

ExxonMobil evacuates workers' families from terminal

A **MERICAN** energy firm, ExxonMobil yesterday evacuated families of its employees at the company's main oil export terminal in Qua Iboe in Akwa Ibom State.

The move came a day after an armed attack on the facility by suspected militants who engaged troops guarding the 400,000 barrel per day terminal in a gun duel for several hours.

According to the company's spokeswoman, Gloria Essien, the militants, numbering about 60 blew up at least a police boat and seized two machine guns from the Navy.

Though the troops mounting security at the facility repelled the rampaging militants, an expectant mother was killed in the cross fire.

Essien said: "After all that shooting yesterday (Monday), we have relocated dependents where they felt more comfortable for a short time.

"We are on essential services. Production was not impacted by the incident," she added.

Monday's attack was the third on a major Nigerian oil facility since September, when the rebel Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) an-

nounced the end of a ceasefire citing the arrest of its leader in Angola on arms dealing charges.

Though no group has claimed responsibility for the Qua Iboe attack, but sources alleged the attackers may have come from a militant hideout in neighbouring Rivers State.

Since late 2005, MEND has staged a string of crippling attacks against Nigerian oil facilities and troops, forcing thousands of foreign workers to leave and cutting output from the world's sixthlargest exporter by a fifth.

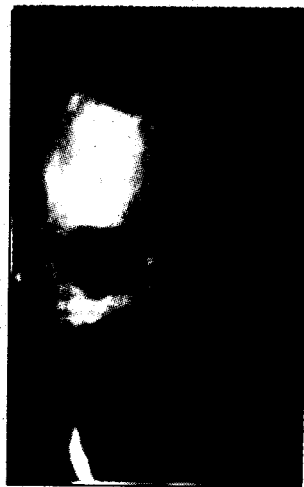
The latest raids were setbacks to a peace process ini-

tiated by President Umaru Yar'Adua, who used his inauguration speech in May to promise urgent attention to grievances of poverty and neglect in the region of southern Nigeria.

MEND, which has demanded greater regional control over the delta's oil resources, had observed a ceasefire for four months until the arrest of its leader, Henry Okah.

Members of the group had accused Nigeria of being behind Okah's detention in Angola.

The government's attempts to lure militants to the negotiating table has split them into factions, and



• John Chaplin, Mobil boss

activists in the region say the resurgence of attacks was also a symptom of a struggle for supremacy in militant ranks.

Nigeria debunks Cameroon's claim

THE Federal Government last night debunked claims by Cameroon that Nigerian soldiers were responsible for the killing of 20 of its soldiers in Bakassi earlier in the day.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ojo Maduekwe, said in Abuja that "preliminary investigations showed that Nigerian soldiers have nothing to do with the said attack."

From Kunle Johnson,
Calabar

Earlier reports said the Cameroonian military claimed that Nigerian soldiers killed that country's soldiers during fighting in the Bakassi peninsula.

Cameroon's military based its report on the fact that the assailants wore Nigerian army uniform and that they ambushed a boat carrying food and supplies to Cameroonian soldiers in

the peninsula.

"It is too hasty to blame Nigeria for the attack. We are investigating and we will be happy for any information the Cameroonian authority can give," Maduekwe said.

He explained that Nigeria was determined to maintain close and cordial relations with Cameroon "that is not only our neighbour but with which we share brotherly and filial links".