

10 feared dead in Warri Refinery explosion

MEND claims responsibility, says it planned 'hurricane exodus'

FROM BOLAJI OGUNDELE AND
EBENEZER ADUROKIYA

THE Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has claimed responsibility for the sabotage of facilities inside the Warri Refinery and Petrochemical Company in Warri, Delta State, on Tuesday, saying it actually wanted to carry out what it termed "Hurricane Exodus" to burn down the entire facility.

There was pandemonium at about 11.00 a.m on Tuesday, as fire engulfed the refinery.

Disclosing its action in a press statement circulated electronically to journalists in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on Tuesday, by its spokesman, Jomo Gbomo, the group claimed that its plan was to burn down the refinery.

The group said the attack was a reaction to the failure of the amnesty programme of the Federal Government, adding that its onslaught against the Nigerian oil industry would not stop until government changed its approach to solving Niger Delta problem.

"MEND takes responsibility for the sabotage this morning, Tuesday, October

22, inside the NNPC Refinery in Warri. 'Hurricane Exodus' was intended to burn down the entire refining facility.

"As long as President Goodluck Jonathan continues to rely on an unsustainable and fraudulent Niger Delta amnesty programme, peace and security will continue to elude his government in the region," the statement said.

Although information on the causes of the inferno were still sketchy, an unconfirmed source said no fewer than 10 workers died, with some

others sustaining varying degrees of burns.

Nigerian Tribune gathered that the casualties were ferried to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) clinic and other medical centres nearby.

The company's Public Affairs Manager, Mrs Emmanuelle Ate, however, was reported to have, however, said there was no casualties, saying it was a minor fire outbreak that was quickly brought under control.

It was learnt that the inci-

dent occurred when a routine maintenance was being carried out at the 10-H-02 equipment in Area II.

Another source said several components of the refinery had been faulty and needed to be upgraded, adding that some engineers were on duty to fix a leak in the gas component before it went in flames.

When the *Nigerian Tribune* got to the gate of the company at about mid-day, security operatives, including soldiers, were seen keeping

surveillance, while visitors, including Red Cross officials, were prevented from gaining entrance.

Journalists were also barred from having a feel of the incident, with one of the security men saying they should return the following day to gather information from the Public Affairs department.

No fewer than four ambulances were seen moving to and from the premises of the company, with occupants armed with hand gloves and

nose covers, an indication that the explosion may have recorded casualties.

Though the cause was yet to be ascertained, a source said the company officials were still carrying out investigation.

It was gathered that the directives and prompt intervention of the Managing Director, Mr Paul Obelley, who cut short his trip to Rivers State on account of his daughter's wedding on Saturday, actually nipped the explosion in the bud.

Armoured vehicles: Senate, Reps begin probe

FROM JACOB SEGUN OLATUNJI,
DAP OF ALADE, SHOLA ADEKOLA
AND KOLAWOLE DANIEL

THE Senate has said it was not foot-dragging on the scandal involving the Minister of Aviation, Ms Stella Oduah, over the purchase of two armoured BMW cars.

Rather, the upper legislative body said it would, first of all, check the available facts and figures before conducting investigation into the scandal, instead of relying on media reports.

This was just as the House of Representatives, on Tuesday, ordered its committee

on aviation to probe the matter and report back within one week.

Chairman, Senate Committee on Aviation, Senator Hope Uzodinma, made this known in Abuja, on Tuesday.

He also explained that the embattled minister and heads of agencies in the ministry did not appear before the Senate during its plenary session on Tuesday because his committee was yet to invite her.

The Senate had, two weeks ago, summoned the minister to explain the cause of the incessant air disasters in the aviation sector.

Justifying the position of his colleagues, who decided not to speak on the armoured vehicles scam, Uzodinma said "as the chairman of the Senate Committee on Aviation, I have read a lot on the alleged scandal in the media and I believe other members of the committee are also up to date on the raging issue.

"However, we cannot jump into the fray of the controversy like that on the strength of media information alone, without properly checking our records for facts and figures on whether the alleged vehicles were appropriated for or not by the agencies that purchased them.

"Our appeal to the general public for now is that they

nally Generated Revenue and whether the minister is entitled to such vehicles under any law in Nigeria."

The committee would also determine "whether the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and all anti-corruption agencies is not bound to investigate and prosecute those involved and whether the president can continue to retain the services of the minister and all those involved in the matter."

Honourable Osagie, while moving the motion, said "given the poverty and unemployment crises ravaging our nation and its people, it will be absurd and unthinkable for an agency of government to connive with its political head to incur such an expen-

in the agreement.

When the two motions were put to vote by the Speaker, Honourable Aminu Tambuwal, they were unanimously supported by members.

NAMA denies buying limousines for Oduah

The Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) has denied that it bought four limousines for Oduah.

The reaction came after an online publication reported on Tuesday that the agency also bought limousines for the minister.

In a statement issued by its General Manager, Public Affairs, Supo Atobatele, NAMA described the publication as mischievous.

We're not demolishing New PDP secretariat