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Insurance
Money & Markets
Infotel & Energy
Marketing
&Management
Transport & tours
Foreign scene
View from America
Weblog
Site Map
Shipping news



Countryman

EFCC: I WILL STEP ON TOES
— MRS WAZIRI



THAT MEANS YOU MAY
PROCEED TO SCHOOL
VERY SOON

20 dead as soldier, militant clash

•Flow station blown up

•We had upper hand —JTF

TONY ITA ETIM and CHINEDU NWOSU, *Port Harcourt and* NAPOLEON EHIREMEN, *Warri*

Over 20 persons were yesterday feared dead, when soldiers and militants engaged in a shoot-out in Port Harcourt. The Movement of the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND, claimed it attacked Alakiri Flow Station belonging to Shell Petroleum Development Company. The attack which was carried out by some operatives of MEND took place about 2 am yesterday.

According to MEND spokesman, Jomo Gbomo the attack is part of the, the group declaration of oil war in the Niger delta region tagged Hurricane Barbarossa.

MEND statement reads: "The struggle is unstoppable. At 0200 Hrs yesterday, September 15, 2008, Hurricane Barbarossa continued its destructive sweep through Rivers State of Nigeria when the eye of the storm struck a direct hit at the expansive Alakiri flow station complex operated by the Shell Petroleum Development Company. The facility was still burning when we left.

"Heavily armed fighters from MEND stormed the facility and have razed it to the ground as promised. The foolhardy workers and soldiers who did not heed our warning perished inside the station.

"Resistance was non existent as the soldiers fled their dug-in positions leaving behind their colleagues and the workers inside the facility to their fate.

"A word is enough for the wise. MEND reiterates its previous warnings to all oil workers in the entire Niger Delta region to evacuate from oil facilities and halt production with immediate effect or they will have themselves to blame.

"We call on the wives of soldiers to convince their husbands to abandon this duty of injustice to avoid becoming widows. Families of oil workers should offer the same advice.

"International vessels should not come in to load crude oil. Owners of such vessels should be warned that the vessels will suffer the same fate of the Alakiri flow station. Hostages will not be taken. Do not be deceived. The Nigerian military can not protect you.

In solidarity, a coalition of militant groups in the Niger Delta Region, Joint Revolutionary Council said: "We wish to declare the ongoing success of operation Hurricane Barbarossa which began an hour after midnight of the of September 14, 2008 leaving in its trail about 17 to 24 dead soldiers of Northern Nigeria stock many of whom are engaged in illegal oil bunkering across the creeks of the Niger Delta."

In a statement signed by Cynthia Whyte, the group noted: "This operation will continue and will remain undeterred. Our strategic objective will be to question the supposed might of the armed forces of the Nigerian state especially bandit units of the Joint Task Force who believe that they occupy our lands, rape our women, attack fishermen and render our lands desolate. They will fail.

"We wish to commend without fail the intense solidarity shown by all strata and commando units of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and our friends of the Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta and the Niger Delta Vigilante Force especially those from the Bantustans of Delta and Bayelsa state for the courage they have shown in traversing high seas to join us in this new onslaught against the ill trained, illiterate and body-smelling forces of the Nigerian state.

"We wish to remind the Supreme Court appointed Governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi that this will not be over in a while. He chose the path of force and violence and that is what he will get.

"To the bandit soldiers of the Nigerian state we will meet in the creeks. Welcome to the new edition of The

to the bandit soldiers of the Nigerian state, we will meet in the creeks. Welcome to the new edition of The Rumble in the Creeks."

In his reaction spokesman for the Rivers State Joint Task Force, Operation flush Out 111, Lt. colonel Sagir Musa said "militants in about 10 speed boats attack our location at Alakiri Shell Station by 12.35 am."

According to Musa, "the attack lasted for over an hour; dynamites and bombs were massively detonated by the miscreants and the attack heroically and successfully repelled by JTF troops on guard with heavy casualty on the bandits side as some of them might have lost their lives in the process.

"It is however greatly feared that the flow station might have caught fire due to cross fire during the encounter. This message is necessary to avoid and checkmate wild, misleading propaganda and disinformation by MEND and cohorts. No casualty on the side of the forces, the situation is closely monitored and is under control."

Musa said that a declaration of war by the militant Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was mere propaganda. "I am aware that the militants suffered heavy casualties during a clash with personnel of the joint task force last Saturday at Elem Tombia in Degema Local Government area of Rivers. "As anticipated, they launched reprisal attacks against our deployments in some areas," he said.

Musa said that any attempt at military deployments were always blown out of proportion by the militants and that such talks were propaganda aimed at boosting the ego of the militants. "Our personnel have successfully repelled attacks against their positions at Soku and Alakiri in Rivers where the group attacked Shell facilities.

"We did not record any death or injury as a result of the attack. we anticipated such attack and prepared for it," he added. Musa urged the people not to panic.

On his part, Rivers state Commissioner for Information, Mr. Ogbonna Nwuke dismissed as propaganda the threat of war by the militants.

"The federal government in collaboration with the governments in the Niger Delta region would protect our oil fields against any attack.

"We are determined to make the Niger Delta region an investment hub," he said.

Nwuke advised staff of foreign embassies in Nigeria to interact with ordinary Niger Delta people to obtain their opinion on the situation of things instead of buying the ideas of propaganda sent out by militants.

"It is not proper to listen to law breakers," he added. In its reaction, Shell said that a community station guard was killed, while four other persons were being treated for injuries sustained in the incident.

Shell spokesman, Precious Okolobo, said that the company sympathised with the families of people who suffered casualties during the attack.

"As a precautionary measure, Shell has reduced the number of its personnel in some field locations for security reasons.

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