

## NEWS

# Youths kill two soldiers in Delta

## • JTF, community trade blame

**T**WO soldiers of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta were killed yesterday morning in two attacks by armed youths in Bomadi and Sapele, Delta State.

The killings have led to fears of fresh clashes between the JTF and the youths, with the leadership of the task force warning that its "patience is wearing thin".

The two soldiers were killed when the youths, suspected to be illegal bunkerers, attacked the task force's station in Bomadi, headquarters of Bomadi Local Government Area.

In the Sapele attack, the task force recorded no casualty. The soldiers were attacked by a gang of armed youths during a routine patrol on the Oghara-Sapele section of the Warri-Benin Highway.

The Bomadi attack was carried out by a number of armed youths, who invaded the scene at about 11:45p.m. on Sunday.

The attack came barely five months after the military location was attacked by a militant gang suspected to be working for some illegal bunkering syndicate.

There were speculations that the attack on the Bomadi post of the JTF was carried out by criminals aggrieved by the arrest of the suspected rogue vessel, *Sandra Valletta Lagos*. It had six Ghanaians and a Nigerian on board.

The Co-ordinator, Joint Media Campaign Centre (JMCC) of the JTF, Col. Rabe Abubakar,

From Shola O'Neil, Warri

who confirmed the report, said the soldiers were killed while on official duty.

He said: "The attack may not be unconnected with the arrest of *MT Sandra Lagos*, in connection with illegal oil bunkering activity. Since the arrest, the suspects behind the illegal activity have mounted a campaign of calumny against JTF, culminating in these attacks."

Col. Abubakar went on: "The JTF sustained two casualties and another sustained injuries."

Sometime last August, some suspected militants attacked the same location.

Col. Abubakar warned those responsible for the attack not to take the task force's restraint as a sign of weakness "but professional maturity because we are only conducting internal security operation."

"Despite all these attacks, the JTF cannot be pushed to wage a full-scale war on the militants in the region, as such will

**'People should not blame us for whatever action we take against the miscreants as our patience is wearing thin and we assure them that those behind the attacks will pay a heavy price for their misadventure'**

affect innocent citizens," he said.

The spokesman hinted of a possible retaliation over the killing of the soldiers, saying: "People should not blame us for whatever action we take against the miscreants as our patience is wearing thin and we assure them that those behind the attacks will pay a heavy price for their misadventure. The JTF would not be deterred from carrying out its statutory responsibilities of maintaining peace and security in the region."

Col. Abubakar said at about 0030 hours on Monday (yesterday), "our troops on patrol on Sapele - Oghara Road came un-

der attack by some unknown hoodlums. The attack was successfully repelled without sustaining any casualty on own side."

The Chairman of the Ijaw Council of Elders (Izon Okosu-Otu) in Delta State, Chief Bare Etolor, disputed the JTF's account of the incidents.

Etolor, who hails from Bomadi, said the soldiers' death may have resulted from internal disputes rather than attacks by the militants.

Trouble, he said, started when soldiers at the Bomadi base demanded N20 gratification from a motorcyclist

who took a soldier to the place.

Etolor said the soldier who was taken to the checkpoint disagreed with his colleagues, insisting that the motorcyclist departs without a fee.

The face-off took a deadly twist when the one of the soldiers shot at the motorcyclist. He is reportedly receiving treatment in a hospital as at press time.

The soldier who the motorcyclist took there allegedly drew his service pistol and shot at his counterparts, leading to the death of the two soldiers, Etolor alleged.

He appealed to the JTF Commander, Brig.-Gen. Wuyep Rintip to investigate the incidents and save innocent citizens from harassment, adding that tension was mounting in Bomadi.

"It would be unfortunate if the JTF Commander believes stories of the deaths arising from an imaginary militant outing or perhaps angry and revenging bunkerers.

"The truth I know is that it has nothing to do with all of that. The soldiers killed themselves," Etolor said.

# Oshiomhole meets contractors

From Osagie Otabor, Benin

**E**DO State Governor Adams Oshiomhole yesterday summoned all contractors handling projects above N50million to a meeting.

The forum was to ascertain which project to be included in this year's budget.

Oshiomhole said it was a fact-finding mission to enhance the preparation of the budget.

His words: "We are preparing the 2009 budget which we want to wrap up. We want to see which project is on ground that we can reflect in the budget and

which is not.

"If we are putting the job you are doing in the budget, you can be sure it is because we want to do it and we believe we have the fund to do it, so that our document can be a realistic guide as to what the business of government is going to be as it affects you."

ing. Some have abandoned their jobs. We know there are several reasons for not working. It could be the contractor's fault or the client's. Government is determined to do a case by case evaluation to ensure justice and fairness.

"We have received some briefings. We think we are in a