Details on French and Belgian troops, and fighting

AFP, April 14, 1994

KIGALI, April 14 (AFP) - Sporadic fighting was heard around Kigali ahead of talks scheduled Thursday between the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and Rwandan government forces that brought fragile hope of a halt to hostilities.

The sounds of rifle fire and heavy weapons echoed in the hills, but there were no signs of any major offensive and the capital Kigali was relatively calm as dawn broke.

During the morning, artillery fire could be heard on the outskirts of the capital. According to an informed military source, government forces appeared to be trying to retake an area held by the RPF.

The RPF was reported to be reinforcing its positions and remained in control of the area in the east of the city which it has held for the past six days.

The rebels failed Wednesday to take a gendarmerie base in the north of the city, according to a well-informed source.

Wednesday's Security Council announcement that the RPF and government were due to meet for talks was a "first glimmer of hope", official Rwandan radio said Thursday morning.

The RPF had previously refused to negotiate with the government and rejected its truce offers.

The two sides are due to meet at the headquarters of the United Nations mission in Rwanda at the Hotel Amahoro in the east of the capital.

Head of the mission General Romeo Dallaire said Thursday it was "premature" to talk of negotiations on a ceasefire. It was more an occasion for the warring parties to talk face to face, he told the BBC.

The UN was said Thursday to be finalising with the RPF the conditions for the planned meeting.

A French army spokesman said

meanwhile that some 40 French troops, and a French army cargo plane, were still in Kigali. The troops were due to leave Rwanda soon to join French soldiers already in Bangui, Central Africa.

Some 500 French troops have, since Saturday, been taking part in evacuation of French nationals and other foreigners from war-torn Rwanda.

Belgian paratroopers meanwhile have left the French school in Kigali which was being used as a gathering point for foreigners waiting to be evacuated.

Local police sources said they would be patrolling the area around the school after looters raided cars outside the building, which had been abandoned by foreigners.

at/ag/bb