

President reported dead as inter-ethnic violence looms

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NAIROBI, Oct 22 (AFP) - The threat of bloody inter-ethnic violence loomed in Burundi Friday amid reports that the country's President Melchior Ndadaye and other top officials had been killed in a coup.

"The dictators killed Ndadaye," Health Minister Jean Minani said on Rwandan radio Friday.

"The whole world knows that they killed him in cold blood, as well as the speaker of parliament and many other democratically elected leaders of Burundi," he said.

Burundi's ambassador in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, Joseph Bangurambona, told AFP: "We believe he is dead. The coup leaders would not be able to set up a new regime if he is alive."

Meanwhile, Burundi's Ambassador to the United Nations Perpetue Shimiramana said the coup leaders had "most definitely" killed Ndadaye as well as two government ministers,

the national security chief and the parliamentary Speaker.

There was no independent confirmation of the deaths, however.

Ndadaye - who became the first president from the majority Hutu tribe when he won Burundi's first multi-party elections June 1 - was overthrown Thursday by soldiers reportedly from the minority Tutsi tribe, which has traditionally dominated Burundi's executive branch of government and the armed forces.

Bangurambona urged the international community to intervene and warned the coup could "only lead to ethnic clashes," adding there was evidence that "a massacre of the population is underway" as thousands of refugees have already fled to southern Rwanda.

In the past, comparable Tutsi coups have led to massive bloodshed with up to 200,000 Hutus feared massacred in 1972 and a further 20,000

Hutus being killed by the majority Tutsi army in 1988. the 10,000 people who had already reached Rwanda were mostly women and children.

An interior ministry official in Rwanda said refugees were arriving "in huge numbers," confirming that more AFP AFP