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Pirates Attack 4 Boats, Kidnap 2

From Ahamefula Ogbu in Port Harcourt, 10.03.2007

Sea Pirates in the early hours of yesterday struck at Bonny channel again and dispossessed occupants of four passenger boats of their money, valuables injuring some of them in the process.

Preliminary investigations by the Police in the State after the pirate attack on passenger boats yesterday morning show that two yet to be identified persons were taken away by the attackers.

The pirates were said to have hidden in a mangrove and targeted the boats which they sped and double crossed with their own at about 7am before they forced every occupant of the boats to lie face down before robbing them.

While some of the pirates had boarded the boats at the jetties as passengers, their collaborators were said to have waited at a point mid sea and apparently on asignal, attacked the boats.

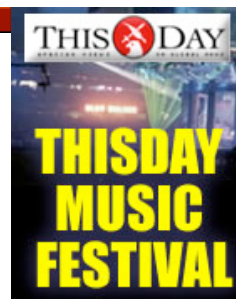
The boats heading towards Bonny from Port Harcourt were there after, taken to one area and dumped there till other boats were able to rescue them and rushed the wounded among them to clinics in Bonny.

One of the passengers who pleaded not to have his name in print said they were stopped in the middle of the river and threatened with automatic weapons which made even the uniformed men among them to comply with the demand hoodlums.

After dispossessing them of their valuables, the pirates were said to have unleashed a volley of shots in to the air before speeding into one of the channels from where they disappeared into the creeks.

Confirming the story, Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Ireju Barasua said the incident was unfortunate but assured that they were doing everything to ensure that the channel was safe for law abiding citizens.

Ireju said of the attack "the gunmen intercepted theboats and dispossessed the passengers of theirvaluables. They also assaulted some of them beforekidnapping two yet to be identified persons."She would however not say whether those taken hostageby the pirates were oil workers.She assured that they have already kick-startedinvestigations into those behind the constant attackson the channel which boasts of high level traffic.The attack is coming on the heels of the report of thesighing of a corpse floating near the Saipemwaterfront where militants raided last week and tookaway two expatriates and a Nigerian while they killeda Columbian.The identity of the corpse could as at press timecould not be ascertained though residents in the areadoubt that the corpse may have been as a result of theexchange of fire about a week ago.It could also not be ascertained if the said corpse is that of an expatriate and neither the JTF nor thepolice agreed to comment on the issue when THISDAYcontacted the authorities.Meanwhile, Nestoil, the servicing company whose equipment wasstopped by youths from Ochigba and Ikata communitiesof Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers Statewhere the Joint Task Force shot and killed one of theyouths, Azhioluka Herbert Aloni has denied involvementin the trouble.Speaking to newsmen yesterday in Port Harcourt, theManaging Director of Nestoil, Sir Ernest Azudialu saidthat the problem was between JTF and the communitiesand not with their company.He explained that his company has been operating andrelating well with the community whose youth he saidthey employed on agreed Memorandum of Understanding,pointing out that the said road which was a subject ofcontention have been severally repaired by them.Narrating how the problem started, he said that therewas an

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understanding between them and the community that any project to be carried out in the area would be executed through contractors as against giving money to the community to do it.

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