

Militants abduct nine Chinese workers

Bisi Olaniyi, Yenagoa

THE daring Niger Delta militants again struck at Sagbama, Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State on Thursday, kidnapping nine Chinese, with one of the attackers shot dead by men of the Joint Task Force.

The expatriates were workers of the Chinese National Petroleum Company, which is an oil servicing outfit involved in seismic activities for the Nigerian Agip Oil Company. Police and industry sources said the latest attack was the third case of kidnapping in the area within the space of three weeks.

The militant youths, who came in a speed boat around 6am, were involved in a heavy shoot-out with the men of the Brig.-Gen. Alfred Ilogho-led JTF, before escaping with the hostages.

The Commissioner of Police, Bayelsa State Command, Mr. Hafiz Ringim, who confirmed the incident, said the nine Chinese were "missing."

He added that a militant was shot dead. Ringim said the youths broke into the company's vault in an attempt to steal the workers' salaries.

He, however, said that he could not confirm if the militants were successful, stressing that the details were still

sketchy as at 3:45pm.

An unconfirmed report had it that a Nigerian working for the CNPC was also kidnapped alongside the Chinese.

Officials of the company and those of Agip in Port Harcourt, when contacted for their reactions were not forthcoming.

The incident occurred barely 48 hours after a Briton and an American were kidnapped in the Rivers State capital and moved to an unknown location in the Niger Delta.

Ten oil workers, comprising nine Koreans and one Nigerian working for Daewoo Nigeria Limited, were on January 10 kidnapped by militants at Ogu community, near the Ox-Bow Lake in Yenagoa LGA of Bayelsa State.

However, they were released two days after. Meanwhile, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, which had been claiming responsibility for most of the attacks in the past, was yet to react to the latest kidnapping.

On January 5, unidentified gunmen abducted five Chinese telecoms workers from their residence and ferried them to an unknown location. The workers were employees of Sichuan Telecommunications Company and were working on a project to extend telephone services to rural areas when they were picked.

Since the beginning of 2006, dozens of foreign workers, mainly in the oil industry, have been kidnapped in the Niger Delta region.

Edo inaugurates N450m radio/TV transmitters

Emmanuel Obe, Benin

THE Edo State Government will on Wednesday next week, inaugurate two transmitters installed for use of the state's radio and television stations.

The Commissioner for Information and Orientation, Mr. Kingsley Osadolor, who briefed newsmen on the outcome of the State Executive Council meeting in Benin on Thursday, said the entire project cost about N450m.

Osadolor said it was the first time in 15 years that the transmitters were being replaced. According to him, Governor Lucky Igbinedion would perform the inauguration.

The commissioner said the public holidays declared by the state government for Monday and Tuesday next week were to enable workers in the state reg-

ister as voters before the close of registration on January 30.

He said the state government was happy that the initial problem of the dearth of direct data capturing machines had been overcome.

"Now the people can look around their neighbourhood and find a registration centre," he said.

He also said that the state executive council had approved the constitution of the state's committee on the Millennium Development Goals, with the governor as chairman.

According to him, the committee comprised 19 members drawn from various sectors in the state.

Among the board goals to be covered by the committee, he said, included education, poverty eradication, empowerment of women, child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS.