

NEWS

Monday, September 01, 2008

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Contributors
Letters
Cartoons
Discussions
Outlook

SPORTS

Home
Abroad
Golf Weekly
Results

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Focus
Policy & Politics
Arts
Media
Science
Natural Health
Law
Education
Weekend
Friday Review
Executive Briefs
Fashion
Food & Drink
Auto Wheels
Friday Worship
Saturday
Magazine
Sunday Magazine
Ibru Ecumenical
Centre
Agro Care

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JTF denies losing 29 soldiers in MEND's soldiers attack

From Kelvi Ebiri, Port Harcourt

THE Joint Task Force (Operation Flus Out III) has described as untrue the claim by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) that it killed 29 soldiers in reprisals attacks in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states last Saturday that also claimed the lives of six militants were also feared dead.

MEND spokesperson, Jomo Gbomo had said that the group in three separate co-ordinated attacks in the three states killed 29 soldiers responsible for the death of 12 passengers, women and children on a commercial transport boat in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state passengers on August 24, 2008.

He said that at "about 19:30 hrs on Saturday, August 30, 2008, fighters from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) carried out reprisals on the military Joint Task Force (JTF) responsible for the killing of men, women and children from their so-called warning shots in the inland waterways to punitive expeditions on oil-bearing communities.

Gbomo said that the attacks took place at Odiana creek in Bayelsa, Opia river in Delta, and the confluence of Bonny and Andonni river in Rivers State.

But JTF spokesperson Lt-Col. Sagir Musa, described MEND's claim as untrue and "a mere dubious and sordid propaganda.

He said yesterday that there had not been any military confrontation between the JTF and any militant group in the Niger Delta in the past one week and wondered where MEND got the soldiers that it claimed to have killed.

Musa said: It is the ranting of a drowning confused miscreants losing the fight and sympathy of responsible members of the public. Militants should know by now that business is over; retreat and surrender and no amount of media whitewash would stop that from happening."

Meanwhile the Action Congress (AC) in Rivers through its spokesperson, Mr. Eze Chukwuemeka Eze, has appealed to Julius Berger Plc. And other firms that have left the Niger Delta to return to the region. He noted that with the firms backing out from contracts they mutually entered with the governments of the region; the people would suffer from the effects of such action.

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