

# Militants kidnap 10 Chinese oil workers

DENNIS NAKU, *Yenagoa*

**N**O fewer than 10 Chinese oil workers were yesterday abducted by unidentified militants in Sagbama local government area of Bayelsa State, just as one militant youth was reportedly killed in a fresh gun duel between the Joint Security Task Force (JTF) and the Niger Delta militant group.

This is as the militants are demanding for a whopping N1.8 billion as ransom to free an American and a Briton

kidnapped on Tuesday in Port Harcourt, Rivers State capital.

*Daily Champion* learnt that the militants had stormed the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), an oil servicing firm working for Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) with two speed boats in Sagbama creek but they encountered soldiers of JTF on guard at the oil facility.

This invasion resulted in a gun duel between the soldiers and the unidentified militant group, leading to the death of

one of the militant youth.

Similar abduction occurred at Ogu community in Yenagoa axis, when eleven Koreans and one Nigerian working for Daewoo Construction Nigeria Limited were abducted by militants a month ago, but were released three days later to the state coordinator of Bayelsa volunteer, Mr. Joshua Benemasia, who personally facilitated their quick release.

Confirming the latest incident,

*Continues on page 6*

# Militants

the state commissioner of Police, Alhaji Hafiz Ringim said the attack occurred at about 6 a.m. yesterday, saying they attacked a house boat after a stiff resistance by the soldiers at the precincts of the firm before whisking away the Chinese nationals off to an unknown destination.

Only recently, the state governor, Dr Goodluck Jonathan had in a public function lamented the escalating militancy in the state, noting that it was affecting the state allocation, even as the state was to refund about N14 billion to the Federal Government which the latter erroneously allocated to the former in excess; adding that it has dropped from its position of third highest oil producing state in the country to fourth due to incessant closure of oil platforms by militants and aggrieved youths in most parts of the state.

Ringim, who would soon proceed on course bemoaned the lingering incidence of hostage taking in the state.

He said the immediate cause of the attack by the youths could not be ascertained as at press time, but noted that his men have been deployed to the area to carry out further investigations.

However, a close source intimated *Daily Champion* that some of the oil workers may have escaped, adding that the youths numbering about 12 stormed and broke into the firm essentially to kidnap the workers to drive home their demands which include the non involvement of the local people in the oil exploration activities being carried out on their own

soil among others.

The company, it was gathered is working on a project called the Amatolo prospect in Sagbama.

On ransom, an industry source said, the unidentified militants demanded N1.8 billion to free the expatriates.

"The people just said they are Niger Delta militants... and that we should pay them 1.8 billion naira," to have the two men released, the source said on condition of anonymity.

"They said they were not negotiating the price. In fact, at a point, they had to drop the call because they said they feared they were being tracked with the numbers they used to call," the source added.

About 100 foreign oil workers had been abducted in the troubled Niger Delta region since last year. Many of the abductees had been released through the intervention of state governments in the region.

Tension is, however, on the increase in the region as the United States of America (USA) and Philippine have issued warnings to their citizens on travelling to the Niger Delta.

Meanwhile, in Beijing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said it is looking into the attack. Company officials could not be reached for comment, but Ringim confirmed that two Chinese 'employees' escaped the kidnap.

Despite the vast energy stores lying beneath southern Nigeria's soil, the region's people remain desperately poor. Many blame their plight on corruption and mismanagement by the federal government.

The Movement for the

Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which seeks greater control of oil revenues and the release of two regional leaders namely Asari Dokubo and former Bayelsa State governor, Chief Diepreye Alamieyeseigha held in prison custody on sundry alleged corruption charges respectively, have launched many of the raids and abductions. The violence has cut Nigeria's usual 2.5 million barrel per day crude production by nearly a quarter.

But most of the kidnappings in recent weeks haven't been claimed by the group, which said it was not behind Thursday's attack. Along with the Chinese, about two dozen Filipinos, two Italians, one Briton, one American and a Lebanese are being held.

China is boosting ties in Nigeria and across Africa, seeking to secure energy and other resources for its booming economy.

## Okigbo Pa

OLATUBOSUN SOWEMIMO

**F**EDERAL Government yesterday insisted that report of the Pius Okigbo Investigative Panel, which indicted former military president, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's regime of financial impropriety is still missing.

The said report on the Reorganisation and Reform of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) of 1994 had allegedly indicted Gen. Babangida in respect of the alleged missing \$12.5 billion windfall which accrued from the excess crude oil sold during the gulf war.

Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Chief Ufot