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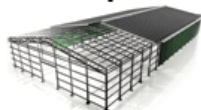
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News from Africa

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## Nigerian oil rebels hit more facilities

Armed Nigerian militants who have declared an "oil war" in the restive south of the country claimed Wednesday to have blown up a major pipeline in their latest attack on oil installations in the region.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the most prominent of the groups operating in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta, said it blew up a pipeline it believes is operated by Royal Dutch Shell and Italy's Agip.

"A very major trunk crude oil pipeline we believe may belong to both Agip and Shell has been blown up today... at about 9:30 am (0830 GMT)... at Rumuekpe, in Rivers state," said MEND in a statement emailed to the media.

The latest attack, a rare daylight one, was not immediately confirmed by the military deployed in the region.

Hours earlier MEND reported having acted with a new ally to have which destroyed a Royal Dutch Shell oil flow station in the African nation's main producing region.

As with other attacks since they declared an "oil war" on Sunday, the rebels moved in with speed boats, dynamite and hand grenades in their attack on the Orubiri flow station, the army said.

The attack on Orubiri was the third on a Shell target in 48 hours. US Chevron has also seen attacks close to its installations this week.

MEND said that it attacked the Orubiri facility along with another militant group, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF).

"About 2200 (2100 GMT) on Tuesday, September 16, 2008, fighters from MEND and the NDVF ... attacked and destroyed the Orubiri flow station," MEND said.

Shell made no immediate comment.

MEND said it killed all the soldiers on guard at the Orubiri facility and took their weapons. The army denied the claim, saying none of the 10 naval personnel or guards on duty died or sustained injuries.

MEND renewed a warning to soldiers and oil workers to abandon all oil installations, including deep offshore.

"Soldiers and oil workers are advised to abandon all oil facilities including the offshore rigs of Bonga and Agbami as we want to minimize casualties before Hurricane Barbarossa arrives," the group said.

Hurricane Barbarossa is the code name MEND has given to its new offensive against foreign majors.

MEND attacked Shell's flagship Bonga field in June, while Agbami is another deep offshore field operated by Chevron which only recently came online.

So far only Rivers state is affected, but MEND warned it would spread its attacks to neighbouring states.

As well as Orubiri and the latest pipeline, they have affected a Shell flow station at Alakiri and another pipeline, as well as Chevron facilities at Robertkiri and Idama.

Lieutenant-Colonel Rabe Abubakar, spokesman of the special military unit policing the two other neighbouring oil states of Bayelsa and Delta, has warned that any attack on oil facilities there "will be met with grave consequences".

He said the unit "will not fold its hands and watch the senseless destruction of national economic assets ...(by) unpatriotic elements".

MEND says it is fighting for local people to get a greater share of the huge oil revenues. It declared war on the oil industry at the weekend in response to what it said was an unprovoked attack by the army on one of its positions.

Since MEND took up arms in early 2006, Nigeria's oil output has been cut by at least one quarter as a consequence of kidnappings and sabotage in the Delta.

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Nigeria armed group frees two South African hostages : military  
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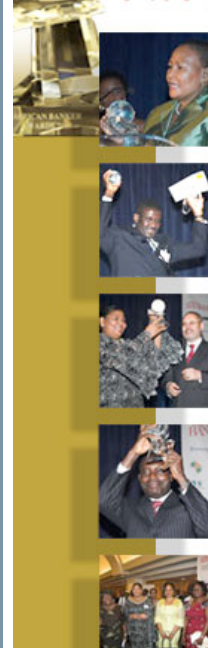
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Two South African hostages seized last week by pirates with 25 other people on a vessel off southern Nigeria were freed Tuesday night, the military said. Military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Musa Sagir told AFP no ransom was paid.

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