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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Gaddafi forces surround Zlitan, threaten rape - rebels (Reuters)

BENGHAZI (Reuters) - Forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on Friday surrounded Zlitan, one of only three towns separating the rebel-held city of Misrata from the capital Tripoli, a rebel military spokesman said.

"Large numbers of troops are surrounding Zlitan from all directions and are threatening its residents with having their women raped by mercenaries if they do not surrender," Ahmed Bani, military spokesman, told Reuters by phone from Benghazi.

Zlitan could act as a stepping stone to allow the anti-Gaddafi uprising to spread from Misrata, the biggest rebel outpost in western Libya, to Gaddafi's stronghold in Tripoli.

Bani said the troops around Zlitan were equipped with artillery and Grad rockets. He said clashes broke out in Zlitan on Thursday, and 22 rebels had been killed.

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