

Continued from Page 10

# Pregnant woman, five others die scooping fuel

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**SONI DANIEL**

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**T**HE people of Ogale community in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State, were thrown into mourning on Saturday when they woke up to discover that six of their own had died.

The victims, an expectant mother and five men, were drowned on Friday night as they joined in the fray to scoop petroleum products from vandalised pipelines that crisscross the community.

An eyewitness, who iden-

tified himself as Iweren, told our correspondent that the pipelines were vandalised by a gang, which had been operating in the community with the tacit support of some powerful individuals and security agents in the area.

Pointing to holes dug and fitted with improvised materials for oil stealing, the source said that the oil theft had become a major source of business in the community and that it was known and carried out by the ordinary natives.

It was learnt that the

***Continued on Page 11***

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**Continued from Page 10**

victims were trapped by the swampy nature of the area where the pipelines are located and were exposed to the suffocating fumes from the exposed mixture of crude oil, kerosene, diesel and gas.

"We thought that these people were able to get out of the area but their bodies were recovered only this morning from the mini dam in Ogale," another witness said.

A high-ranking community leader in the area (name withheld), who is believed to be the arrowhead of the bunkering activities in

the area, was allegedly arrested by security agents and taken to Abuja on Saturday morning.

The Special Adviser to the Rivers State Governor on Emergency and Fire Service, Chief Godwin Bebe-Okpabi, confirmed the incident and said that he had despatched his men to the area to get details.

Describing the incident as unfortunate, Bebe-Okpabi, said the relevant agencies charged with the responsibility of checking bunkering should be able to find out those who carried out the vandalism of the pipelines that led to the death of

the people.

The pregnant woman was buried on Saturday, amidst wailing by his family, friends and relations.

○ The death of the victims coincided with the reported killings of four men in Bori, the headquarters of the Khana Local Government Area on Saturday by two rival cult groups-Dewell and Degbam, fighting for supremacy ahead of the 2007 elections.

But, Ireju Barasua, the Rivers State Police Public Relations Officer, a deputy superintendent of police, claimed ignorance of the two incidents.