

Tom Iseghohi, and two others by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Their ordeal might not be unconnected with a disagreement with the National Council on

From Yusuf Alli, Managing Editor, Northern Operation, Abuja

Privatisation (NCP) over the sale of Nigeria Telecommunications Limited (NITEL),

The Nation learnt.

It was also learnt that Iseghohi has remained adamant in detention, insisting that all the TRANSCORP officials are innocent of all allegations levelled against

them by both the State Security Service (SSS) and the EFCC.

Iseghohi, the Company Secretary of TRANSCORP, Mohammed Buba, and a Deputy General Manager,

Mike Okoli, have been in detention for two weeks, transiting from SSS underground cell to the EFCC.

Although a court ordered the three suspects released last Thursday, they are still

elations that their ordeal has to do with their refusal to allow the government sell NITEL cheap to a faceless investor.

Continued on page 4

Military extends assault on militants to Rivers

■ Suspect killed as camp falls

■ Anxious Odi residents flee

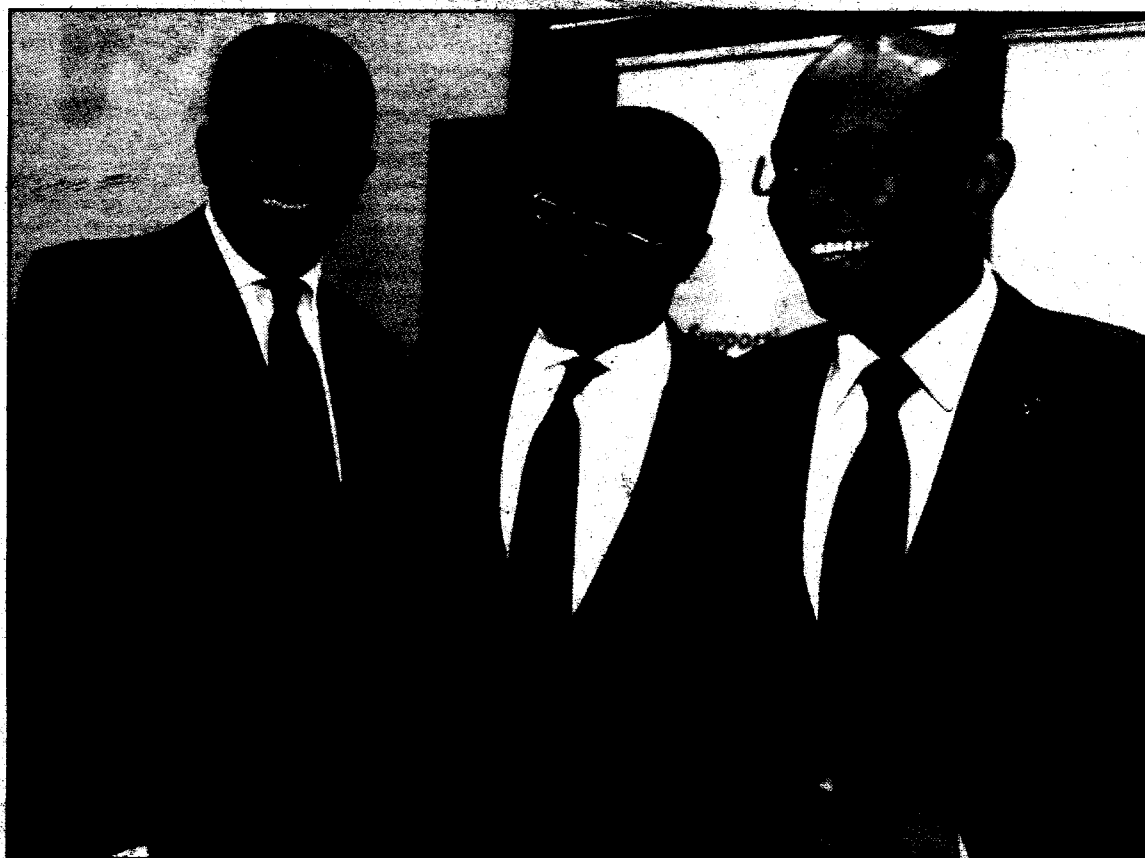
From Shola O'Neill, Warri

ONE suspected militant leader was confirmed dead yesterday as the Joint Task Force (JTF) extended its operations to Abonnema (Rivers State). Besides, the JTF captured another militant camp in the Gbaramatu Kingdom of Delta State.

Nene Sele, a suspected militant leader, was shot dead in a gunfight between JTF troops and suspected militants early yesterday at the riverside community of Rivers State.

