

National News

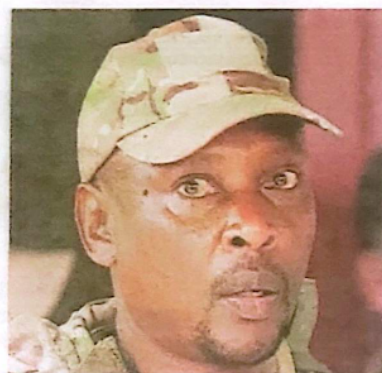
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M23 rebel spokesperson killed in Congo army drone strike, officials say

BY REUTERS

DAKAR. The military spokesperson for the M23 rebel group, Willy Ngoma, was killed in an army drone strike in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on Tuesday, two senior rebel officials, a regional diplomat, and a Western adviser to the government said.

The attack happened near Rubaya, in North Kivu, at around 3 a.m. (0100 GMT), and came after several days of sustained drone attacks on the area by the Congolese army, one of the senior M23 officials told Reuters.



M23 rebel group spokesperson Willy Ngoma. PHOTO/REUTERS

Rubaya is a strategic coltan-mining hub that produces around 15 percent of the world's supply, making it a key financial stronghold for the M23 rebels.

The Congolese government recently added the site to a shortlist of strategic mining assets being offered to the United States under a minerals cooperation framework.

Fighting intensifies despite mediation efforts. Civil society sources reported heavy fighting in several localities near Rubaya since Sunday, forcing hundreds of families to flee the area.

The killing of Ngoma comes as Qatar mediated ceasefire efforts continue,

with Kinshasa and M23 having signed agreements in Doha to establish a joint ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism involving Qatar, the United States and the African Union as observers.

Ngoma had been under European Union sanctions, opens new tab since December 2022 for his role as the M23 spokesperson.

A spokesperson for the Congolese presidency declined to comment and a spokesperson for Congo's army did not immediately respond.

M23, which the United Nations says is backed by Rwanda, controls large

swathes of North and South Kivu provinces after a rapid offensive last year in which the rebels seized the strategic cities of Goma and Bukavu.

The rebels briefly captured the city of Uvira in December and the Congolese army retook it last month. Congo reopened its border with Burundi there on Monday.

The U.N. peacekeeping mission in Congo deployed a joint exploratory assessment team to Uvira this week to support the implementation of the ceasefire monitoring mechanism agreed in Doha and evaluate security conditions in the area.