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Gunmen Kill 2 Soldiers, Kidnap Monarch

From Ahamefula Ogbu in Port Harcourt and Ejiofor Alike in Lagos, 01.13.2009

Two Nigerian soldiers guarding oil facilities in Bomadi area of Delta State were killed when unknown gunmen suspected to be Niger Delta militants attacked their positions, a military Joint Task Force (JTF) spokesman said yesterday.

Also, unknown gunmen numbering about 15 early yesterday kidnapped a royal father, Chief Samuel Nnee, in Ogoni, Rivers State, when they stormed Kpite at about 2am and before help could come, spirited him to an unknown destination.

Agency reports quoted the spokesman of JTF in Delta State, Lieutenant Colonel Rabe Abubakar, as saying that the soldiers were on guard duty at a facility in the area when they were attacked late on Sunday by gunmen in speedboats.

"They opened fire on us without provocation, unfortunately two of our men died," Abubakar was quoted as saying.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, but Abubakar said it was believed to have been staged by criminals in apparent retaliation for the military's latest clampdown on oil bunkering, in the Niger Delta.

"We think that this attack is in retaliation because of our success in putting a stop to illegal bunkering in the Niger Delta," Abubakar said.

The JTF recently arrested a vessel, MT Akuada, laden with 12, 000 metric tonnes of stolen crude oil, with 22 Filipinos on board.

It has also seized a number of vessels used to carry stolen oil in the past two months.

Eleven illegal oil bunkerers including two middle aged women and one deaf and dumb male were also apprehended late last year by the JTF at the Miller water side, Warri South Local Government, Delta State.

About 2,000 drums and three 20,000 litres tankers filled with the product believed to be diesel were recovered along with two Cotonou boats and 16 pumping machines recovered from the scene.

JTF Commander in the Niger Delta region, Gen. Wuyep Rintip last month charged all illegal oil bunkerers to change from their nefarious ways and engage instead in legitimate businesses in the region, saying that the year 2009 would be tough for them.

He also predicted massive employment opportunities for youths of the region, adding that more militants would drop their guns and embrace the peace.

The JTF Commander made these remarks at the JTF Headquarters, Effurun Barracks, Warri, Delta State in an interactive session with newsmen on the eve of the New Year Day.

The motive behind the kidnap of the royal father could not be ascertained as at press time but the victim, who is the Chief of the community, is suspected have been taken for pecuniary reasons.

So far, the whereabouts of the royal father remained unknown as no group has claimed responsibility for the action and since no contact has been made by the kidnappers, no ransom has been demanded.

The Police Public Relations Officer in Rivers State, Mrs. Rita Abbey, confirmed that the hoodlums were about 15 in number and successfully took away Nnee and were yet to make contact.

She said so far, no group has claimed responsibility for the kidnap.

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