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Gunmen Attack Oil Security Vessel Off Nigeria

AFX News Limited Thursday, February 05, 2009

Gunmen attacked a security vessel off Nigeria on Thursday in an oil field operated by Canada's Addax Petroleum, killing the Nigerian captain and wounding a crew member, the navy and security sources said.

The strike on MV Red One at around 3 a.m. (0200 GMT) off the coast of southern Nigeria's Akwa Ibom state was the latest in a series of attacks on the country's deep water oil industry.

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Navy spokesman Commodore David Nabaida said the vessel, with military personnel aboard, was trying to prevent an attack on an Addax storage platform when it

came under fire.

"There was an exchange of fire and unfortunately the captain was killed and a crew member was injured. But the attack was repelled, the militants didn't succeed in getting to the storage platform," Nabaida said.

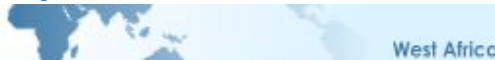
Addax Petroleum could not immediately be reached for comment.

Two private security sources working in the oil sector said a gang in two boats had attacked the vessel. One source said the captain was a retired Nigerian army major.

The attack took place in OML 123, a 370-sq km

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(140-sq mile) license area operated by Addax. Similar attacks took place in the area last year and there have been at least 10 such raids in the wider Niger Delta offshore region this year.

Some industry executives say the rise in piracy could force smaller oil services firms -- vital to the smooth operation of the offshore industry -- to consider withdrawing from Nigeria.

"If they pull out, it will cripple the industry," one industry source said.

The Niger Delta has long been plagued by insecurity, particularly since militants who say they are fighting for a fairer share of the region's natural resources began blowing up oil pipelines and kidnapping expatriate workers three years ago.

The offshore industry, on which Nigeria is depending to raise output from around 2 million barrels per day (bpd), had been considered relatively immune from the unrest because its operations are far from land.

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