

Militants Kill Two Soldiers, Four Others, Blow up More Pipelines

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- ***Another group threatens to shut down Nigeria's airspace, orders troops to vacate N'Delta***
- ***We will not negotiate with Avengers, CDS Vows House backs military action in oil region***

Our Correspondents

The constant attacks on oil and gas installations took a turn for the worse yesterday, when

the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) blew up two more pipelines in Bayelsa State and vowed to bring Nigeria's oil output to zero.

Yesterday's attacks by the rampaging militants, who have claimed responsibility for the recent wave of attacks on oil installations in the Niger Delta, came on the heels of another one suspected to have been carried out by the same group on Wednesday evening on a houseboat stationed at Ijere community in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, where the group engaged Nigerian troops in a gun battle, killing two soldiers and four civilians.

The houseboat was operated by the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company (NPDC), the exploration and production subsidiary of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

This was just as a new militant group, the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force, threatened to launch missiles to shut down Nigeria's airspace and the country's satellite system by Tuesday next week. It also ordered the Nigerian Armed Forces to vacate the oil-rich region within 48 hours.

Sources, who opened up on the attack on the houseboat at Ijere, said other than the six persons who were killed, some soldiers were also believed to be missing.

Security sources told THISDAY that the militants struck when the soldiers least expected it.

"Some militants suspected to be the Avengers attacked a houseboat stationed at pipeline junction at the back of Ijere community. The militants came through Omadina creek in the Itsekiri axis. During the exchange of gunfire, the houseboat sank while the army recorded casualties. The militants escaped through the Omadina community axis.

Following the attack, it was gathered that two soldiers and four civilians died instantly.

Sources disclosed that the civilian casualties – two females and two males – included a 26-year-old caterer identified as Tombra Iwoboibi, who were support staff on the houseboat at the time of the incident.

The corpses of the soldiers and civilians were seen at Central Hospital, Warri by THISDAY. The Public Relations Officer of the hospital, Mrs. Success Obere, confirmed that the bodies were deposited at midnight on Wednesday.

A relation of one of the civilians, Mr. Richard Ebanyaidou, confirmed that his brother, Tombra, was a caterer on the houseboat.

He pleaded with the federal government to wade into the crisis in the riverine areas of the state, lamenting that the innocent people like his brother were losing their lives.

Confirming the Ijere incident later yesterday, the Nigerian Army said the NPDC houseboat

stationed at Ijere junction was attacked by suspected armed militants.

According to a statement signed by the Assistant Director, Army Public Relations, Captain Jonah Unuakhalu, the suspected militants approached the houseboat at 5.50 pm in five speedboats mounted with 250 horsepower engines and disguised as normal commuters.

He said that during the deliberate attack, two soldiers were killed, one wounded, one soldier went missing while four civilian staff attached to the houseboat were shot dead.

The attack, he said, occurred when other members of the troops were on pipeline patrol.

"The brigade condemns the attack on our personnel carrying out their constitutional duties and other innocent staff. The brigade will not be deterred by such dastardly acts, but will remain resolute in discharging its constitutional duties," he added.

Captain Unuakhalu stated that those who carried out the criminal acts would surely be sought, apprehended and brought to justice, and implored all law abiding citizens to go about their normal business.

After the attack in Ijere, the NDA laid claim to bombing two oil pipelines in Bayelsa State yesterday.

The group, in two Twitters posts, said the bombing was carried out at about 2am yesterday.

It equally vowed to ensure that the country's oil production is reduced to zero.

It identified the pipelines blown up as those between Ogboinbiri and Tebidaba and Clough Creek to Tebidaba.

It said: "At about 2.00 am today @NDAvengers blew up the Ogboinbiri to Tebidaba and Clough Creek to Tebidaba Crude Oil pipelines in Bayelsa State.

"This is inline with our promise to all international oil companies and indigenous oil companies that Nigeria's oil production will be zero."