

Grenades go off in capital as opposition launches strike

AFP, February 14, 1995

BUJUMBURA, Feb 14 (AFP) - At least three grenades exploded on the outskirts of the Burundi capital Tuesday as the Tutsi-dominated opposition launched a general strike to press for a new government, amid mounting ethnic tension.

The three grenades were set off in the Ngagara district inhabited mainly by the Tutsi minority, apparently aimed at dissuading residents from heading to work. It was not immediately known if there were any victims.

Public transport was not running at the start of the morning and most workers remained at home. But people could head to work later in the day, as happened during the last strike called by the opposition early this month.

With a tense Burundi at risk of a new bloodbath between its Hutu majority and Tutsi minority, the country's supreme executive organ, the

national security council, urged the people Monday night to ignore the opposition warning this weekend that it might call a strike.

The council also ordered security forces to ensure that strikers prevented nobody from heading to work.

The opposition is demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko, a moderate Hutu himself from the opposition ranks who heads a coalition government formed late last year to stave off the sort of mass violence that last year wracked Rwanda, its central African neighbour which has the same ethnic make-up.

The crisis was sparked by Kanyenkiko's refusal in December to heed the demands of his own mainly-Tutsi Union for National Progress (UPRONA), the main opposition party, to quit the government in response to a parliamentary crisis.

In October 1993, about 50,000

people are estimated to have died in ethnic clashes in Burundi after the country's first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was killed in a foiled military coup bid which the government survived.

Outbreaks of strife have occurred several times since.

Tuesday's strike call came as the capital prepared to host an international conference on Rwandan and Burundi refugees, organized by the office of the UN High Commissioner

for Refugees and the Organization of African Unity.

The three-day conference was officially due to open Wednesday.

The north of Burundi is particularly explosive, housing huge camps of displaced Burundians as well as Rwandan refugees who fled the ethnic carnage there between April and June last year, when an estimated 500,000 people died.

dn-at/ns/nb AFP AFP