



ARMORGROUP NIGERIA WEEKLY REPORT

DATE: 13 February 2007

POLITICAL

Attendance at a political rally hosted by the President was disrupted by armed militant roadblocks outside Port Harcourt at the weekend. Although there was no violence, such intimidation is expected to be part and parcel of the election scene over the next 2 months.

Speculation has arisen that the President may be offered an international job after he steps down in May. This would probably be in a pan Africa role and would be in recognition of his work for democracy in Nigeria. It is assessed that he will think carefully about his reputation and legacy, because any delay in standing down, or delaying the elections for whatever reason, would risk intense international condemnation and possibly affect investor confidence.

Vice President Atiku shows no let up in exploiting his feud with the President in the run up to the elections. He has been warned by others not to further inflame tensions in the Delta Region as a cheap political trick, but will no doubt exploit the situation for all it is worth. He risks arrest for inciting unrest, but it is assessed that he knows Obasanjo will not risk adverse publicity in having an opponent arrested. However, the legal and security forces may take a different view.

INDUSTRIAL

The two 20,000 strong main oil-worker unions in Nigeria said they called off a strike planned for Monday 5 February to protest insecurity in the restive petroleum-producing region pending a meeting with President Obasanjo. This follows the death of a Nigerian worker last week. It is assessed that the postponement is in deference to a meeting with the President and further action will depend on the outcome. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) has disclosed that 90 per cent of Niger Delta indigenes stand to lose their jobs in the region if the current insecurity and hostage taking persist to cripple production.



.MILITANCY

This weekend saw the release in good health of 9 Chinese workers captured last week from the Chinese National Petroleum Company in Bayelsa State during a payroll robbery. It coincided with a visit to Africa at the moment by the Chinese PM.

Last weekend, MEND released photographs of the 24 Filipinos held captive from a German ship in the delta. MEND said they expect their political demands to be met by the government, threatening unspecified action this week. It is assessed that this incident could signal an escalation in tactics, reflecting as it does a split within the organization, which could adopt a more radical approach. The size of the captive group, and their threat to scuttle the ship, gives them numerous options to attract further attention.

The Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Owoye Azazi said this weekend that he was not aware of any plan by the Federal Government to import arms worth \$2 billion for the purpose of crushing militants in the Niger Delta. He said the army opted for dialogue not out of cowardice but because of its commitment to the peaceful resolution of the crisis in the area. He said he believed that more soldiers needed to be deployed there. The militants said the only condition for peace in the Niger Delta was for government to release immediately Asari Dokubo and the impeached governor of Bayelsa State, Chief Diepreye Alamieyesiegha. They also said for lasting peace to be achieved, the nation should either revert to the 1960 constitution which emphasized regional autonomy or take practical steps to address the defects in the nation's federalism. According to them, since the current constitution fails to resolve problems around structural imbalances in the nation's polity, it would only continue to deepen the crises and conflicts in the region. It is assessed that this statement was issued in response to rumour-mongering by Vice President Atiku as much as a legitimate desire by the Army not to get embroiled in an escalation of the conflict.

BIRD FLU

The first human death from avian flu in west Africa was confirmed at the weekend in what experts said was a much more serious development than the spread of the virus to a turkey farm in Suffolk, UK. A 22-year-old woman from Lagos, Nigeria, who died on 16 January was



infected with the H5N1 virus, the World Health Organization confirmed. Professor Angus Nicoll, head of the avian flu division of the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, in Stockholm, said: "This [Nigeria] is the most populous country in Africa. It has got H5N1 in poultry and it must be a candidate for a pandemic to emerge. The most disturbing thing is that the possibility of the Nigerian government controlling this must be slim." Worldwide, the H5N1 virus has infected billions of chickens and ducks over the past decade but only 271 humans, of whom 165 have died. Some scientists argue that with each passing year the likelihood of its mutating to create a pandemic strain that would sweep the world killing millions of people are diminishing. If it was going to mutate it would have done so by now, they say.

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