

NEWS

Two feared dead in Warri clash

TWO persons were feared dead yesterday in a clash between security operatives and Ijaw youths working on the Escravos Gas Project of Chevron Nigeria Limited in Warri, Delta State.

They were allegedly killed by uniformed men deployed in the facility.

One of the victims was Sunday Melaye, an indigene of Kokodiagbene community. Two others were said to be wounded.

The clash caused tension among the ethnic groups working in the company and between the civilian and security operatives of the Joint Task Force (JTF).

At the time of this report, gunshots were being heard within and outside the \$6 billion Escravos Gas To Liquid project (EGTLP), which sources feared could be shut-down to avert more deaths.

from Shola O'Neill, Warri

A witness told our correspondent that trouble started at about 5.30p.m., when mobile policemen prevented some workers from entering their residence within the premises, saying it was not yet closing time.

"As more and more staff joined them at the gate, the crowd grew and the workers started chanting songs condemning the action of the security agents. In the ensuing melee, I think one of the MOPOL officer opened fire at the crowd," the witness said.

More gunshots were fired to scare away the crowd, all to no avail.

Investigations by our correspondent indicated that some of the security agents had earlier confronted the workers over an undisclosed reason.

A victim died at the spot; the other died at the clinic within the complex. Those wounded are being treated, it was gathered.

Delta State Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan and his top officials worked frantically last night to prevent the crisis from degenerating, amid reports that the victims' kinsmen were spoiling for a fight.

It was gathered that Uduaghan and top officials of Chevron were reaching out to prominent Ijaw youth leaders to prevail on their kinsmen not to seek vengeance.

A source close to Uduaghan told our correspondent: "The governor is on the matter and he is determined that this singular incident will not disrupt the peace being enjoyed in the riverine areas and the entire state."

A Gbaramatu youth leader and former Chairman of Kokodiagbene Community, Comrade Sheriff Mulade, told our correspondent that the circumstances surrounding the incident were still hazy.

Mulade said the killing was "a very wrong way to start the New Year", adding that the authorities should ensure that an investigation is carried out.

"We do not want this to end up as another 'accidental discharge'; those responsible must be fished out and made to face the music," he said in a telephone interview with our correspondent.

He appealed to the youth to continue to maintain the peace, stressing that there was no need to allow the incident to lead to another crisis.