

Militants Attack Monarch's Home, Kill One

• Two Toddlers Regain Freedom

**From Kelvin Ebiri,
Port Harcourt**

SCORES of suspected militants armed with lethal weapons and dynamites, attacked the palace of the Amanymanabo of Bonny, killed one person and blew up the Marine Police building at the main jetty, Bonny Island, Rivers State, yesterday.

The attack followed the release of two toddlers from a four-day detention by kidnappers, even as another victim abducted the upper week had died in the hands of his abductors.

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Kidnappers Free Toddlers

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Sources in Bonny told *The Guardian* that the gunmen stormed the island at about 3am and held the town hostage for over two hours. During the siege, the bandits destroyed houses and torched over 20 vehicles.

Rivers State Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Ireju Barasua, said immediately the gunmen entered the island, they proceeded to the Marine Police building and blew it up with dynamite. She did not confirm whether any police personnel was killed or injured during the attack.

A source in Bonny revealed that the gunmen shot a man on the head, who probably ran into them as they entered the town. The man died on the spot while other persons were said to have sustained injuries caused by stray bullets.

The marauding gunmen attacked the home of King Edward Asimini William Dappa-Pepple III, Perekulé XI, Amanyano of Grand Bonny Kingdom and riddled it with bullets. Nobody was reportedly injured there.

The bandits also attacked and vandalised the house of the Chairman of the Chiefs' Council, Chief Bob Hart.

An aide to the monarch said the king was in Bonny for the funeral of

Chief George Jumbo when the attack occurred.

According to him: "The hoodlums, who have been ostracised, riddled the king's gate with bullets. They had written and threatened to attack Bonny last December but having realised that it would be dangerous for them to embark on such mission, they waited till today (yesterday). They destroyed over 20 vehicles."

Rivers State Governor, Chibuike Amaechi, had visited the monarch to assess the extent of damage inflicted on his palace.

It was gathered that irate Bonny youths, who are disenchanted with alleged mismanagement of a development funds donated to the community by an Asian oil service firm, were the ones that mobilised the militants from other parts of the Niger Delta to attack the island.

A politician in Bonny disclosed that amid the sporadic gunshots, the youths were shouting "all the people that chop (embezzled) our money must vomit the money or else there will not be peace in Bonny. All those who chop our money will not find peace."

He said the gunmen also attacked the residence of a brother to a Rivers State lawmaker. But the lawmaker's brother, his wife and child escaped death narrowly.

He explained that the aggrieved persons, who masterminded the attacks, had sometime last year, written to state and federal governments to complain that some chiefs, in collaboration with some politicians, had diverted developmental funds donated to the community by an oil-servicing firm.

But to the chagrin of the irate youths nothing was done to the accused persons.

Though there are hundreds of security personnel in Bonny Island, the attackers fled unchallenged in speedboats at about 5am.

Meanwhile, after four days of captivity in the den of kidnappers, two toddlers abducted at gunpoint at Choba, Port Harcourt, regained freedom yesterday.

The children, Chimaroke (2) and Kelechi (1), who took ill on Thursday, are pupils of the University of Port Harcourt Day Care School, Choba. Gunmen, who intercepted their car, kidnapped them on Tuesday morning, as they were being driven to school.

The children's father, Mr. Rufus Okocha, told *The Guardian* that the kidnappers called his mobile phone on Friday night and directed him to go to Ologbo Premier College at Choba and pick up his one-year daughter,

Kelechi.

According to him, "I went there and found the child abandoned all alone. So, we took her home."

In the morning, the kidnappers, who had demanded for N30 million ransom last Wednesday, phoned Mr. Okocha again and directed him to go to the Government

Comprehensive College, Borokiri, Port Harcourt, as they had dropped the two-year-old Chimaroke there. It could not be independently confirmed if any ransom was paid.

But before the parents of the child arrived at the school, a benevolent teacher in the school, Mrs. Sikoba Tonye Angala, who was returning from church at about 6.10am, saw the abandoned child around the administrative building crying. She decided to take him to her house.

