

# Pipeline explosions rock Ogun

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## • Five policemen, four others burnt

**F**IVE policemen and four members of a vigilante group on Monday sustained various degrees of burns in two pipeline explosions around Mosimi Depot in Ogun State.

The explosions occurred barely hours after two people died in a building that collapsed in Iba, a suburb of Lagos and 11 days after a similar incident claimed several lives in Ijegun, Alimosho Local Government Area.

Our correspondents learnt that one of the explosions occurred about two kilometres away from the Mosimi Depot around 3am on Monday. The depot supplies petroleum products to the states in the South-West.

An eyewitness claimed that the explosion occurred during an exchange of fire between vandals and the policemen, who attempted to stop them from siphoning fuel from a hole in the pipeline.

The witness said, "The vandals were siphoning fuel from the pipeline and when they sighted the security men, they laid ambush for them and there was an exchange of

fire.

"This was when the pipeline exploded, burning the policemen and four vigilante group members. The vandals, however, escaped unhurt."

It was gathered that the second explosion occurred while maintenance engineers from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation were trying to put out the initial fire.

No casualty was reported in the explosion which occurred at the Isheri end of the depot.

The Public Affairs Manager of the Pipelines and Products Marketing Company, Mr. Ralph Ugwu, confirmed the incidents.

He said that the policemen were "being treated of various degrees of burns at a nearby hospital."

Ugwu said, "The pipeline exploded in an exchange of fire with the vandals. The fire has been put out and the pipeline has been clamped and they are now engaged in the cooling of the pipeline at the earlier incidence.

"Another team of engineers were immediately deployed to the second scene."

The Depot Manager, Atlas Cove Jetty, Mr. Anthony Onwuka, told our correspondent that the depot had to shut down operations as a result of the explosions.

Onwuka added that pumping had resumed on the pipeline known as

Systems 2B, after the repair of the Ijegun pipeline which was excavated during a road expansion work.

The Minister of State for Energy (Petroleum), Mr. Odein Ajumogobia, on Monday, met with Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fasola (SAN), on better ways of securing the NNPC pipelines' Right of Way in the state.

Also, in Iba where two people died when a two-storey building collapsed on Sunday night, residents claimed that some people were still trapped in the rubble.

The state government accused the owner of the building of raising it without approval.

It was learnt that officials of the state fire service reportedly rescued

## 11 soldiers feared killed b

Ibanga Isine and  
Ihuoma Chiedozie

**A**NOTHER tragedy may have befallen the Nigerian Armed Forces as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta on Monday claimed it killed 11 soldiers in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The Joint Task Force, otherwise known as Operation Restore Hope in the Niger Delta, denied the claim but confirmed that MEND blew up a major oil pipeline belonging to the Shell Petroleum Development Company near Awobi

Flow Station in Degema.

MEND had in an e-mail statement to THE PUNCH in Port Harcourt, said its 'detonation engineers', backed by heavily armed fighters, carried out the attack on the SPDC facility in the early hours of Monday.

The statement was issued shortly before President Umaru Yar'Adua expressed hope that the Niger Delta Master Plan would end the rising agitation for resource control by indigenes of the oil-rich region.

According to the statement by Mr. Jomo Gbomo, MEND's engineers and fighters encountered

failed to ensure peace, security and reconciliation in the Niger Delta.

But the spokesman for the JTF, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, denied that any soldier was killed by MEND.

Musa, in a telephone interview with one of our correspondents, said reports available to the JTF indicated that a pipeline near Awoba Flow Station exploded in the early hours of Monday.

He said, "The area and flow station is not guarded by any armed security outfit. Therefore, the purported document in which MEND claimed responsibility for an