

Tutsi opposition strike enters fourth day

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BUJUMBURA, Feb 17 (AFP) - A general strike called by Burundi's Tutsi-led opposition entered its fourth day Friday as opposition leaders prepared to put up a candidate to replace a premier they accuse of betrayal.

By Thursday the strike had spread to most areas parts of the country, even though Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko had asked the country's Hutu president the day before to start looking for someone to replace him.

In a letter to President Sylvestre Ntibantuganya, Kanyenkiko acknowledged that "there is no longer a consensus among opposition parties to support me" and urged the president to select a prospective successor from opposition ranks.

Kanyenkiko, himself from Burundi's Hutu majority, took office as a member of the Tutsi-led Union for National Progress (UPRONA), but is now considered by the party as being a pawn of the Front for Democracy

in Burundi (FRODEBU), the party of the Hutu majority.

UPRONA leader Charles Mukasi said the opposition will meet Friday to choose a candidate to succeed Kanyenkiko, whom the opposition has accused of playing for time by failing to state clearly that he was resigning.

"There is nothing to prove that he really is prepared to step down," Mukasi told AFP. He said the opposition would pick its candidate and if that person were not given the job of prime minister at the weekend "then we will know where we stand".

But the selection of a candidate threatens to create a rift in opposition ranks. All the opposition parties agree that the future prime minister should belong to UPRONA but they are demanding to have a say in the selection process.

"We want UPRONA to submit the names of not one but several candidates. Only on this condition will the candidate chosen be representa-

tive of the opposition as a whole," said Terence Nsanze, the leader of the Burundian-African Alliance for Salvation (ABAS).

UPRONA has rejected this method as a "way for small parties to raise the stakes" ahead of the bargaining for ministerial portfolios in the new government.

Thursday night was the quietest the capital has seen since the strike began on Tuesday though automatic gunfire and grenade explosions were heard in the central district of Mbuisa which has seen fierce clashes between Hutu and Tutsi militias.

Five people were reported to have been killed in political violence on Wednesday night. Much of the unrest has been blamed on Hutu ex-

tremists led by former interior minister Leonard Nyangoma.

Burundi has the same volatile ethnic make-up as neighbouring Rwanda, with a large Hutu majority and a small but politically influential Tutsi minority which wielded power for decades after independence and still controls the army.

The government was set up late last year after difficult political negotiations in a bid to stave off ethnic carnage.

Some 50,000 people were killed in massacres after Burundi's first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated during a foiled military coup in October 1993.

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