

## Maritime workers paralyse port activities over pirate incursions

Continues from page 23

to combat sea pirates' activities that had hampered marine transportation in the state in recent times.

He said when the government eventually made an attempt to tackle the situation, it set up a task force leaving maritime workers out of the entire process.

He further said the union was also demanding inclusion into both the federal and state governments Subsidy Re-Investment Programme (SURE-P).

He said members of the union had not benefitted from the programme since its introduction.

Sese said: "This time we are embarking on an indefinite strike because the government has decided not to live up to its responsibilities. Cases of sea pirates' attacks on our waterways are increasing by the day.

"We went on a 21-day warning strike, and midway the commissioner for transport pleaded that we suspend the strike with the promise that within two weeks, the government would meet our demands. Sadly, up till date, nothing has been done.

"Sea pirates rob traders of their money and valuables and in some cases, rape women on board the boat every day. We cannot operate in that kind of hostile environment.

"And if the government cannot protect the lives and property of boat drivers operating in the state, then there is nothing we can do than to stop work and allow government to take over the maritime transportation business."

A commuter, Inafate Ayebadiepreye, said that the industrial action had compounded her problems because she was in Yenagoa to trade, and he got to know she could not return home on when she got to the Swali jetty because of the strike.

He said: "With the way things are going, I might remain in Yenagoa for weeks because where I am travelling to is not connected by road and cannot be accessed through our neighbouring states.

"As I am talking to you now, I have spent more than I bargained for, and the more I remain in Yenagoa the more I will spend both the profit and capital of my trade. The situation is terrible."

Another commuter, who gave her name only as Efetemere, said she was already trapped in Yenagoa.

"Even our people back home will suffer in the coming days, particularly when food and water can no longer be transported to the various communities that are disconnected from the city by road."

Shedding light on the strike, Sese said the action was not intended to further worsen the sufferings of the people but to give them a better living condition.

He added: "It is better for our people to stay in their villages and drink water from the river than to be killed by a sea pirates because they are travelling to the city to buy clean water.

"It is better for our women to allow their farm produces rot in the village than to be raped by sea pirates because she is travelling to the city to sell them. We will not call off the strike until government takes action to curb the situation."

When contacted for comment, Commissioner for Transport, Mrs Mari Ebikaki, declined to comment on the issue, saying she had been transferred to another ministry.