

Militants attack vessel, kill Navy personnel, injure others

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A Naval officer has been confirmed dead following an attack by militants on a vessel belonging to Addax Petroleum Development Corporation near Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Four other Navy personnel and some of the vessel's crew members were reported to have suffered injuries in the attack, which occurred hours after an explosion marred operations carried out by the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta to recover arms and ammunition in militant camps in the Niger Delta and Edo states.

The injured persons and the vessel were taken to LNG, Bonny Island.

The Public Relations Officer, Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, and Addax confirmed the attack but differed on casualties.

Musa said, "I can confirm that the militants did not hijack the vessel neither did they capture any Naval personnel."

But Addax, in a statement in Lagos, said, "It is with regret that we report the death of a Nigerian Navy personnel. During the incident four other Navy personnel and crew were injured."

The Swiss-Canadian oil company said the vessel was contracted by it to provide security services on Oil Mining Lease 126, offshore Nigeria.

It said, "At approximately 11.45 pm on Sunday, June 8, 2008, the Navy vessel on OML126 was approached and attacked by unknown assailants in two speedboats.

"The two speedboats departed, without any adverse effect on the corporation's operations or technical infrastructure in OML126."

The President/Chief Executive, Addax Petroleum, Mr. Jean

Claude Gandur, described the attack as "unfortunate" and "pre-meditated."

While condoling with the family of the deceased officer, he said the company, in collaboration with some government agencies at both the federal and state levels had commenced full investigations into the attack.

Early on Monday, our correspondent learnt that 10 boxes of ammunition recovered from militant camps in some coastal communities in Delta and Edo states exploded on Sunday evening during an exchange of gun fire between JTF personnel and militants.

A reliable source disclosed to our correspondent at 93 Battalion, Effurun, the headquarters of the JTF, that some members of the JTF and militants were injured in the incident.

The source also said that the security operatives recovered about 20 assorted arms, including AK 47, SLR and G3 rifles from the camps.

The Commander of JTF, Brig.-Gen. Wuyep Rintip, confirmed the incident when he spoke with our correspondent.

Rintip said, "The operation would have been successful but there was an explosion. Ten boxes of ammunition which we recovered from the miscreants exploded during the exchange of gun fire between our troops and the criminals.

"It was a big catch but we lost the ammunition to the explosion. It is unfortunate but it was not a bad outing. We also recovered about 20 arms; it may be more because we are still collating.

"We have not recovered all the illegal weapons but it is a gradual process. Am sure we are going to recover all arms and ammunition in their

(militants) possession."

Our correspondent gathered that the attacks on the militant camps caused tension in the coastal communities in the two states and neighbouring Bayelsa and Ondo states.

Reports on Monday showed that residents and the militants fled in droves.

A source said, "Exodus of people from the riverside communities has been reported since the military action started. Some warlords who probably thought that they are on the wanted list of JTF had run for cover.

"They have relocated their arms and ammunition and abandoned their camps. There is tension everywhere on the river."

Meanwhile, the Finnimah community in Rivers State has appealed to the Federal Government to come to its rescue by removing a grounded vessel, M.T. Pentagram, from its beach.

A spokesman for the community, Mr. Augustine Princewill, said the vessel, which belongs to a Nigerian company, drifted to the beach in 1997 when it lost anchorage and engines while on its way to Lagos.

Princewill said that frantic efforts to remove it had failed.

He said the community was worried that the vessel was posing danger to its indigenous people since it had not only become an abode for militants but had also contributed to the pollution of the beach.

Princewill recalled that three bodies suspected to be members of the security agencies keeping peace in the Niger Delta were seen floating around the vessel.

He said the Federal Government could direct the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas to remove the vessel since it had the resources to do so.

lay over warning strike

salary scale for all the teachers in the country.

"The Federal Government can only set up a model that the states can copy. Indeed, the government has reached an advanced stage in the process to bring about the implementation of the TSS," he said.

Agada announced that discussion on the details of the new salary scale was on-going between the government and teachers.

Also on Monday, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, Senator Joy Emodi, appealed to NUT to shelve the strike in the interest of Nigerian children.

Emodi hinged her plea on the fact that each time there was an industrial action, children of the less-privileged suffered the most.

While supporting the

teachers' demand, Emodi expressed regret that whereas other professionals in the country enjoyed specialised remunerations, teachers were left out.

"Anything we can do to motivate the teachers, we have to do because of their importance to society," she said.

Before Agada and Okoroafor spoke, the Registrar of the National Examination Council, Prof. Promise Okpalla, expressed fear that the planned strike would affect the conduct of its Junior Secondary School Certificate Examinations and common entrance to unity schools.

Okpalla lamented that if the strike took place, it would affect the examinations because teachers would be actively involved in the examinations as invigilators and supervisors.