

News

Lawyers warn of 'hidden mines' in Petroleum Bill

From Shola O'Neil, Warri

LAWYERS in Warri, Delta State, have warned of "hidden mines" in the Petroleum Industry Bill.

They urged the people to rise up against it.

In a statement by the Warri Chapter of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the lawyers also joined in the call of the resignation of the Minister of Petroleum Resources, Dr. Rilwanu Lukman.

They said the minister had betrayed the Federal Government's policy of local content in the oil industry.

In the statement issued yesterday by the NBA Chairman and Secretary Ayuba Giwa and Andrew Bekederemo, the lawyers accused Lukman of indifference to the people of the oil communities.

They urged President Yar'Adua to sack him to prove that the minister's perceived oligarchic activities did not receive his blessing.

It said it was clear that the bill is skewed to favour the North and to the disadvantage of the South/South oil producing states.

"We (NBA) have always maintained that the equal treatment of equals is justice whereas the opposite is injustice. In the legal regime of the extractive minerals administration and control in Nigeria, there is a great dichotomy which is unfair, unconstitutional and unwarrantably discriminatory against the hydro carbon regime and in favour of the solid mineral regimes," the statement read in part.

The lawyers said the Federal Government's stance on hydro carbon was contrary to the solid mineral mining rights and the Texas Theory of ownership of minerals, which could have enabled the region to get more out of their resources.

They also faulted perceived ambiguity and numerous versions of the PIB, stressing that while a faction conceded 20 per cent royalties to the producing states and five per cent to the communities, another version dispensed with the concession.

"Either way, both are still short of constitutional requirement of equality of component parts of the Federation or the United Nations' Resolution on the new world economic order. The worst that the South/South expected was that any opportunity for a change in the legal regime of the hydro carbons extraction industry would bring it in line with the solid mineral regime or the Constitution but neither version of the bill has done so," the statement said.

Also, the lawyers faulted the Federal Government's amnesty plan, stressing that such action without due regard to the position expressed by the South/South Governors Forum would be "pyrrhic and ill-advised."



• Scene of an accident involving an overloaded trailer on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway...yesterday. One person died in the accident.

PHOTO:DAYO ADEWUNMI

Robbers kill three policemen in Ado-Ekiti

From Odunayo Ogunmola, Ado-Ekiti

IT was a black Sunday yesterday for the Ekiti State Police Command as suspected robbers killed three of its men.

The operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) were shot by the hoodlums at about 7:30p.m. while on a routine operation around the popular Fajuyi Park in Ado-Ekiti.

Among the victims was the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of SARS, a Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP). Others were a corporal and a constable.

They were said to have died of gun shot wounds

they got in the attack.

The policemen were confirmed dead at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH), Ado-Ekiti.

They were said to be coming from the police headquarters on Iyin Road when they sighted a black Toyota Camry car being driven by the robbers on the other side of the road, a development which aroused their suspicion.

An eyewitness said the SARS men closed in on the Toyota Camry car to ascertain the identity of the occupants. The hoodlums opened fire on the policemen and sped off.

Bystanders, including some travellers, who were just arriving in Ado-Ekiti, who heard the gunshots, fled in various directions.

There was no official statement from the command over the incident but a source said the Deputy Commis-

sioner of Police in charge of the command, Mr. Fabian Ojiri, may brief the press on the incident today.

Efforts to speak with the Police spokesman Awe Oladipupo were futile.

Family members, friends and relations of the slain officers stormed the hospital on receiving the news of the incident.

Residents rushed indoors as rumours went round that robbers had seized the town.

The remains of the victims have since been deposited at the morgue of the University Teaching Hospital, Ado-Ekiti.

Council boss appointed into health think tank

THE Chairman of Ijebu East Local Government Area, Ogun State, Amb. Tunde Oladunjoye, has been named a member of the Steering Committee of the State Health Development Plan.

A July 24 letter by the Commissioner for Health, Dr. Biodun Oduwole, said the committee would

"provide the required political advocacy and oversight functions over the State Planning Team, while the State Planning Team will serve as the State Core Team that will develop the Ogun State Strategic Health Development Plan for review, amendments and endorsement by the State Steering Committee before submission to the State Executive Council for approval."

Accepting the appointment, Oladunjoye thanked the ministry for considering him "worthy" for the position.

He pledged to put in his best for the committee to deliver on its mandate.

Ijebu East was recently named as the "Most Supportive Local Government 2008" by the Ministry of Health.

Lassa fever threatens MDGs, says expert

From Osagie Otabor, Benin

LASSA fever has been identified as a threat to Nigeria's hope of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Speaking in Benin, the Edo State capital, at the weekend at a one-day symposium on the diagnosis of Lassa fever, Dr. Sylvanus Okogbenin, said 59,000 Nigerians stood the risk of contracting the disease.

Besides, 50,000 deaths could be recorded yearly, he said, stressing that it posed a serious impediment to the attainment of the millennium goals of reducing maternal mortality rate, child mortality

rate, extreme poverty and HIV and AIDS.

Said Okogbenin: "At Irrua Teaching Hospital, for instance, in 52 maternal deaths, 11 cases were due to Lassa fever. So, it is contributing 21 per cent to maternal death."

"You will agree with me that the death of mothers increases the rate of childhood death. This, coupled with the death of the bread winner, will severely hamper the attainment of goals two, four, five and six of the MDGs."

The Chief Medical Director

of the Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, Prof. George Akpede, said the 229 cases reported in 2008 resulted in 30 deaths.

This year, he said, 428 suspected cases have been reported.

"Lassa fever has been a problem in the sub-region, Nigeria and Edo State since the first cases were reported in Jos in 1969. In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed not only an upsurge in cases but also spatial spread."

"From only one to three states reporting Lassa fever before 2005, since 2007, at

least, one quarter of the 36 states in the federation as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) now reports Lassa fever. This data portends a major public health problem or disaster," Akpede said.

Commissioner for Health Dr. Moses Momoh praised the management of the Irrua Specialist Hospital for its initiative in tackling the disease.

He sought concerted efforts by all in the control and management of Lassa fever.

Experts from Germany and the United States, who spoke on the disease, canvassed the need to contain its spread.



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