

NIGER DELTA REPORT

How pirates killed 20 on Nembe water

SUSPECTED pirates have taken over Nembe water. Hardly does a day pass without one incident or the other being recorded. So bad is the situation that boat drivers and travellers literally say their last prayer before beginning a journey.

Last week, many travellers were killed by pirates on Nembe water. Two speed boats were also stolen.

Niger Delta Report gathered that no less than 20 travellers and boat drivers killed have been killed this year. 32 speed-boats have been stolen.

The Nembe water in Rivers State, which is one of the water routes for those travelling to Bonny, Okrika, Nembe Town and some parts of Bayelsa, such as through Sagbama, Akasa and Brass, has become a deathly route due to the activities of pirates.

A visit to Nembe jetty in Rivers State shows that the continued attack on passengers and boat drivers has instigated anxiety. It has also crumbled the maritime business in the area.

The boat drivers now find it difficult to enter the water. The sea travellers are now opting for other means of travelling, except those who have no alternative. The boat owners are now afraid of investing on the business. Some of the boat owners who have six to ten boats are operating one or two.

The presence of security agents has not deterred the sea robbers. The Maritime Workers Union and the boat owners said they have written to the police and severally met with the security operatives in the state to see what they could do to assist them. They said the sophisticated weapons at the disposal of the pirates show that the police were ill-equipped to contend with them.

Drivers have sad tales to tell. Mr. Linus Adolphus, a boat driver with Tari Company who was recently discharged from the hospital after being shot by the pirates, relived his experience to Niger Delta Report: "I loaded from Nembe jetty to Nembe town. I was on the water and noticed that the water wave has increased; then I revved the engine to enable my boat cope with the wave. Suddenly, when I look at my left I saw another speed boat with those onboard fully armed men started coming close to me. When I tried to speed off, they shot me from the left side of my chest. The bullet hit me on my hand and scattered the bones. One of them jumped inside the boat and drove us to the creek where they robbed the passengers of their belongings; they even collected their shoes. When we got to the creeks, they discharged the passengers and ordered them to run. They collected the boat and asked me to call the owner of the boat on phone and told him where I was. I called my company and eventually they located me and took me to the hospital. I thought I was death because I was seriously bleeding with severe pain until I got to the hospital."

Adolphus said the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) must find a solution to sea robberies in order not to kill their business.

Other boat drivers, who



•Nembe Jetty



•From right: Authentic, Teke, Ovugbani and Ogun



•Adolphus shortly after he was shot



•Adolphus after being discharged from the hospital

Companies No of boats lost

Seabird	1
Seabiro	4
Matco	3
Pedeo	1
Jerry	2
Big Jerry	2
Tari	1
Job	1
Bro Jee	1
Ebifeited	1
Holy Ghost	1
Savour	1
Lady Dee	1
Chifo	1
Patros	1
Lucky	1
Obopear	1
Osubini	1
Miracle	2
Khalid	2
Tedee	2
Ipoks	1
EFA	1

From Precious Dikewoha

spoke with Niger Delta Report, said they were afraid to drive on the water.

"My brother, if you go to the jetty now, you will see many boats tied in the waterside. None is on duty. The worst thing is that the owners of the boats no longer release boat to their drivers because they are Aboh, said things must change. He believes if the attacks on boat drivers and sea travellers continue, they may force the boat owners out of business, thereby leading to frustration.

He said: "I want to call on Governor Rotimi Amaechi to consider our plight because in the Bayelsa axis, the government was able to secure the water ways. The only problem we are having now is Rivers routes. In Bayelsa, some boys were recruited and attached to military officers, who monitor the pirates. That is what we need in our own water ways."

The owner of Matco Marine boat, Ebi Ovugbani, said three of his boats were snatched in September. He said each of the boats cost between N1.8 million to N3 million.

He said: "This year alone I have lost three of my boats to pirates and these were new boats. I came with seven boats when I started operation at

Akwa Ibom boat operators: pirates are disturbing us

BOAT operators and traders in Oron, Akwa Ibom, have decried the increasing rate of piracy activities around the Calabar creeks.

The operators and traders told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Saturday in Oron that attacks on boats and vessels have been the major challenge in their business.

NAN gathered that the development had led to a hike in water transportation charges as the operators claim to be operating under risks.

Mr Ime Etim, a boat owner, told NAN that piracy was affecting water transportation in the area.

"If pirates attack us, we give them money. Sometimes, they seize our boats or the goods of the traders," Etim said.

Mr Taju Balogun, another boat owner, corroborated Etim's complaint, saying that pirates not only seized boats, but sometimes killed passengers in the boats.

Mrs Ndi Okon, a fish trader, told NAN that boat owners have increased their fares because of the activities of the pirates.

"Before now, we paid between N400 and N500 within the Calabar creeks, but now, we pay N1,200 per trip. This is affecting the cost of business," Okon said.

Sources told NAN that vessels navigating within the Calabar creeks, around 40 nautical miles from the Fairway Bouy, up to the Calabar Port, have been operating in fear.

The source said that reports of attacks on vessels and boats around the port have increased in recent times.

According to the source, who pleaded anonymity, there are several islands around the passage leading to the port.

These islands, the source said, served as hideouts for militants who carried out illegal operations on the water.

"The problem with the passage is that there are several islands, like Parrot Island and Snake Island, where militants used to hide.

"Even ordinary boats crossing the islands have increased their fares because of the activities of pirates," the source said.

The source said that Nigerian waters had yet to attain a satis-

Nembe water, but as I am talking to you now, I have no boat and I have nothing doing to survive. The problem with most of us now is how to live up to the responsibility at home. Some of us are yet to pay our children school fees."

The Unit Chairman, Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria Nembe branch, David Teke, said the government of Rivers State should emulate its Bayelsa counterpart.

He said: "Things are not going well here with us. Travellers are being attacked and

boats are being stolen daily. We do complain to the security officers when any incident occurred but the security officers who come around sometime, especially when we complain of any robbery incident, do not have the kind of weapon the pirates have. Mind you, the sea pirates also monitor the security personnel and when they discover that they are not around; they attack and go back to the creek. We don't have security that could match or overpower the pirates. Since I assumed office, 23 boats have

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•Akpabio

factory level of security, in spite of measures being taking by the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA).

"Recently, NIMASA arrested some oil tankers and handed them over to the EFCC, but nobody has been prosecuted.

"NIMASA is struggling, but at the same time, there are people sponsoring these pirates," the source said.

been stolen and about 20 people have been killed.

"On August 8, three passengers were killed during a raid on the boat by a gang of pirates and about 25 passengers on the boat were robbed of their belongings. We are calling on the Federal Government to assist us. We don't have arms to face them. If not for God, nearly the criminals would have collected another boat yesterday. When NIMASA visited us to preach about safety where they distributed about 200 lifejackets,

most of us told them that life jacket is not the major issue because sometimes pirates also collect the lifejacket given to travellers by the union.

"But we told NIMASA to assist us protect the water ways, we want them as a body in the maritime sector to protect our life. They can secure our water ways. The distribution of life jackets is not our main priority for now; we need help from the state to Federal Government to provide security for the safety of travellers, especially during Xmas period."