

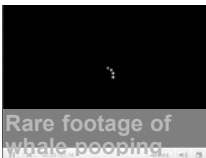





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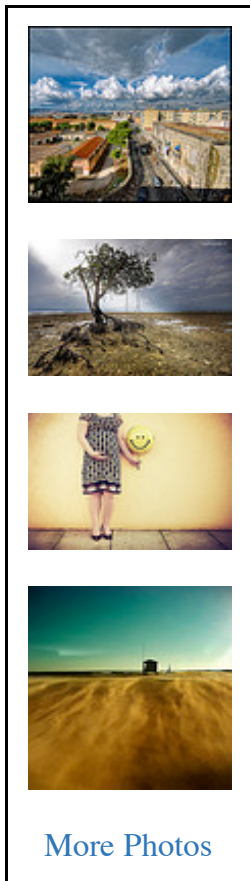
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Emma Arubi and Samuel Oyadongha. IT was a harvest of deaths at the weekend in the Niger Delta when 19 people lost their lives in two separate incidents. While six Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) contract staff were confirmed dead following a pipeline explosion on the SPDC 24 inches Amukpe - Sapele Trunkline in the Western operations, 13 persons were killed following a violent attack on Sangana community on the fringe of Atlantic Ocean in Bayelsa State by gunmen.

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The contract staff worked for a contractor employed by SPDC at the SPDC trunkline in Delta State which supplies crude oil to the Forcados Export Terminal. The company has shut down all its flow stations which receive feed crude as a result of the incident. One of the explosion victims was reported to have died while being flown to a hospital in [South Africa](#) and another victim is yet to be accounted for.

When the incident occurred late Thursday at Iriama village in Sapele Council area of the state, the

company management attempted to keep it under wraps.

Vanguard authoritatively gathered that 18 contract staff and an SPDC supervisor were working at a “leak repair work-site” when the explosion occurred just as no one could say the actual cause of the fire.

SPDC hospital sources, where four of the victims were rushed to, told Vanguard that rescue teams were still at the work-site just as fire-fighters were deployed to battle the inferno and make the place safe.

The incident has been described as one of the “worst work-site incidents in the SPDC in the last 30 years.”

Meanwhile, clamping of leaking points and recovery of crude oil are on-going even as the management of the oil giant has requested all teams in the SPDC (contractors and staff) to stop work on Friday, November 21 for some moments to ponder over the incident and the safety aspect of their work both in the field and offices.

Contacted, Precious Okolobo, a spokesman for the company, confirmed that a fire broke out in the course of ongoing work by an SPDC contractor who was repairing a leak on the line.

“The SPDC is saddened that six people working for the contractor died in the unfortunate incident. We are very sad at the incident and loss of lives and have launched a full scale investigation. SPDC fire-fighters have extinguished the fire.

“Our thoughts are with the families of the deceased who lost their loved ones,” he said.

13 killed in Bayelsa

Though the immediate cause of the Bayelsa State gun attack that claimed 13 lives could not be ascertained but informed sources said 11 bodies had been recovered from the creeks while a search for the remaining two was on at press time.

According to sources, the violent attack on Sangana which occurred during a burial ceremony has heightened tension in communities on the Atlantic fringe.

It was gathered that the slain youths were on a routine patrol of the river as done during such ceremonies when suspected militants, believed to have come from one of the camps on the Atlantic fringe of Southern Ijaw, opened fire on them.

The suspected militants who are said to be checking criminal activities in the area must have mistaken the patrolling youths for some persons said to have attacked an oil facility earlier in the area.

However, what was baffling, according to our source, is why they would continue to shoot at the youths on realising that there was no resistance from them.

“There is no way unarmed persons could attack an oil facility or location,” the source said.

It was further learnt that three persons from Amassoma community travelling in a local boat were seriously injured when they ran into the crossfire. The injured persons were reportedly rushed to Brass General Hospital from where they were referred to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa for treatment.

Vanguard enquiries revealed that the incident has now created tension in the area following alleged plan of a reprisal by the aggrieved people of Sangana on their neighbouring Southern Ijaw community said to be harbouring the suspected militants.

Reacting to the incident, the Chairman of Akassa Local Government Area, Mr Solomon Williams, condemned the attack by the gunmen which led to loss of lives and property.

He said incessant attacks on the waterways en-route Akassa kingdom and environs were now unbearable to the residents and multinationals and appealed to government to intervene.

The Chairman appealed to the chiefs and the people, especially the youths, to remain calm as government has waded into the matter. Contacted, the State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Iniobong Ibokette (DSP), said he was not aware of the incident but promised to cross check.

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