

# JTF Kills Five Militants

Men of the military Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta yesterday killed five gunmen after exchanging fire at Cawthorne Channel, an area in Rivers State, a military spokesman said yesterday.

Nigerian navy vessels encountered the gunmen in three speedboats early on Thursday while on patrol in the Cawthorne Channel, an area that is a known hotbed for violence due to its close proximity to key oil facilities.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sagir Musa, a spokesman for the military taskforce said the "chance encounter resulted in the killing of five militants."

There were no military casualties, he added.

The fighting is the second major incident since the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), announced a ceasefire last

month.

Last week, gunmen in speedboats attacked navy vessels guarding the main

crude oil and liquefied natural gas export terminals on Bonny Island.

Soldiers repelled the

attack and killed several of the gunmen after two of their boats were sunk, the military said.

## Oil Workers Call Off Strike

Members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the Nigerian Union of Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) have called off their proposed strike scheduled to have commenced at the end of a 14-day ultimatum given the Federal Government to halt the sale of some key outfits in the oil and gas sector.

The ultimatum (starting from October 9 to October 22) followed reports that the government planned to sell the Nigerian Gas Company and Pipeline and Product Marketing Company (PPMC), a claim that government had since denied, saying it would not privatise them.

### From Patrick Ugeh

in Abuja

Apart from the two companies, the workers called for the review of the sale of the Eleme Petrochemical Company, now Indorama, and the NNPC quarters in Abuja.

THURSDAY gathered yesterday that the decision to suspend the strike followed a meeting between the unions and the Ministers of Energy in charge of Gas and Petroleum, Messrs. Emmanuel Odusina and Odein Ajumogobia, SAN at which they pledged to meet the demands of the oil workers.

"We have issued a 14-day ultimatum to the government to look into our case

beyond which if nothing is done, we will embark on an industrial action at the expiration of the ultimatum October 23," the unions had said.

"The integrity of the bureau is not credible enough for the government to keep it in office. We also fault the sale of Eleme Petrochemical. It should be reviewed because it is fraud. That is why we have come here to register our protest on these issues."

On the denial on the planned sale of the two companies, the NUPENG chairman said: "They are only using that to cajole us to go to sleep but later they announce that certain persons have won the bid."

Workers of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) under the aegis of the both unions in Abuja had vacated their offices in the early hours of Wednesday in a peaceful protest to express their grievances against the planned sale of Nigeria Gas Company (NGC) and Pipeline and Products Marketing Company (PPMC).

They had also reportedly demanded the removal of Irene Chigbue, director-general of Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) for purportedly handing over the Eleme Petrochemical Company Limited to the Indorama group, the new owner, without paying the required fees for the privatisation of the company.

## Amaechi's COS Asks Court to Quash Charge

Chief of Staff to Rivers State Governor, Barrister Ezeibunwo Wike has asked a High Court of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to dismiss the seven-count charge brought against him by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The anti-graft agency about two weeks ago arraigned Wike for allegedly diverting more than N3.9 billion of Rivers State government fund for his personal use. He pleaded not guilty and was later granted bail in the sum of N50 million and two sureties.

### From Funso Muraina and Chioma Okide

missing.

Wike is also contending that no evidence has been placed before the court to show he committed any crime, as the statements of the prosecution's four witnesses did not allege culpability in any offence against him. He claimed an FCT High Court lacks jurisdiction to entertain the charges.

Mr. Chile Okoroma, representing the EFCC, said he was served the said motion at the

court premises about 10 minutes before and needed time to respond to it.

Justice Banjoko agreed with Okoroma's submission and adjourned hearing on the matter till 12th of December 2008.

The EFCC charge sheet claims "Wike, between 2007 and 2008 at Abuja dishonestly converted to his own use N129m belonging to the Rivers State government and thereby committed an offence punishable under section n309 of the panel code, Cap 532 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria."