

Militants kill pregnant woman, four Naval ratings

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FOUR naval ratings and a pregnant woman were feared dead on Saturday in Bonny, Rivers State in an attack on a naval houseboat by militants.

An unspecified number of militants were also said to have been killed by some Naval operatives aboard the same houseboat.

A source told one of our correspondents that the heavily armed militants chased two civilians to the naval houseboat and opened fire on it, killing some of the occupants.

He said, "We learnt that the two civilians, who ran to the houseboat were killed. About four naval personnel were also killed by the militants. One of them was believed to have been beheaded.

"But the other Naval men who were unprepared for the assault quickly mobilised to repel the militants. Many of the militants were killed and their bodies fell into the river. The fighting lasted for a long time."

Another source said some of the militants who escaped went to another part of the community and shot dead a pregnant woman and injured many others.

Our correspondent in Rivers learnt that authorities of the Joint Task Force visited the scene of the attack on

Sunday.

Gunboats and troops were later deployed in the town to forestall further break down of law and order.

When contacted on the telephone, the spokesman for the JTF, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, said, "There was an attack on our location in Bonny which led to exchange of fire between suspected militants and troops deployed to maintain law and order in the area.

"Although there were casualties, I cannot confirm the number of persons affected. But it is greatly feared that two or more persons died as result of the encounter."

About 48 hours before the Bonny incident, gunmen attacked a former Speaker of the Delta State House of Assembly, Mr. Young Igbude.

Although Igbude was lucky as he escaped with an injury, his in-law was not.

A police source said the gunmen tailed Igbude from Warri, intercepted his car at Otor-Owhe in Isoko North, and first opened fire on his in-law whom they mistook for a police orderly.

He said, "The former speaker managed to escape into the bush with a bullet wound in his leg. His wife who was with him was also able to escape but his in-law was killed by the bandits who believed that he was a policeman attached to the former speaker."

Meanwhile, Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan is to meet with Niger Delta leaders

in Abuja over the growing insecurity in the region and the planned Presidential summit.

There were however conflicting claims on when the meeting would hold. While one of our sources said it was scheduled for 10pm on Sunday, another said it would take place on Monday (today).

The sources said the idea of the meeting was mooted at another similar talk between Jonathan and governors in the region in Abuja on Saturday.

The meeting will be attended by the governors, 10 elders/leaders from each of the states in the region, members of the National Assembly, ministers and other highly

placed government officials of Niger Delta origin.

A source said that Jonathan would use the opportunity of the meeting to also drum up support among the leaders for the peace summit initiated by President Umaru Yar'Adua.

But in spite of Jonathan's roles in Federal Government's efforts to restore normalcy to the region, the Ijaw Youth Council has called for his resignation from the Yar'Adua administration if he could not use his position to influence issues affecting the Ijaw.

The council said through its Secretary, Mr. Eradiri Udengs, that it was unfortu-

nate that the vice-president was in a government which had moved to construct a boulevard worth billions of naira in Abuja when the Niger Delta Development Commission was starved of funds.

Udengs, who spoke with journalists in Benin on Sunday, said, "If the vice-president feels that he cannot influence anything in that place, he should resign.

"It is not an issue of being a vice-president from the South-South and not having a say. They were passing the budget for the boulevard but the vice-president did not have an input to reflect his coming

from the Niger Delta. If he thinks the environment is too harsh for him, he should resign."

He also cautioned against the deployment of warships in the region, saying it could lead to deaths and destructions in Ijaw communities.

Udengs said, "We are calling on the Federal Government to rescind that decision that gunboats should invade Ijawland to fish out militants who attacked the Bonga oil flow station.

"These boys do not have the capability to fight the Nigerian Army. But they would cripple the economy. It is the multi-nationals that would suffer most."

New electricity tariff takes off tomorrow

**Obinna Ezeobi and
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THE new electricity tariff known as the Multi-Year Tariff Order will take effect from Tuesday (tomorrow) across the country.

Under the MYTO approved by the Federal Executive Council on March 30, 2008, a kilowatt hour of electricity will cost N11 instead of the current N6.

Consumers, however, need not panic as the Federal Government will pay the difference (N5) between the new tariff and the old one through a MYTO Support Fund in the next three years.

It will cost government

N177.95bn to take care of the shortfall in tariff for the period (three years).

Our correspondent gathered in Abuja that MYTO is a 15-year tariff plan that would feature major tariff reviews every five years.

The Chairman, Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission, Dr. Ransome Owan, told one of our correspondents in Abuja on Friday that the new price regime would encourage investors to build independent power stations since they would be guaranteed "a reasonable return on their investments."

The commission had licensed 26 companies to

build power stations but many of them held back because of what they considered as low tariff.

"One of the missing links had been the cash flow projection. How much are we going to get for the wholesale power that we are going to sell to the grid? With the introduction of MYTO, they can now see a path to how much they will be paid as the wholesale price," Owan said.

He dismissed insinuations that most of the licensed IPPs were idle, pointing out that those in Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Abia states were either generating or installing their turbines.

The NERC chief said, "Now that they have the new

He explained that the Federal Government and such consumers will contribute into the PCAF.

Meanwhile, the South-West Legislators' Forum has thrown its weight behind President Umaru Yar'Adua's plan to declare a state of emergency in the power sector.

The lawmakers said after a three-day conference in Akure, Ondo State, that epileptic power supply in the country which had contributed to the closure of many businesses, made the plan imperative.

No fewer than 63 legislators from the five state Houses of Assembly in the South-West attended the conference.

They said in a statement that the much sought after direct