She disclosed that: "I saw the baby crying. I went up to him and asked him his name and that of his parents but he did not respond. I noticed that he was drinking Chivita."

"I took him to the security men but they didn't know him. I could not leave him here; I took him to the house of a policeman, who said I should keep him for at least 24 hours."

Mrs. Angala explained that while they were in her house, neighbours came and saw the boy and after she narrated how he was discovered, one of the visitors screamed, 'this is

Chimaroke Okocha, this is Chimaroke Okocha."

Shortly, the parents of the child came to her house and found the child, who was even scared of his father.

The father, who had had grueling experience since the abduction of the children, said he had taken them to an undisclosed hospital in Port Harcourt for medical examination.

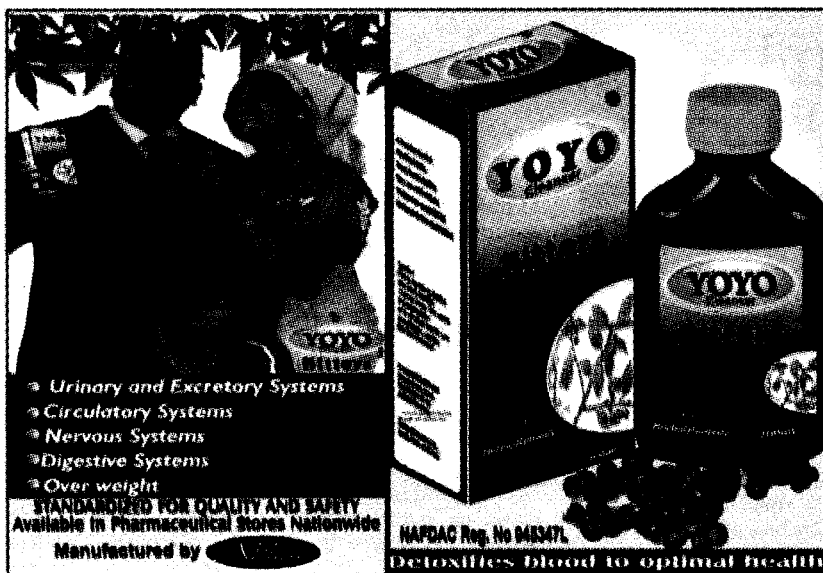
He expressed his appreciation to the security agents and well-meaning individuals in the state for their support and encouragement during his family's ordeal.

The wife of the Rivers State Governor, Mrs. Judith Amaechi, yesterday reiterated her condemnation of abduction of children particularly the under-aged and women.

Mrs. Amaechi, who appreciated the release of the children, frowned at the recent spate of kidnappings in Rivers State, describing the act as criminal and capable of adversely impacting negatively on the psychological development of a child.

According to her: "Children are and women are special species and should not be target of any anti-social initiative like hostage taking."

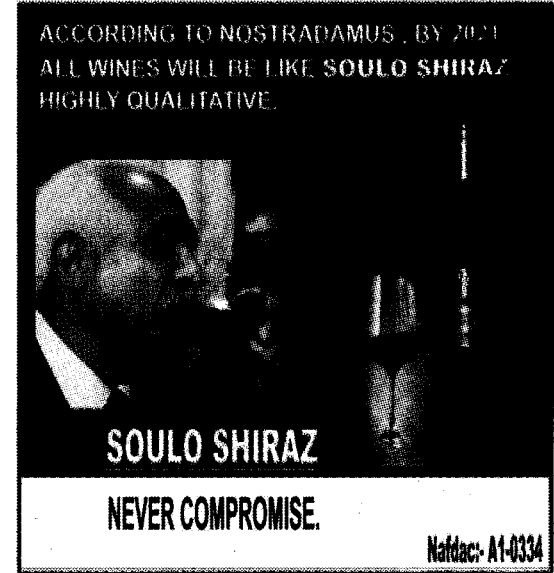
She implored well-meaning individuals to rise against all forms of anti-social activities and appealed to youths in the Niger Delta and mothers to intercede for the restoration of peace in the state.



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