

# Rwandan rebels singing war songs march to battle

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MULINDI, April 12 (Reuter) - Rebels singing war songs and carrying ammunition on their heads tramped through the misty hills of northern Rwanda on Tuesday as their forces were poised to battle government troops for the capital Kigali.

Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) spokesman Wilson Rutayisire said rebel radio would start broadcasting messages to Kigali residents as the rebels entered the city.

"We will tell them to take care and stay away from the fighting areas. They should either stay indoors or move out of the city," Rutayisire told Reuters.

He said that 2,400 rebels had surrounded the city and that the operation to enter the city centre itself had started.

"Most of the forces are still on the outskirts," Rutayisire said.

A 600-strong RPF battalion is already based in the east of the capital as part of a nine-month old peace accord that fell apart when President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a plane crash last Wednesday.

The RPF has consistently denied that it recognises any truce with government soldiers on a killing spree but insisted that they have been waiting for the evacuation of foreigners to be completed before starting battles.

"We would wish to advance once the French troops have left and we hope that their mission will be over today," he added.

Rebel radio, monitored in Nairobi, called for the withdrawal of French troops from the country, warning that they would be fired on if they "got in the way of the RPF."

The RPF military operation was not affected by the departure of members of the interim government set-up in the days after Habyarimana's death, Rutayisire added. The entire cabinet piled into cars and fled the city for the countryside earlier on Tuesday.

"It doesn't make any difference. The troops are still there," he said in the rebel-held headquarters of Mulindi 70 kms (50 miles) north of the capital.

Mortar explosions could be heard regularly on battle fronts north of the capital on Tuesday afternoon and guerrillas said they were mounting an assault on a key government garrison in Byumba about 55 kms (30 miles) north of Kigali.

"They (rebels) are shelling them (government troops) so that they get out," said Rutayisire.

Since the RPF launched a fresh offensive on Saturday they have overrun garrisons in the northeast of the country and cut key roads to towns in the northwest.

A major advance by troops towards the capital is expected once Byumba has fallen to the RPF since guerrilla forces have been spearheading attacks in this region.

The RPF military commander Major-General Paul Kagame is himself directing the fighting on the frontline near Byumba.

He is also in contact with RPF forces in and around the capital by radio, the guerrillas said.

From dawn on Tuesday rebels have been ferried to the front from Mulindi in trucks crammed with boxes of ammunition.

Young rebels in uniforms stripped from their dead enemies and shouldering AK-47 rifles were seen marching out into the steep hills singing liberation songs composed since they first invaded Rwanda from neighbouring Uganda in October 1990.

Many of them are units from the Tutsi clan who grew up in exile in countries such as Uganda where their parents had fled to escape a series of tribal massacres in the last four decades.

But RPF officials say that despite the fact that many of their fighters are Tutsis they have substantial support of Hutus and people from the pygmy Twa tribe and their main aim has been to overthrow Habyarimana's government.

"This is not an ethnic war. It is a war against a dictatorship," said RPF chairman Colonel Alexis Kanyarengwe himself a Hutu and a former interior minister in Habyarimana's government.

Kanyarengwe, 57, and Kagame, a 36-year old Tutsi who was once the military intelligence chief in Uganda until he deserted to join the RPF in Rwanda, both said they would hold all-party talks to establish a new transitional government if they take power.

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