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Egyptian worker killed in Nigeria oil delta-sources

01 Dec 2010

Source: Reuters // Reuters

* Attack on convoy an apparent robbery attempt

* Egyptian said to have been killed by stray bullet

* Militant group renews threat of attacks

By Austin Ekeinde

PORT HARCOURT, Dec 1 (Reuters) - An Egyptian contractor working for an energy services firm in Nigeria's Niger Delta was killed by gunmen on Wednesday in what security sources said appeared to have been a failed robbery attempt.

The gunmen attacked a convoy carrying several expatriates on the main road from Aba, the main commercial city in Abia state, to Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state and the hub of Africa's biggest oil and gas industry, the sources said.

"The Egyptian was probably killed by a stray bullet during the attack. Other expats in the convoy were robbed of their personal belongings," one of the security sources said.

A senior police officer, who declined to be named, confirmed the attack.

The sources said the victim was working for the local unit of oil services firm Dresser-Rand Group Inc <DRC.N>, although the company could not immediately be reached for comment.

Armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and militant attacks on industry infrastructure cost oil companies in the Niger Delta millions of dollars a year in extra security.

Resurgent unrest and criminality in the Niger Delta has risked undermining the credibility of President Goodluck Jonathan in the run-up to elections next April.

He is the first head of state from the oil region and brokered an amnesty with militants last year, which saw thousands of gunmen lay down their weapons and brought more than a year without significant attacks on the oil industry.

Police in Rivers state said on Wednesday they had charged 65 people with kidnapping, robbery and oil theft, some of them believed to have been behind the abduction of 19 oil workers freed by the military last month. [ID:nLDE6B00Q1]

The main militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has been weakened by the arrest of some of its suspected leaders, raids against its camps, and many of its top field commanders accepting last year's amnesty.

But security experts fear unrest could increase during the election campaign, a period which in the past has been marked by political thuggery in the Niger

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Delta.

MEND said in a statement emailed to media late on Wednesday that it would resume attacks on the oil industry "at the appropriate time" and said Jonathan was "clueless" as to how the problems in the Niger Delta should be solved.

Previous campaigns by MEND fighters have forced Nigeria to shut down a significant part of its crude oil production, currently running at over 2 million barrels per day (bpd), but it is unclear how much operational capacity the group has left. (For full Reuters Africa coverage and to have your say on the top issues, visit: <http://af.reuters.com/>) (Writing by Nick Tattersall)

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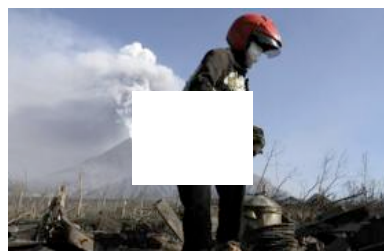


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