

Militants kill naval officer in Bayelsa

• MEND claims responsibility • Senators, Niger Delta youths meet

SENATORS, who were on a fact-finding mission to the oil city of Warri, Delta State, got yesterday a first-hand information.

Their visit coincided with the killing of a naval officer by militants in an all-night attack on a vessel protecting Anglo-Dutch oil giant, Shell installation in Bayelsa.

Four other naval personnel were injured, seen as 23 Senators arrived Warri for a parley with restive youths in the area.

The officer (name withheld) was feared dead on Tuesday night in an attempt by armed militants to seize the NNS Obula, one of the largest gunboats in the services of the Navy.

The gunmen planned to hijack the armoury in the gunboat, which came into the operation of the Navy in 2004.

Five officers and ratings sustained varying degrees of gunshot wounds from the resultant attack, which

From Shola O'Neil, Warri
Isaac Ombe, Yenagoa

occurred around the Funiwa Platform in the Penington River estuary, Bayelsa State.

The gunboat was one of several deployed by the Chief of Naval Staff, Ganiyu Adekaye to protect the oil fields, including the EA Field of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC).

The Information Officer of the Naval Base in Warri, Lieutenant Sikiru Adigun confirmed that an officer and four ratings were shot by the militants, but denied that any of the men died.

The wounded naval men were recuperating at various private hospitals in the oil city yesterday evening.

It was gathered that the armed youths launched the attack from no fewer than 15 speed boats at about 11:16 pm on Tuesday, but were repelled by the naval team, who engaged them in a lengthy gun-duel.

Military sources said

RPGs (rocket propelled grenade) where first shot into the gunboat by the militants, who later opened fire on the officer and soldiers who came out to defend it.

Adigun, informed that at least one of the invaders was confirmed dead, while scores others escaped with severe gunshot after the defeat.

He said, "I can tell you with confidence that one of the invaders was killed; am confirming this because we have saw the corpse, but several others escaped with gunshot wounds and others may have died too, but am not sure since we do not have the death."

A Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) security official also informed that the naval personnel were stationed at the installation to keep surveillance.

"We got a report that militants attacked the navy vessel NNS Obula at 2105

hours. The vessel was detailed to protect the EA oilfield operated by Shell. One navy officer was killed while four were injured," the Shell security official said.

The state security service (SSS) also confirmed the attack, but said no hostages were taken from the Anglo-Dutch oil facility.

The Senators, led by senator Kabiru Gaya, met with leaders of Ijaw and Itsekiri groups in the state at the Governor's Office Annexe with Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan in attendance.

There were, however, doubts that the senators would carry out a planned visit to the camps of the militants as earlier scheduled because of what a source described as "logistics problem."

Chief Oboko Bello, President of Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) led Dan Ekpebide and other Ijaw youth leaders, while Mr.

Edward Ekpoko and Matthew Itsekure, led Itsekiri group to the meeting.

Senator Gaya, representing Sokoto South Senatorial District told the groups that the Senate decided to move to the region to find lasting solutions to the perennial problems of the people.

He said: "As you can see, we are here in the Niger Delta to seek ways of finding solution to the perennial problems of the region and were hope at the end of our visit we will be able to have concrete information to work with."

Uduaghan, who was accompanied by top government official, including the Secretary to the State Government, (SSG) Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa, promised to provide the team with all the assistance they need for the job.

He said if the senators were not able to visit the militants' bases in the creeks, the youth leaders on ground would give them the relevant information that would assist them in finding a lasting solution to the problem.

The Senate President, David Mark was expected to join his colleague.

He was expected to arrive with other teams that carried out similar visits to Bayelsa and Rivers states.

Meanwhile, MEND, for the attack on the NNS Obula in Bayelsa State.

In a statement made available signed by its leader Jomo Ubomo, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) described the Naval war ship as a sitting duck says the attack was to tell the Oil companies and the Nigerian government that military presence in the Oil rich region cannot stop them from their campaigns.

The statement on the militants' website reads in part: The attack was to again proof to the oil majors and the Nigerian government that the presence of the military in the Niger Delta can not deter an attack nor provide protection to oil facilities when we decide to attack them. It is only the presence of justice that can.

"The NNS Obula was a sitting duck and this attack again exposed the incompetence of the Navy; especially in the night time warfare.

"During the last military exercise, the Chief of Naval Staff admitted that "due to the presence of frog" the exercise had to be called off. We found that statement laughable, ridiculous and pathetic considering our fighters can navigate in pitch darkness at speed of up to kilometer per hour," it said.

Why we are in Amaechi's govt, by AC

THE Action Congress (AC) yesterday in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, said yesterday that it agreed to serve in the Rotimi Amaechi administration in the interest of the people.

Its governorship candidate, Prince Tonye Princewill, is in the 28-man

serve on the committee should be considered "a patriotic move aimed at assisting to stabilize governance and give a focused direction and restore tranquility as well as equity to our State by some people as compromising our stand or a sell-out is to us most unfortunate and

ing our case and efforts of overturning the injustice and the illegalities hatched and perpetuated against our people in the name of election that brought PDP into governance in the State in the first place."