## **CONGO CRISIS: INTERNATIONAL RELATION**

**NEWS:** Lab holding Ebola in DRC's Goma at risk amid fighting: Red Cross

## WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is witnessing an escalation in the conflict between government forces and M23 rebels, reportedly backed by Rwanda. The fighting has intensified in Goma, a key city in eastern DRC, leading to severe humanitarian consequences. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has also raised concerns about a potential biosecurity threat, warning that fighting near a national biomedical research laboratory could lead to the escape of deadly pathogens like Ebola.

## 1. Clashes in Goma: Root Causes & Current Situation

#### **Historical Context of the M23 Rebellion**

- The March 23 Movement (M23) is a Tutsi-led rebel group active in North Kivu Province, eastern DRC.
- Formed in 2012, the group claims to fight for the rights of ethnic Tutsis in the region.
- The DRC government and international bodies accuse Rwanda of supporting M23, a claim Rwanda denies.

#### Recent Escalation of Conflict

- M23 rebels launched fresh attacks in eastern DRC, advancing towards Goma in early 2024.
- Heavy clashes with Congolese security forces have been reported, leading to civilian casualties and mass displacement.
- The DRC government accuses Rwanda of backing the rebels, further straining diplomatic relations between the two nations.

#### Impact of the Fighting in Goma

- Casualties & Displacement: Thousands of people have been forced to flee the conflict zone, worsening the humanitarian crisis.
- Foreign Embassy Attacks: Protesters in Kinshasa (the capital of DRC) targeted embassies of Rwanda, France, Belgium, Kenya, and Uganda, demanding action against M23 rebels.
- Security Measures: The Congolese army is trying to push back the rebels, while the UN peacekeeping force (MONUSCO) is monitoring the situation.
- 2. Biosecurity Risk: ICRC's Warning on Potential Pathogen Escape



#### National Biomedical Research Institute in Goma

- Houses sensitive biological samples, including **Ebola virus strains**.
- The ongoing fighting raises the risk of accidental release of pathogens, which could trigger a public health emergency.

## Why is Ebola a Concern?

- Highly contagious viral disease with a high fatality rate (50-90%).
- Past Ebola outbreaks in DRC have killed thousands.
- If the lab is compromised, the outbreak could spread beyond Goma to neighboring countries.

## ICRC's Humanitarian Appeal

- Calls for urgent protection of medical facilities and research centers.
- Warns of devastating consequences if proper containment measures fail.
- Appeals for diplomatic intervention to prevent further escalation.

#### 3. Strategic Importance of Goma

## Geopolitical & Economic Significance

- Capital of North Kivu Province and one of the largest cities in eastern DRC.
- Located on the northern shore of Lake Kivu, directly bordering Rwanda.
- A critical hub for regional trade, humanitarian aid, and resource transportation.

#### **Challenges Facing Goma**

- Border Tensions: Ongoing disputes with Rwanda over rebel activity and territorial integrity.
- Refugee Crisis: The city hosts hundreds of thousands of displaced people from previous conflicts.
- Resource Exploitation: Eastern DRC is rich in minerals (gold, coltan, cobalt), making it a hotspot for armed group activity.

#### 4. About the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

#### **Geographical Features**



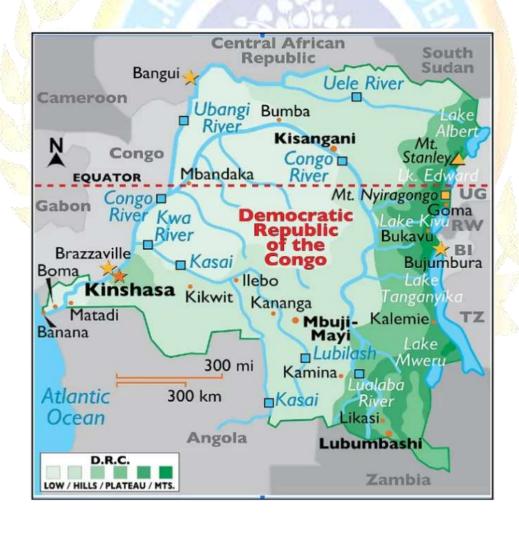
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#### MAKING YOU SERVE THE NATION

- Second-largest country in Africa after Algeria.
- Lies in **both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres** as the Equator passes through it.
- Capital: Kinshasa, located along the Congo River, the only river in Africa that crosses the Equator twice.
- Major mining regions: Katanga Plateau (rich in cobalt, copper, tin, uranium, and diamonds).
- **Highest Peak: Mount Stanley** in the Rwenzori Mountains.

## **Security & Political Challenges**

- DRC has suffered from decades of civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and foreign interventions.
- Rebel groups like M23, ADF, and Mai-Mai militias continue to operate in the region.
- Despite its vast mineral wealth, corruption, political instability, and foreign exploitation hinder economic development.





## 5. About Rwanda

## **Geographical Features**

- Landlocked country in East-Central Africa, part of the African Great Lakes region.
- Capital: Kigali.
- Borders: Uganda (north), Tanzania (east), Burundi (south), DRC (west).
- Major Water Bodies:
  - Lake Kivu (largest lake, borders DRC).
  - Mukungwa River (Nile Basin), Rusizi River (Congo Basin).
  - Lake Victoria does NOT border Rwanda.
- Highest Peak: Mount Karisimbi in the Virunga Mountains.



## **Rwanda-DRC Relations**

- Historical tensions due to Hutu-Tutsi conflicts (linked to the 1994 Rwandan Genocide).
- Rwanda accused of **supporting M23 rebels**, fueling cross-border hostilities.
- Regional alliances and rivalries shape the conflict in eastern Congo.

The escalation of conflict in Goma highlights the volatile security situation in eastern DRC, with regional implications involving Rwanda. The biosecurity threat posed by fighting near a biomedical lab adds another layer of urgency to the crisis, as an Ebola outbreak could have devastating consequences. The international community faces increasing pressure to intervene and mediate the situation to prevent further humanitarian disasters.

Source: <a href="https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/lab-holding-ebola-in-drcs-goma-at-risk-amid-fighting-red-">https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/lab-holding-ebola-in-drcs-goma-at-risk-amid-fighting-red-</a>

<u>cross/article69151203.ece#:~:text=The%20Red%20Cross%20voiced%20alarm%20on%20Tuesday%20(January%2028%2C%202025,in%20a%20laboratory%20to%20escape.</u>

