

BREAKING NEWS

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UPDATED AT 15.00 GMT

Four naval officers feared dead in Bayelsa

Five naval officers and a staff of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) were feared killed on Thursday by armed youths over election into the youth body of the Nembe-Bassanbiri Community in Nembe Local Government Area of the state. The recent attack is coming just as the Joint Military Task Force, through its media campaign centre, announced a deliberate act by those they identified as militants as threatening the peace existing in the state with an attack on the formations of the peace keeping force in Ekeremor Local Government area of the state. While the corpse of the five naval personnels and the SPDC staff were reported to have been deposited at the General Hospital, the only surviving officer is receiving treatment at the Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa. The Guardian gathered that the Naval officers and the SPDC staff were caught unaware along the Nembe waterways by the rampaging youths. Chairman of the Nembe-Bassanbiri Council of Chiefs, Chief Alfred Tamuno said that preliminary investigation showed that youths involved in the killing were those identified in the September aborted invasion of the Community over the youth executive election crisis in the area. The community has promised to assist in arresting the youths. The State Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Abayomi Akerele denied any connection between the incident and the forthcoming election but said they are on red alert to investigate and bring those involved to justice.

Rivers embarks on development of Ogoni

Rivers State Government has embarked on the development of Ogoniland. Towards this end, the state government is set to construct a new bridge in Ogoni in order to link Gio and Kpoghor communities in Tai Local Government Area of the state. The State Governor, Mr. Chibuike Amaechi, who has directed the state Ministry of Works to start the project immediately, announced that the construction work would prevent possible collapse of the temporary wooden bridge linking the communities. Similarly, Governor Amaechi has assured that his administration would provide potable water for the people of Bara-Ale community in the state. He grieved that up till now the community was still drinking water from a well. The governor disclosed that the state government was currently building Primary Healthcare facilities across the state to handle minor ailments, noting that secondary healthcare matters would be handled later. Governor Amaechi, who also inspected the 95 Megawatts Eleme Gas Turbine Station, expressed displeasure over the slow pace of work at the gas turbine, which would serve the Ogoni axis of the state.

Zimbabwe ready to work with Obama

Zimbabwe 's President Robert Mugabe, whose government is under sanctions by Washington, says he is ready to work with President-

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elect, Barack Obama, to improve ties. In a congratulatory message to Obama, Mugabe made no reference to the travel and economic sanctions imposed on his ZANU-PF leadership over charges of election rigging and human rights abuses, or to a deadlock with the Zimbabwe opposition over a power-sharing deal. "As the government and people of Zimbabwe join you in celebrating this event in the history of the USA, I take this opportunity to assure you, that the

government of the Republic of Zimbabwe remains ready to engage your government in any desirable endeavour to improve bilateral relations," he said. The U.S. under President George Bush joined the EU and other Western powers in an international campaign to isolate Mugabe over his increasingly controversial rule. But Mugabe, in power since Zimbabwe's independence from Britain in 1980, says the West is driving a "racist plot" to oust him over his seizures of white-owned farms for redistribution to blacks.

We are stranded, Somali MPs cry out after summit

A group of more than 200 Somali members of parliament (MPs) is stranded in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, a week after attending a regional summit. The lawmakers say the organisers of the summit had refused to foot their travel expenses back to Somalia. They are living in hotels around Nairobi while they wait for the matter to be resolved. One of the legislators told the BBC that the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was supposed to pay their expenses and arrange their flights back to Somalia. Abdul Rashid Mohammed Iro said the UNDP had paid for 27 MPs to fly back to Mogadishu on Thursday, a claim the UNDP has vehemently denied. "If someone invites you, he has to cover your expenses and your transport. That is why we are expecting IGAD to cover our expenses and transport," Mr. Iro said. The regional meeting was held to review the performance of Somalia's transitional government, nine months before its mandate expires. The government was strongly criticised for failing to bring peace to Somalia, which has not had an effective national government for 17 years.

Pakistan frees Taleban militants in swap deal

Pakistan has set free three Taleban militants, including a prominent commander, who were arrested in July, officials said on Friday. Among the freed militants is Commander Maulvi Rafiuddin, a close associate of militant leader, Baitullah Mehsud. The release was part of a prisoner swap deal reached on Wednesday night between the Pakistani government and the Taleban in which the militants released 10 Pakistani soldiers, the officials added. The swap took place in the violence-hit Hangu district in the northwest. The district mayor of Hangu, Khan Afzal, told the BBC that the released soldiers included seven personnel of the army and three personnel of the paramilitary Frontier Corps. The Taleban had kidnapped over a dozen officials and beheaded three when their demand for Maulvi Rafiuddin's release was not met. Meanwhile, police officials in Hangu say nearly 20 kidnapped officials, most of them civilians, are still being held by Baitullah Mehsud's followers. Mehsud, who leads an alliance of pro-Taleban groups, is being accused of masterminding the killing of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, an allegation he has repeatedly denied.

Afghanistan outlaws street begging, seeks rehabilitation

Afghanistan has banned begging on its streets and called on the authorities to send beggars to care homes and orphanages. Officials say beggars are vulnerable to crime and exploitation. Reports say Afghans are sceptical over government's plan to carry out the ban as there are so many beggars and much poverty in the land. Beggars are a common sight on the streets of the capital, Kabul, and other Afghan towns and cities, most of whom are women, children, the disabled or elderly and their numbers increase in the winter as food becomes scarce and employment opportunities drying up. Child beggars are considered particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation by drug smugglers. The government says some beggars engage in violent and anti-social behaviour, which disgraces Afghans. It subsequently directed the Interior Ministry to arrest beggars and send them to orphanages or care homes run by the Red Crescent Society. Aid agencies say almost half the population live on less than the equivalent of \$2 a day, while the World Food Programme is trying to feed about eight million Afghans.

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