

There was no independent confirmation of the claims, made late Thursday by Paul Kagame, military commander of the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

"We destroyed three buses carrying government soldiers in an ambush," Kagame said. "About 250 were killed. Most of the bodies were burnt."

He said a fourth bus escaped when his forces attacked a troop convoy 30 kilometres (18 miles) north-west of the capital Kigali on Thursday.

The convoy was apparently carrying reinforcements from Kigali to the beleaguered town of Ruhengeri, 64 kilometres (40 miles) to the north-west, almost encircled by rebel forces on three sides.

Occasional shelling was heard in the distance as Kagame briefed reporters at his bush headquarters, a cluster of corrugated tin shacks hidden amid banana plantations in thickly wooded hill country near Ngarama, 90 kilometres (54 miles) north-east of Kigali.

The rebels also seized the Ntaruka hydroelectric dam outside Ruhengeri, cutting power to the town and reducing electricity supplies to the capital, he said.

The dam was undamaged, but the rebels switched off power, said Kagame, 36, a former major in the army of neighbouring Uganda where his parents fled to escape tribal massacres in 1960.

Kagame, a quiet-spoken, slightly-built bespectacled career soldier with a wispy goatee beard, said the rebels had launched a three-pronged offensive.

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