
UKRAINIAN SEPARATIST LEADER WOUNDED IN BOMB ATTACK

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Pro-Russian separatist leader Igor Plotnitsky has been injured in a blast in the city of Luhansk in eastern Ukraine. Regional officials say the bomb was an assassination attempt.

Local media reported that an explosive device was detonated near to Plotnitsky's car in the city of Luhansk early Saturday.

The 52-year-old, who leads the Luhansk People's Republic was taken to hospital with shrapnel wounds and is now in stable condition. His driver was also injured.

Russian state television showed footage of a black SUV mangled by an explosion.

The rebels' news agency claimed the blast was an "attempt on the life" of their leader but Ukrainian authorities quickly rejected claims that they could have been behind the bombing, putting it down to an internal power struggle within the separatist group.

Ukraine's 'temporary occupied territories'

Luhansk is the smaller of two breakaway pro-Russian provinces that have been fighting Ukrainian government forces for more than two years, a conflict which has left more than 9,500 people dead and a million displaced. Kyiv and the West have accused Russia of supporting rebels, which Moscow denies.

Plotnitsky, who is on the European Union's sanctions blacklist, was elected during disputed polls in November 2014 to head the Luhansk region. He was also one of the signatories of a peace accord in 2015 that helped to lower the intensity of fighting in eastern Ukraine.

His wounding follows similar attacks against other separatist leaders. In December, pro-Russian leader Pavel Dremov was killed in a suspected car bombing. In May 2015, Luhansk rebel commander Alexei Mozgovoi was killed in an attack against his vehicle.

Despite what he termed a "provocation," a spokesman for the Luhansk People's Republic said Saturday they would not end a fragile ceasefire with the Ukrainian government. But another rebel official, Denis Pushilin, said he believed the blast signaled Kyiv's intentions to renew hostilities in the region.

Kaynak/Source: