

Bujumbura [The government has clamped a dusk-to-dawn curfew]

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BUJUMBURA, Dec 22 (AFP) - The government has clamped a dusk-to-dawn curfew on Bujumbura after fighting between Hutus and Tutsis left at least 30 dead and sparked fears of civil war.

But sporadic shooting and the occasional explosion of grenades continued.

No official toll had been drawn up by early Thursday, but Communications Minister and government spokesman Germain Nkeshimana told AFP the most recent fighting, in the mixed neighbourhood of Bwiza, had resulted in the deaths of at least 18 Burundians, with two of the wounded in a critical state.

Fighting round the central market on Tuesday – revenge attacks by Tutsis for massacres by Hutu militias on Sunday – left around 15 dead, the minister said Wednesday.

Residents of the capital remained at home Thursday morning for the se-

cond day running, despite the relative calmness of the night and an appeal by the government for everyone to turn up at work.

Most shops and offices remained closed, and little traffic was on the streets.

The shooting and grenade explosions that could be heard overnight came from Bwiza, which is on the periphery of the city, and from which Hutu residents are continuing to flee.

The curfew, from 7 :00 p.m. to 5 :00 a.m. (1700 GMT to 0300 GMT), was imposed by an emergency cabinet meeting late Wednesday, Nkeshimana said.

It is expected to continue indefinitely.

President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya called the crisis cabinet meeting after visiting Bwiza for an-the-spot assessment of the situation.

Tension between the tribes is at flashpoint, raising fears that Burun-

di may plunge into a savage civil war like that which left between 500,000 and a million dead in its northern neighbour, Rwanda, where the ethnic mix is identical – 85 percent Hutu and 14 percent Tutsi.

That war broke out after the Hutu presidents of both countries were killed when their plane was shot down over Kigali on April 6.

Witnesses said the violence round the central market on Tuesday started with a revenge attack by Tutsis who killed several Hutus suspected of the murder on Sunday of about 10 inhabitants of the capital's southern district of Musaga, a Tutsi neighbourhood.

The killers who went into Musaga decapitated one man and ripped his heart out.

They were suspected to be partisans of former interior minister Leonard Nyangoma, a Hutu fiercely opposed to power-sharing who is living in exile in Zaire, where he has created the National Council for the Defence of Democracy, a political party with its own military wing.

The fighting comes amid political instability created by an opposition demand for the resignation of the speaker of the national assembly, Jean Minani, a Hutu accused of inciting violence against the Tutsis.

Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko's Tutsi-dominated Union for National Progress Party has threatened

to leave the government – set up last October after complex political negotiations – if Minani remains in office.

The prime minister's party has accused Minani of having urged Hutus to kill Tutsis following the assassination by the military of Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993 during an unsuccessful coup attempt.

Some 50,000 Burundians were killed in the ethnic violence that followed that assassination.

The mainly Hutu Front for Democracy in Burundi on Wednesday accused the army, made up mainly of Tutsis, of supporting Tutsi militias who have destroyed houses occupied by Hutus. It described the flight of Hutus from Bwiza as "ethnic cleansing."

The Organisation of African Unity, preoccupied by "insecurity, violence, murders and massacres," decided on December 14 to prolong the mandate of its 47-officer observer mission in Burundi.

In northern Burundi alone, some 20, 30 or 50 people hacked to death with machetes, shot, or blown apart by grenades every week or so, and tensions are exacerbated there by the presence of more than 200,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees.

Pierre Buyoya, president of Burundi from 1987 until July 1993, warned on December 8 that the violence had reached a level where the country

risked plunging into all-out civil war. dn/hn/g AFP AFP