

Tension in Bonny over murder of Dutch man

From Clarice Azuatalam, Port Harcourt

THE killing of a Dutch man by militants on Bonny River on Tuesday night is generating tension amongst the white community on Bonny Island.

The Nation gathered that the expatriates who are working for various oil firms are threatening to down tools *en masse* to register their protest over the killing of their colleague whose offence, according to them, was that he was on board a boat travelling to Bonny that fateful evening.

According to a source, "the whites are saying that it is only by walking away from their jobs that the Nigerian government can rise up to tackle this militant menace frontally."

Apart from the tension amongst the white community in the area, it was also gathered that Bonny residents are equally aggrieved over the incident that claimed both the lives of the Dutch man and those of some locals on their waterways.

Though the identities of the perpetrators of the heinous crime have not been established, it is said that Bonny leaders are disturbed by the incident "because they have always advised their youths against getting involved in such crimes or to even indulge in hostage-taking".

"This also explains why the community always ensures that all the companies operating there carry out their corporate responsibilities to the people."

However, the killing of the Dutch man, who was working with Hyundai Company, a construction firm executing some projects for Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), occurred on Bonny River at about 1900hours when the boat they boarded from Port Harcourt was just about four minutes to Bonny Island.

The militants who attacked the boat also killed one naval Rating and two other Nigerians whose identities have not been established.

Those injured in the attack were five, including two expatriates and three Nigerians. All the passengers on board the boat were dispossessed of their belongings by the attackers.

The state Police Commissioner, Mr Felix Ogbaudu who confirmed the killing, said that both marine and mobile policemen had been deployed to the area.

A naval source said: "On the part of the navy, we have combed the area and the place is calm now. People should not be afraid to make their journeys."

Niger Delta main rebel group, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) has denied any involvement in the two separate attacks that took place in the region this week.

The Movement also confirmed for the first time that it is in negotiation with a government official with regards to three Italians and a Lebanese hostage. One of the Italians, Diegi, said to be sick, is to be released.

"We wish to deny the involvement of MEND or any other freedom fighters in the attack on the Hyundai convoy around Bonny on January 16, 2007. This was a robbery carried out by pirates," spokesman for MEND, Jomo Gbomo said in a statement released to the media.