

International

Rwandan capital on verge of falling to rebels'

NAIROBI, May 10: The capital of Rwanda could be on the verge of falling to rebels who are pounding it with heavy artillery fire, a United Nations official said, reports AP.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, made the comment on Monday when the rebels were blasting Kigali, the capital, with heavy artillery and short-range mortar fire. Intense small arms fire indicated the rebels followed the barrages with infantry assault.

The rebels are mostly members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group. The government is dominated by majority Hutus.

One mortar round exploded inside Kanombe camp, causing an undetermined number of casualties at the base for three battalions of government troops.

Another shell exploded on the airport tarmac on Monday, forcing UN officials to turn

back a relief flight en route from Nairobi and close the airport, UN spokesman Abdul Kabir said in Kigali. The aid flights bring food to thousands of displaced people under UN protection in the capital.

The bombardment shattered a one-day lull in combat that had brought strange quiet to Kigali after five days of intense fighting in which the rebels made substantial gains.

Fighting also was reported raging near Ruhengeri in northwest Rwanda and near Bugesera and Kanazze, about 15 miles (25 kms) southwest of its capital.

Rebels have cut the highway between Kigali and Ruhengeri, 45 miles (65 kms) from the capital, and are advancing on the capital despite stiff resistance from government forces.

The fighting began after the presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi, both Hutus, died in a suspicious

plane crash at Kigali on April 6.

Since then, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people have been killed, most of them civilians slaughtered because of their ethnicity, according to the United Nations and aid groups. About 1.3 million people have fled their homes.

Rwanda had an estimated population of 8.5 million people before the fighting. About 90 per cent were Hutu and 9 per cent Tutsi.

The United States said it

would airlift 100,000 blankets and 10,000 rolls of plastic sheeting to Tanzania to be used by Rwandan refugees there. The US Defence Department said Monday the items would be flown from storage in Turkey.

Four US Air Force C-141s

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Base, N.J. for Incirlik, Turkey,

to begin flying the missions, a

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