

Militants take 19 foreigners hostage

NIGER-Delta gunmen made a big haul yesterday, snatching at least 18 people in less than 24 hours in three attacks. They seized people from an offshore oil vessel, a power plant construction site and a bar, officials and witnesses said yesterday.

In the attack on the power plant, a soldier and one community worker were feared killed.

The kidnappings bring the total number of foreigners abducted in the turbulent oil region surrounding the Niger river delta so far this year to at least 92, surpassing the figure for all last year.

Eight Filipinos, three South Koreans and a Nigerian employee were abducted early yesterday from Afam power station, about 20 miles northeast of Port Harcourt, according to a statement from Daewoo Engineering and Construction Co.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said the Nigerian driver was later freed. It did not provide further details.

Eight other foreign workers were kidnapped from a Saipem Nigeria Limited offshore oil vessel known as FPSO Mystras, about 50 nautical miles off the coast

From Clarice Azuatalam, Port Harcourt and Shola O'Neil, Warri

of Bonny said Chief Joshua Benemesia, head of a government-backed volunteer anti-piracy force.

Italian oil firm Agip confirmed the attack aboard the vessel managed by its subsidiary. The Agip statement did not provide details on the nationalities of the hostages. The eight were later released a few hours after their abduction. They are Mr David Flariders, a Briton; Mr Trofan Betrot, a Romanian; Mr Dan Ford, Australian; Mr Hector Gomez, a Chilean; Mr Iber Marcin and Mr Wieskaw Miazarek, both Polish and Mr D. Stifanic and Mr D. Leka, from Croatia.

In the third incident, a Dutch man was kidnapped from a bar in Warri overnight.

Flora Achudumoe, who owns Flora's Bar near an oil company compound in the city centre, said the man — an unemployed oil worker — was taken by a group of youths while he was watching football Wednesday night. She spoke by phone from a police station where she was reporting the incident.

The victim was identified



• Eight foreign oil workers of different nationalities stand together after being released at Port Harcourt, Nigeria ... yesterday.

as Mr. Peter Hendrikus van Kampen, a resident of Bungalow 34, Odibo Estate, Enerhen, Uvwie Local Government Area.

It was gathered that the Dutch, a former official of a construction company, Uniwell Nigeria Limited, before he lost his job in 2002, had been out of work for over five years.

He was reportedly snatched at the popular bar on 24, Enerhen Road by five armed men who stormed the place and whisked him away in a waiting car at about midnight.

A security source told our correspondent: "If his kidnappers think they have hit a goldmine by taking him, they would certainly find that this is a rough patch because the man has not been able to pay his rent for several years."

In fact, it was gathered that the management of the estate had already given van Kampen a notice to quit the apartment because of his inability to pay his rent.

The source said: "The man was drowning his sorrow in several bottles of beer when the armed men in-

vaded the place and took him away in the dead of the night."

Police Public spokesman Olabisi Okuwobi confirmed the report, adding that the police were working on a number of leads that could facilitate securing him early freedom.

A separate group of suspected criminals also kidnapped an unidentified foreigner along Warri - Port Harcourt road early yesterday.

The kidnappings are the latest involving South Korean workers in Nigeria. In

January, nine Daewoo employees were released after being kidnapped by an armed group. Last June, three Daewoo employees and two others were freed after a day in captivity.

But top brass of the Army, Air Force, State Security Service (SSS) and the police attended a crucial meeting yesterday in Warri to fashion a strategy to curb the menace.

One killed in clash

By Jude Isiguzo

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