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## Militants ambush 2 gunboats

16/08/2008 12:37 - (SA)

Port Harcourt - Twelve Nigerian militants and a naval officer were killed in a gun battle on Friday near a Royal Dutch Shell natural gas plant in the oil-producing Niger Delta, military and security sources said.

Lieutenant Colonel Sagir Musa, spokesperson for the military task force in southern Rivers state, said militants ambushed two navy gunboats on patrol in Rivers state. The Shell-operated gas plant did not come under fire.

"This evening our men of the (Joint Task Force) came under attack around Alakiri on the Port Harcourt-Bonny sea route," said Musa. "We responded and exchanged fire and we killed several of the militants."

Two security sources said at least 12 militants and one soldier were killed in the fighting.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which launched a campaign of violence against the oil sector in early 2006, dismissed the high casualty report.

"No MEND units or affiliated groups have reported such heavy losses," the militant group said in an e-mailed statement.

Militant attacks on Nigeria's oil facilities have become increasingly frequent, shutting down a fifth of oil production in the last two years.

The Niger Delta Vigilante, a militant group with links to MEND, threatened more violence in the area.

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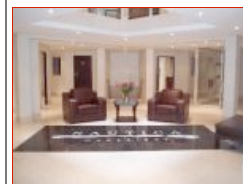
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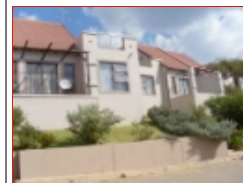
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