

Ethnic Battles Flaring Up in Burundi, Too, Fueled by Strikes

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After three days of deadly street clashes, the capital of Burundi, Rwanda's increasingly unstable neighbor, resumed a nearly normal pace today, diplomats and aid officials said.

But the unrest in the capital, Bujumbura, which has thus far revolved around a test of political will between two Tutsi factions, threatens to erupt into the kind of ethnic violence that has shaken Rwanda. The disturbances, apparently directed by a jailed extremist, began on Sunday. At least 15 people have died.

In the rural north of Burundi, as many as 2,000 people have died in recent battles, relief officials say. Most were Hutu Rwandans among the hundreds of thousands of refugees who crossed the border last month to escape the civil war and genocidal massacres in Rwanda.

Signs of Normalcy

But today, calm prevailed. "Blockades have been removed and most things are back open today," said a Western diplomat reached by telephone. "University students are still honoring the protest, but most other people have returned to their posts."

On one side in the political-tribal drama is Mathias Hitimana, a Tutsi and the leader of the Party for the Reconciliation of the People; the Government considers him an extremist. On the other side are more moderate Tutsi political powerbrokers in the Government and the army, who favor a broad-based government, including Hutu.

Mr. Hitimana was arrested on Sunday, the day he called for a general strike, which was enforced by marauding gangs, most of them Tutsi. Before forming his party last year, Mr. Hitimana was a leader of the Royalist Party, whose history is rooted in the feudal control that Tutsi once exerted over the Hutu majority.

Government officials said they had ordered Mr. Hitimana's arrest to try to quell unrest in the capital. Instead, it appeared that the arrest stirred his followers to a ferocity that they had not previously shown.

"Now they have become much more violent," said the diplomat, who refused to be identified by name or country. "There was lots of rock-throwing and trashing of cars."

Witnesses said the youths attacked any civilians on the street, including some foreigners. Some Tutsi youths reportedly chanted "Iboro!", a local

slang for “Kill the Hutu!”

Fearful workers by the thousands stayed home on Monday and Tuesday. Stores, banks and Government offices were closed. Farmers also stayed away from the city, stirring fears of food shortages. Foreigners living in Bujumbura said it appeared that a large show of force by the military and public appeals by the President and by opposition leaders helped to relieve the chokehold by the mauling youths. Many of those involved were high school and college students. Though the capital was calmer today, seven people were injured when a grenade was tossed into a throng at the central market. Damage was minimal, but the bombing drove hundreds of people back into their homes.

“It’s quiet now,” said one foreign resident, “but we don’t know if the students are done.”

Officials of the World Food Program said in Nairobi today that there are more than a million refugees in Burundi, displaced either by the civil war in Rwanda or by ethnic violence in Burundi. The instability is not only threatening efforts to feed the refugees; it also endangers food shipments into the French-run “safety zone” in southern Rwanda.

The turmoil accelerated on April 6 when a plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi crashed as the men, both Hutu, were returning to Rwanda from talks in

Tanzania. There is a general belief that the plane was shot down.

No one has been charged with attacking the plane, but suspicions have been directed at hardline Hutu in Mr. Habyarimana’s Government who wanted to sabotage his effort to share power with the Tutsi.

The Slaughter Begins

After the crash, civil war resumed in Rwanda. Tens of thousands of Tutsi were slaughtered; nearly 2 million others, mostly Hutu, fled the victorious rebel forces, who are mostly Tutsi. In Burundi several thousand people were killed, but the conflict there has been slower to reach a boil.

For most of the three decades since Burundi and Rwanda won their independence from Belgium, the neighbors have been mirror images. Hutu won control of Rwanda after independence and held on to political power almost exclusively until last month, when the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front took control.

In Burundi, Tutsi controlled the Government and the army until 1993, when the first Hutu President, Melchior Ndadaye, was elected. Mr. Ndadaye was assassinated last October by renegade Tutsi soldiers; Mr. Ntaryamira, also a Hutu, succeeded him.

The Interim President, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, a Hutu, has been unable to carry out political reforms.