

Soné Daniel,
with agency report

Militants, on Friday, attempted to break into a new generation bank in the

Militants kill four, injure two in Port Harcourt

Rumuoprikom area of Port Harcourt, killing two naval personnel and two civilians. The militants injured two

other naval men, and lost two of their own colleagues. Friday's incident was against the backdrop of indications

that the expatriates in the Niger Delta may have started evacuating their wives and children, following the ab-

duction on Tuesday of a Filipino woman by unknown gunmen in Port Harcourt.

The militants, who invaded the city through one of the waterfronts in the state and went straight for the bank, were repelled by the superior firepower of the policemen on duty. The gallant policemen successfully gunned down two of the militants, forcing their colleagues to retreat with the bodies of the slain ones.

But in frustration, the gunmen fired sporadically, killing a man they suspected leaked information about them to the law enforcement agents. They also opened fire on a naval truck that was just passing by and killed two on the spot and wounded two others.

The attack on the bank came barely after 24 hours after gunmen raided two branches of banks in Omoku, the headquarters of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of the state and made away with over N7.5 million on Thursday. The money, which belonged to one of the oil firms in the local government area, was reportedly withdrawn the previous day from Port Harcourt and lodged in the two banks.

River State police commissioner, Felix Ogbaudu, who confirmed Friday's attack, said that the police foiled the robbery bid. He said the militants escaped through one of the waterfronts with the bodies of their two gang members killed by the police.

Meanwhile the Nigeria police and Filipino diplomats said they were unsure about the fate of the woman, who was kidnapped near a bank.

Agence France Presse quoted an unnamed expatriate in Lagos as saying that she had called a friend of hers "in Port Harcourt, and she said she and her husband have decided she must leave with the children. They will come to Lagos today and then fly home."

AFP also quoted Ogbaudu, as saying that "her (the female hostage) wherea-

bouts are unknown." Ogbaudu, who also said he had no information about Frenchman Gérard Laporal, who was kidnapped on Wednesday in Port Harcourt, however, dismissed news of the abduction of a Briton.

An official at the Philippines embassy in Abuja said, "The people we have on the ground have confirmed that she was seized near a bank in the centre of Port Harcourt on Wednesday, and that she was taken to an unknown destination. But that is all we know." The unnamed official said embassy officials in Port Harcourt had not yet established if the woman was still alive or dead.

In the capital of the Philippines, Manila, the foreign ministry on Friday said it was seeking urgent checks on reports from Nigeria saying the woman was dead. Sources in Nigeria told AFP that the woman, who is married to an Iranian and has two children, may have drowned falling off the kidnappers' boat or jumping overboard when they tried to assault her.

But Philippine Foreign Undersecretary, Esteban Conejos, said he still believed the woman, who has been living in Nigeria for 17 years, was alive and that the abduction was likely a criminal rather than a political act by Nigerian rebels. Conejos said the kidnappers contacted the lady's husband later that day and told him they were holding her, but made no further demands.

The kidnapped woman's sister, who did not want to be named, told reporters, "We have strong hopes that she is still alive. We don't believe she is dead because my sister is strong in spirit and would not casually risk her life." The sister said the embassy told her a helicopter had been sent to confirm reports about a body floating in the sea, adding, "They told me the search was negative and that no body was found."

An official of the United States Consulate-General in Lagos, who declined to be named, told our correspondent on the telephone that the private companies would be in a better position to speak on "what they are doing with their staff. The United States Government has not called for an evacuation. What we have done is that we have issued a travel warning and told US citizens of the danger of travel to Nigeria."

Also speaking, a diplomat at the British High Commission, Abuja, said, "There have been no changes to our travel advice for British nationals since December. There have been no evacuations this week. Shell did evacuate some family members of its staff in December."

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