Confirming the operation, Col. Rabe Abubakar, the JTF spokesman, said: "Troops carried out a dawn raid on suspected militants' hideout at Abonnema town in Rivers State.

"After a fierce exchange of gunfire with the militants, one militant, Mr. Nana Sele, suspected to be their leader, was shot dead during the operations and others fled with



• From right Mr. Tony Elumelu, Group Managing Director/CEO, United Bank for Africa (UBA) Plc; Mr. Phillips Oduoza, Deputy Managing Director, South, UBA; and Mr. Charles Ogunmola, Director, Group E-Intelligence Cash Deposit ATMs in Lagos ... on Friday.

Minister, seven others in race for FirstBank CEO

From Yusuf Alli, Managing Editor, Northern Operation, Abuja

MINISTER of State for Finance Mr. Remi

Babalola is believed to be under pressure to be the next Group Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of financial giant First Bank.

The seat became vacant, with the Group Managing Director, Alhaji Lamido Sanusi, accepting to succeed Prof Chukwuma Soludo as Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor. Soludo's tenure ends on May 29.

Seven Executive Directors (EDs) and other members of the management staff are said to be interested in the job.

They are: Bola Adesola (ED, Lagos Directo-

Continued on page 4

Continued on page 4

has endeared himself to the people of banks, and associates. Babalola, a first best Over-

Continued on page 10

cable circumstances. It was the same Okereke-Onyiuke, engaging in such high-level discussion for the sale of

Continued on page 10

Military extends assault on militants to Rivers

Anxious Odi residents fleeing

From Isaac Ombe, Yenagoa

THE people of Odi in Bayelsa State are fleeing, following reports that the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) is about invading the community.

Unconfirmed reports said soldiers had already stormed the community as at yesterday afternoon.

A source in Odi community, who spoke on phone, said he and his family had fled the community because of the impending invasion. Many members of the community who had experienced the 1999 military expedition are fleeing, he said.

He said they were informed of the impending attack and this spurred him and others to leaving the community for safety, to avoid a repeat of the 1999 invasion that reduced the community into rubble.

"As I'm talking to you now, my family and I

have packed out of Odi community. I am now at Adagbabiri with my family to avoid being caught up in a cross fire," the indigene said.

Unconfirmed sources disclosed that the militants' camp around the area is also prepared for the worse, to support their counterparts in Okerenkoko where the soldiers are fighting militants.

All efforts to speak with the state commander of the JTF, Lt.-Col. Nnana Efik was not possible as his cell phone line did not go through.

However, military sources disclosed that the soldiers' mission to Odi is on a fact-finding voyage, adding that there have been complaints of some militants' disturbing the peace of the area. "We want to find out who are the youths behind such criminal acts," he added.

the parade said.

In spite of a counterclaim by Col. Abubakar, a source said there was a growing disenchantment among the top hierarchy of the military.

"They are yet to announce the capture of Tompolo (Government Ekpemupolo) and they have not really shown the world any of the military hardware that the militants are reported to have.

"We heard about anti-aircraft missiles and rockets, but the JTF is yet to show the world any of those things. All we hear are reports of killing of innocent civilians, burning of communities and such activities and for anybody involved in this operation that is disturbing," the source added.

Specifically, it was gathered that contrary to the posture

of the JTF bigwigs, the weapons recovered from the militants' camps were far from inspiring.

It was gathered that the discoveries at the various camps, including Camp 5 and Iroko, have not matched the security force's intelligence information, particularly on arms and ammunition recovered.

Boys seem to always be a step ahead of the task force and this is very disturbing because it looks like they are getting information on our movement and plans even before we execute."

But Col. Abubakar affirmed that the operations had yielded results, stressing: "It is pertinent to note that in all the communities searched by the JTF so far, large quantities of arms and ammunition, as well as hostages kidnapped

by the militants, were discovered. Military hardware, as well as nine hostages, was also discovered in Camp 5."

He said as long as 11 missing officers were not found, "the operation will be ongoing". "Therefore, we are soliciting for the cooperation of the public, especially those affected by this purge, to furnish us with information that will lead to the arrest of the miscreants who unleashed terror on innocent members of the communities," Col. Abubakar said.

In Gbaramatu Kingdom of Warri South West Local Government Area of Delta State, residents of Benikrukru yesterday raised the alarm over decomposing corpses and starvation of survivors hiding in the bush.

The community, which was

reportedly razed Saturday morning, petitioned the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

Chairman of the community, Mr. Joseph Wuruyai and Secretary Jeffrey Ojogun in the petition, alleged that Benikrukru was invaded and razed by JTF even though it is not a known militants' camp.

The petition stated: "If the Nigerian military is actually looking for militants, they would have concentrated on the so-called militants' camps and not our own Benikrukru community which has nothing to do with militancy."

"We have made official representations to the state and Federal Government but no respite despite the devastating nature of the military operation."

"Bodies are decaying and survivors of the attack are taking cover in the nearby bushes without food, water and drugs and in continuous fear of repeated attacks. Victims of this military action are mainly women, children and the aged who are vulnerable."

"We are, therefore, calling on the international community and indeed the United Nations to intervene to put an end to these genocide attacks on defenceless and hapless people with dispatch," the community added.

Also yesterday, the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) reiterated its call for a ceasefire in Gbaramatu Kingdom.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 1

gunshot wounds," he added.

Our correspondent gathered that Opuye-Opuye Camp located around Abiteye (Delta State) was invaded by JTF troops who deployed gunboats and fast attack craft early yesterday.

Sources in the creeks told our correspondent that neither arms and ammunition nor any of the militants in the camp was captured by the JTF as the warlords had evacuated the camp hours before the JTF struck.

Our source, who craved anonymity, said the operator of the camp, Kingsley Odiete (aka Opuye-Opuye), was tipped off about the military operation hours before it was carried out.

The JTF has taken over Camp 5 and Iroko Camp, which are considered the biggest and most fortified in the region. The former fell to the JTF on the first day of the military operation. Iroko followed two days later.

It was gathered that militant leader Opuye-Opuye was tipped off by his source in the JTF about the impending attack on his camp.

He started mobilising his boys and weapons as soon as information got to him that the JTF was going to move in today (Sunday) and they got out in the night before JTF stormed the camp in the morning," the source added.

The military top brass are getting increasingly frustrated with the ongoing mili-

tary operation in the area following their inability to announce any big break, it was learnt yesterday.

A source spoke of rising pressure on the Federal Government following condemnation by the international community - particularly US lawmakers who advised President Barak Obama to ask the Nigerian Government - to stop the military clampdown.

Sources said the Federal Government would only be able to withstand the pressure to stop the siege to the Ijaw communities when the JTF makes startling discoveries.

Commander of the JTF Major-Gen. Sarkin Yarkin Bello, last Thursday, displayed some arms and ammunition recovered from the two camps to newsmen at the Effurun Barracks.

But the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) at the weekend taunted the task force's "failure", particularly in showing "old dane guns" and unserviceable rifles as weapons recovered from their camps.

"The fact is that none of the weapons displayed was recovered from our camps as claimed. Our standard issue is the AK47 assault rifle and none was displayed. Instead rusty dane guns used by hunters and old machetes and other weapons taken from God-knows-where were displayed," a statement by Jomo Gbomo shortly after

Military extends assault on militants to Rivers

•Continued from page 4

President of FNDIC Chief Oboko Bello, who said the Gbaramatu Kingdom is not a part and parcel of MEND's declaration of war with the army, advised the militant group to stay out of the kingdom.

He said the group was happy about Sunday-Saturday morning's release of the last batch of hostages, adding: "We are happy at the reports of the release, without battle, the victims of war declared by the military Joint Task Force (JTF) in Gbaramatu Kingdom in the Warri waterways.

"It is an indication that despite the continuous propaganda of MEND which the JTF—like it advised the general public—should also ignore, the forces in the ongoing battle which the Gbaramatu Ijaw people are not willing to be part of, have withdrawn."

He, however, expressed distress over the continuation of the military operation and the spreading of "deaths, discomfort and hopelessness", in spite of JTF's claim that the militants

have been dislodged.

"We therefore re-iterate our call on the JTF to kindly cease fire and discontinue its (JTF) war on the defenceless Gbaramatu Ijaw people and allow place for dialogue," Bello appealed.

But Col. Abubakar claimed that the three Filipinos gained their freedom Saturday following a cordon-and-search operation by troops at Oporoza community in Gbaramatu Kingdom.

The Nation learnt that Errico Arelano, Romeo Naclicar and Napoleon Emphasis were freed voluntarily by their captors, who dumped them at the Oporoza Jetty on Saturday morning.

On the military operation, the JTF spokesman said: "We conducted the operations in the most professional manner and the security outfit is only focusing on the areas where there are militants and their hideout where hostages were being kept. It is not a random operation and people should commend us for what we have done so far."

I
rea
of
So
Int
Ke
l
tw
roy
So
Gc
At
cer
de
mi
wa
De
lic

Minister, seven others in race for FirstBank CEO