Fighting intensified on Monday, October 6, between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and AFC/M23 rebels in the Kibandamangobo forest, situated in Shabunda territory, South Kivu.

According to local sources, government troops, backed by Wazalendo fighters, engaged the M23 rebels in fierce combat, blocking their advance toward the territorial capital.

The region, known for its rich mineral deposits, has become a strategic flashpoint in the ongoing conflict since M23 rebels captured the towns of Goma and Bakavu.

At the same time, newfronts opened in Lubimbe, Kibandamangobo, Lutunkulu and Mulambula, according to UN Radio Okapi. Sources on the ground told the station that the rebels' current strategy seeks to seize Shabunda and Mwenga territories, both highly coveted for their mineral wealth.

Witnesses report that the clashes have triggered mass displacement and looting of civilian property, compounding the humanitarian toll in the area.

Shabunda, one of South Kivu's largest mining zones, is renowned for its abundance of gold and cassiterite. The territory is largely under the control of Wazalendo militias affiliated with the Raïa Mutomboki group.

Fighting reportedly began last Saturday, when M23 rebels, armed with both heavy and light weapons, launched coordinated offensives on FARDC and Wazalendo positions in Kabare and Walungu territories.

Local sources in Ninj confirm that the rebels' initial assault targeted Chulwe, Mwegerera, Lubuhu, Ikambi, and Luhago, towns that fell under rebel control following the strategic withdrawal of loyalist forces.

Meanwhile, talks between the DRC Government and the M23 (AFC/M23) under Qatar mediation are expected to resume this week in Doha, sources say, as both sides aim to resolve a major sticking point: a prisoner exchange.