

Cyrus Mody, assistant director of the International Maritime Bureau, said incidents off the coast of Nigeria have been growing "for a number of years,"

vessel, he said.

Such hijackings require "buyers willing to take cargo, there has to be a degree of organisation on land as well

impoverished, and for years small groups of bandits have attacked oil industry vessels, but the attacks have increased in recent years and become more

made the continent's western coast an increasing target for pirate attacks.

Piracy has long flourished off Africa's east coast, where lawlessness in Soma-

land last December said in a statement announcing the Brussels-based nonprofit's report on the area.

# Suspected pirates kill two soldiers in Rivers

## •One missing, four injured

From Mike Odiegwu Yenagoa

**T**WO soldiers on escort duty have been shot dead by unknown gunmen suspected to be pirates in Rivers State.

The soldiers, attached to the Joint Task Force (JTF) Operation Pulo Shield, were said to have been killed in an ambush in Ikuru Community in Adoni Local Government Area.

Another soldier onboard the attacked boat was said to be missing after the incident.

A security source confirmed that two of the soldiers were killed at the spot with their bodies recovered, while one of them was missing.

The source, who pleaded anonymity, said the soldiers were escorting civilians when their boat was attacked.

"They fought gallantly but were unable to escape. They, however, protected the civilians

onboard," he said.

It was, however, learnt that three of the civilians, including the boat operator, sustained injuries.

The boat was reportedly conveying workers of the Z-Cube Construction Company, who were on their way to the project site awarded the firm by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

The pirates were said to be operating on a coastal border between Bayelsa and Rivers states.

JTF was reportedly angered by the incident.

The Media Coordinator, JTF, Lt. Col. Onyema Nwachukwu, lamented the death of the soldiers.

He said they repelled the attack and defended the lives of the civilians they were escorting at the expense of their lives.

Nwachukwu described the attack as an ambush and said the outfit was on the trail of the bandits.

He said: "About 1pm on Tuesday, three of our soldiers fell into an ambush of sea robbers when escorting three civilian workers

of Z-Cube Construction Company, moving from end of New Road to Ikuru town in Adoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

"The workers were on their way to NDDC road construction site. Our troops repelled the attack and defended the lives of the civilians they were escorting at the expense of their lives.

"They stood by the creed of their profession by paying the supreme sacrifice to ensure the safety of the civilian workers."

Nwachukwu said the civilians sustained injuries and were recuperating in hospital.

He added: "We are on the trail of the criminals, who must be brought to justice. We urge the inhabitants of the area to report any suspicious movement to law enforcement agencies."