

Four naval ratings, others feared killed in Bayelsa militants' ambush

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Four naval ratings attached to an oil servicing company have been feared killed in an ambush by suspected militants in Nembe creek, Nembe Local Government of Bayelsa State.

A senior employee of the firm and his wife, identified simply as Mercy, were among those reportedly shot by the gunmen.

While Mercy was said to have been killed on the spot, sources said the whereabouts of the ratings and the oil worker were unknown last night.

A security source, who spoke in confidence, described the attack as deadly, saying the gunmen took their victims by surprise.

He said the attack occurred on Tuesday morning at one of the wellheads supplying crude to the Nembe Flow Station, which formerly belonged to the Shell Production Development Company (SPDC).

The source said the victims left the flow station, which was reportedly sold to another oil company, ICEO, by SPDC, to inspect the wellhead.

According to the source, Mercy was on a visit and decided to accompany her husband on the inspection tour.

The source said: "Immediately they got to the wellhead close to the flow station, some militants waylaid them, killed the woman on the spot. The whereabouts of the employee and the naval ratings are still unknown. There are indications that they have been killed by the gunmen."

The source, a senior security officer, decried the spate of attacks on security personnel and military gunboats in the region.

A senior naval officer, who did not want to be named, confirmed the attack, but said he was not aware of the number of deaths.

The incident occurred before an unrepentant militant group, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), warned a former wanted militant leader, Chief Government Ekpemupolo (aka Tompolo), about a letter he wrote to President Muhammadu Buhari.

Tompolo, in the letter, disassociated himself from the NDA, urging the Federal Government to go ahead with its proposed repair of damaged gas pipeline in the region, including the Forcados 48-inch pipeline.

But the NDA, in an electronic statement, asked Tompolo not to give false assurances to oil servicing contractors in charge of pipeline repairs.

The group described Tompolo's support for President Buhari as provocative.

NDA's statement addressed to Tompolo said: "We, the Niger Delta Avengers, have only decided to pick the struggle up from where you and the former Niger Delta agitators left off; it is only the actors that are new. You are not one of us and you need not bother yourself to try to convince anyone.

"...If you can't join us, please, take your hands off our activities because it's a slap on our face for you to give a nod for repair works to continue on the 48-inch pipeline at Forcados, despite a stern warning by us that no one should go near the blast site.

"Come to think of it, the Maritime University at Okerenkoko was awarded and approved by the last president only for the Buhari-led government to cancel it. When he did so, did any of the emirs, former northern vice-presidents and former northern presidents say a word or question their fellow northerner for doing such an unspeakable harm to the Niger Deltans?

"So, how can Chief Ekpemupolo undermine the Niger Delta Avengers and ask that work should go on on the 48-inch pipeline at Forcados?

"We hereby give you a three-day ultimatum to apologise to Niger Delta Avengers in the same national newspaper; anything else than that will mean that we shall bring the war to your doorstep by blowing up oil installations within your backyard (Gbaramatu Kingdom), since you have taken sides with the Federal Government to fight Niger Delta residents.

"We are, however, advising you to steer clear of our battle with the Federal Government; it is better you stay mute on our activities, if you can't support us. Please, take your eyes off our activities."