

Bloody Shoot-out in N/Delta, 12 Killed

• *Oil company staff feared dead*

*From Segun James in Yenagoa
and Crusoe Osagie in Lagos*

The fragile peace in the Niger Delta creeks snapped Sunday night as 12 persons were reportedly killed in a gun battle between men of the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope (JTF), and militant youths along Biobou Creek.

Although there were conflicting accounts of the clash

yesterday, but the JTF, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Shell Petroleum Development Company confirmed the incident.

A Shell statement said the

company had received reports of a clash between men of JTF and the militants around Brass Creek, which resulted in injuries and possible casualties, noting that the details were still sketchy.

It said: "We have also received reports that an SPDC staff in Letugbene may have

been involved in the attack."

The company refused to give the name of the staff feared to have been involved in the incident, stating that company policy demanded that the family be notified first.

The Shell worker was abducted on August 8 during a routine visit to the community

of Letugbene, in the presence of Bayelsa State Government officials.

But MEND, in its account distributed to the media through email, said the incident happened when a rescue party sent to secure the release of a Shell staff held hostage by some youths was ambushed by the JTF, leaving dead 10 of its fighters, a state government official

and the rescued shell staff.

According to the group, "We set out with 14 fighters to secure the release of a Shell worker held in Bayelsa State. This was successfully done and on the way back, they were ambushed by about 10 JTF gunboats.

"They were attacked without provocation or warning

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and we lost 10 of the 14 fighters in this attack”

MEND said the Shell worker was in one of its boats when they were attacked, but it did not know whether he was killed.

But the JTF said it was not aware of any casualty during the incident.

According to its Public Relations Officer, Major Said Hammed, JTF received a report last Friday that

some criminals were hiding in Biobou Community in Ekeremor, and that on the strength of this information, the community was raided through a cordon and search process.

“No casualties were involved either from the military side nor the side of the militants, only arrest was made,” he said.

But the spokesman of MEND, Chief Patrick

Bigha, told THISDAY that the JTF killed 10 of its fighters.

He explained that a team of chiefs, community heads and youth leaders had been briefed by Shell to negotiate the release of one Mr. Nelson Ojegha, a Community Liaison Officer (CLO), kidnapped by the youths of Letugbene Community about a month ago.

EHINDERO *Cont'd from P1*

tions, by two of the aspirants, Senator Bode Olowoporoku and former deputy governor of the state, Mr. Abiodun Aluko, that the Ekiti State Government and the Nigeria Police were responsible for the murder, penultimate Monday, of a PDP gubernatorial aspirant, Dr. Ayodele Daramola.

But speaking at the opening of the meeting with the aspirants, Ehindero said investigations into the murder would cut across party and tribal lines.

In his words, “We all know why we are here. We are here because of the murder of Dr. Ayo Daramola. I had invited quite a sizeable number of people and stakeholders to unravel the motive behind the assassination. I am still going to invite traditional rulers from Ekiti state.

“We must stop. It portends danger for the whole country, especially if the police are unable to stop the

aspirants across the country have applied for police protection, explaining that it was not possible to provide all the aspirants with police protection other than the security provided for other Nigerians. Ehindero stated: “Aspirants are not entitled to more security than the security that is generally provided for all Nigerians. But when they emerge as candidates, then we can now start giving them personal security. That is government policy”

But he said Nigerian politicians must imbibe the culture of sportsmanship and play politics by the rules. “I want to say that our politicians should play politics without bitterness. Our politics must have principles that are based on morality,” he said.

But when the Inspector General of Police invited the aspirants to make contributions, at least two of them indicted the state government and the police for the

dreams.

“What have you to say of a man that was impeached (Aluko) or of a senator that was expelled by the Peoples Democratic Party (Olowoporoku) and joined the ACD, or of Mr. Femi Falana who wants to come in through the back door using the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) against the state government, taking advantage of his relationship with the EFCC Chairman, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu.

“They are only trying to cover up the truth and using animosity to jeopardize the course of the investigation into the matter. They should not trivialize the death of Daramola because of their political ambitions.

“My governor did not kill anybody to become governor and will not kill to retain his office.”

Meanwhile, Fayose has said until the killers of Daramola are found by the

He said after securing the hostage's release, the rescue party was attacked by the JTF along the Biobou Creek.

He said they were moving in two speedboats and a Passport 19 boat when the attack happened.

Bigha said there was no exchange of fire between the soldiers and MEND, warning that the attack had vitiated the peace agreement between the two groups.

police, the PDP will remain a suspect.

The governor who on Sunday night in Ado-Ekiti accused some of his party members of anti-party activities said he was saddened by the cycle of crises in the state and called for divine intervention.

His pains were yesterday worsened by the arrest of one his supporters, 90 year-old Prince Adegoke Adewunmi, who was taken away by security agents to an unknown destination.

Fayose who bemoaned “the politics of destruction that some people are playing in Ekiti State today,” berated his political opponents, saying when he was in the opposition in 2003, he conducted a responsible campaign that was devoid of mudslinging.

The governor denied in strong terms the allegation that he killed the former World Bank consultant.

But his supporter,

The Federal Government had last week ordered the military to flush out the militants from the Niger Delta, stating that its patience with their militancy was tinning out.

But oil companies had at the weekend expressed fears of a possible backlash of the Federal Government's order for a crack down on insurgents in the Niger Delta.

Industry sources told

Adewunmi, is currently helping security agents to solve the murder riddle.

The security agents who came in three vehicles stormed the residence of the prince on Ojumo area of Oke-Isha, Ado-Ekiti, the state capital, at 9am.

During the operation, which lasted for about two and a half hours, the security agents who operated in a commando style shot sporadically into the air to scare away people, especially those at the market area.

Following a thorough search of the one-story building apartment, painted in brown and light yellow colour, several dangerous weapons such as guns, axe, cutlasses, and charms were recovered.

Others arrested with prince Adewunmi were four of his children and two friends who were said to be on a visit at the time of the arrest.

THISDAY on Sunday that oil majors in the country had started to brace up in anticipation of more violent attacks.

A top official of one of the multinational oil firms said the force-for-force order given by President Olusegun Obasanjo may result in more violence against workers in the oil and gas industry, which government forces may not be able to curtail.

“If the Federal Government's armed forces go all out against the militants in the already charged Niger Delta region, an all out bout of violence and bloodshed may result and the oil companies and their staff will be directly on the receiving end,” the official stated.

He said government's swift change in its approach to violence in the region may be too sudden for the militants to adjust and this may blow off the lid and give way for unbridled violence and bloodshed.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government troops at the weekend arrested about 100 people in a search for militants suspected to have abducted oil industry workers.

With the fears being raised over the life of the SPDC staff the concerns that were expressed by players in the oil industry following the federal government order may have been confirmed.