

Burundi leaders appeal for calm after killings

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BUJUMBURA, April 7 (Reuter) - The remnants of Burundi's leadership appealed for calm on Thursday after the killing of President Cyprien Ntaryamira, its second head of state to die violently in seven months.

Parliament chairman Sylvestre Ntibantunganya told Burundians in a broadcast on state radio : "It is extremely sad for all of us and we are stunned. It's painful for all of us, but we must not lose our heads at this trying moment of extreme grief."

Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko said : "Our people must remain calm, and go about their work as normal."

Ntibantunganya, widely seen as a favourite successor to Ntaryamira, said the government set up an emergency committee to deal with the crisis and was investigating the killings on Wednesday night.

Ntaryamira, 38, President Juvenal Habyarimana of neighbouring Rwanda, and two Burundi ministers were among those killed when their

plane was hit by at least two rockets fired by unidentified attackers as it approached the Rwandan capital of Kigali.

According to the constitution, Ntibantunganya is expected to become interim president until a fresh poll to replace Ntaryamira, who succeeded Burundi's first democratically elected president after he was killed by renegade troops in October.

Ntaryamira was installed in January as successor to slain president Melchior Ndadaye amid a wave of tribal slaughter between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority unleashed by his killing.

An independent commission estimated up to 50,000 people were killed.

Diplomats said the Burundian capital of Bujumbura and the countryside remained largely peaceful on Thursday.

"Calm prevails. People are in the streets and at the markets - but in some cases civilians have not repor-

ted to work, awaiting for fresh developments,” an African diplomat said.

Diplomats said they feared the killing of the two presidents might set off a new outbreak of tribal slaughter in Burundi and neighbouring Rwanda, bedevilled for decades by Hutu-Tutsi savagery.

Diplomats said the deaths of the two presidents came at the worst possible time because both states were making renewed efforts with international help to put a stop to the killings.

“It’s extremely volatile, catastrophic. No one really knows what will happen, its scary,” one diplomat said.

The deep rivalries between the Hutu majority in Rwanda and Burundi and the Tutsi minority have given tiny central African states bloody histories since before independence in

1962.

The plane was returning both Hutu leaders from a peace summit in Tanzania to build popular support in the fragile Ntaryamira government and break deadlock in Rwanda blocking implementation of a pact to end civil war.

A week of clashes and massacres in northeastern suburbs of Bujumbura between the Tutsi-dominated army and mostly Hutu gunmen late last month killed hundreds of people and drove tens of thousands from their homes.

The Hutu, a Bantu people, account for an estimated 85 per cent of the estimated 5.6 million population. The Tutsi, feudal overlords before colonial days, make up less than 15 per cent.

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