

Fifteen believed killed in latest ethnic flare-up : government

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BUJUMBURA, Dec 21 (AFP) - At least 15 people were believed killed in the latest outbreak of ethnic violence in the Burundi capital as shooting kept up throughout the night, the government said Wednesday.

Communications Minister Germain Nkeshimana, contacted by telephone, said this figure was not the final toll in the trouble between rival majority Hutus and minority Tutsi youths that erupted Tuesday in the central market area.

But "perhaps some 15" people were killed during the day and "there were other deaths" during the night, he said.

The Burundi capital was paralyzed Wednesday morning after light arms fire and sporadic grenade blasts rang out through the night.

Two grenade explosions shook the city early Wednesday before shooting died down.

Public transport remained clo-

sed and most people stayed in their homes Wednesday. Tuesday's fighting was the second outbreak this week after 10 people were killed in trouble on Sunday.

Witnesses said Tuesday's violence started with a revenge attack by youths who killed several people suspected of committing Sunday's murders in the capital's southern district of Musaga, minority Tutsi neighborhood.

The violence erupted amid political tension over an opposition demand for the resignation of the speaker of the national assembly, Jean Minani, whom it has accused of inciting violence against the minority Tutsis.

The opposition, led by Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko's Union for National Progress Party, has threatened to leave the government - set up last October after complex political negotiations - if Minani remains in office.

Burundi President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya returned here Tuesday from a regional summit in Brazzaville, but offered no immediate comment.

The Tutsi-dominated Union for National Progress has accused Minani of having called on Hutus to kill Tutsis following the assassination of Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye in

October 1993 by soldiers.

Some 50,000 people were killed in the wake of the failed coup.

The country has the same ethnic mix as neighbouring Rwanda, where an estimated 500,000 to one million Tutsis died at the hands of hardline Hutu militias in a savage April-to-June civil war.

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