

# Abductees demand N50m ransom

witness said they were pushed out of their Peugeot saloon vehicle into another car before they were taken away.

Confirming the incident, the Commissioner of Police, Akwa Ibom State Command, Mr. Moses Anegbode, said that the abductors were daring enough to have beaten the security of the council chairman.

Anegbode, who spoke on the phone with our correspondent on Sunday, disclosed that those who kidnapped Ekong had already asked for a N50m ransom in order to effect his quick release.

He said, "I am aware of the incident that took place on Fri-

day and I can only tell you that the abductors have demanded the sum of N50m as ransom."

The commissioner, however, refused to make further comments, saying that he had already informed the force headquarters in Abuja about the development.

He also stated that since the matter was still under investigation, it would not be appropriate to make further comments on the matter.

It will be recalled that incidence of kidnapping and hostage taking reared its ugly head for the first time in Akwa Ibom State on October 3, 2006 when militants abducted seven foreign oil workers for over three weeks.

# Obasanjo on controversial utterances

date, Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, that the PDP had already written the results of the coming April elections.

He said the claims were a form of defence that the opposition were trying to offer should they lose the elections.

"We have 30 governors, 30 states. Why should we rig? Do we need to rig an election? There are only six governors who are not members of PDP. In fact, we just don't want to take all of them. That's why they are still there," he said.

The PDP chieftain expressed regrets over the failed constitutional amendment through which the President had intended to extend his stay in office.

"Look at immunity. That was one of the issues we said should be removed so that whether you are a governor or you are a President, you will be like Anenih, you will be like the woman in the street. That one was thrown away because of the so-called third term agenda," he said.

# Death toll rises in Bayelsa communal clash

**Bisi Olaniyi, Yenagoa**

THE death toll arising from the boundary dispute between the people of Egweama and Liama in coastal Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, has risen from five to seven, with the panic-stricken people deserting the communities.

Security sources in the area confirmed to our correspondent on the telephone on Sunday that the people of the two communities were now relocating to Yenagoa, the state capital and Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital.

In addition, human casualties and houses were set ablaze on both sides, with more houses and other valuable property razed in the smaller Liama.

The Chairman of Brass LGA, Mr. Nathaniel Sylva, also appealed to the people of the area to sheathe their swords, noting that there would never be development without peace.

Sylva urged the people and others in the council to always

embrace dialogue and stop taking laws into their hands.

To ensure maintenance of law and order, the state's police command had deployed more riot policemen in the area, which was confirmed by the Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Ibokette Iniobong, a Deputy Superintendent of Police.

# PENGASSAN warns NNPC against retrenchment

**Sola Adebayo, Warri**

THE Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria has warned the management of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation against further unilateral disengagement of its members in the establishment.

The labour union said it would not tolerate further disengagement of its members without due consultations with its leadership.

The President of PENGASSAN, Mr. Peter Esele, gave the warning during the

# Anti-riot policemen deployed in Ogoni, as death toll rises

**Stories: Soni Daniel, Port Harcourt**

RIVERS State Police Command on Saturday deployed no fewer than 250 riot policemen in Ogoni community to quell rising tension and killings resulting from communal conflict.

The riot policemen, backed by an Armoured Personnel Carrier, took off from the state police headquarters on Moscow Road around 11am on Saturday.

The policemen reported at the Mbogho/Bodo boundary around midday and took positions to stall further killings and destruction of property by rival militias, who had been fighting for supremacy over a disputed parcel of land.

No fewer than seven persons had reportedly lost their lives in the first two days of the fracas, which erupted on Thursday night, forcing some natives to flee their homes to escape being caught in the crossfire.

Eyewitnesses said trouble

started following the inexplicable death of a 62-year-old woman who had gone to her farm near the disputed land between the two neighbours.

Irked by the death of the woman from one of the two communities, angry persons from the other settlement, attacked their neighbours whom they suspected of murdering the woman.

Dangerous weapons were reportedly freely used in the encounter, which erupted over the killing of the woman.

A native of one of the communities residing in Port Harcourt told our correspondent that no fewer than 10 persons had been killed on both sides as at Saturday morning when the people arrived the troubled spot.

Sources said that the involvement of armed cultists who had been fighting for some politicians in the area worsened the communal clash and raised the death toll.

He said the matter de-

generated when one of the politicians claimed that his family house had been destroyed by unnamed persons and threatened to take action.

Police Public Relations Officer in the State Police Command, Mr. Ireju Barasua, confirmed the deployment of policemen to the Ogoni community in a telephone interview with our correspondent on Sunday.

She said that the deployment of the men was to forestall the escalation of the violence and destruction of lives and property.

Barasua, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, however, declined to comment on casualty figure, saying that the police were more concerned with the protection of life and property in the area.

Rivers State Finance Commissioner, Mr. Kenneth Kobani, a native of Bodo, on Sunday appealed to both parties to sheath their sword and allow peace to reign in the area.

# Odili upgrades third class royal father

RIVERS State Governor, Dr. Peter Odili, on Sunday promoted the Nye-New Ali of Isiokpo, King Blessing Ahiazunonwo Wagor-Imenwo, Wagidi XL, to a first class monarch thereby increasing the number of first class royal fathers in the state from 12 to 13.

The latest promotion is however seen by some people as a way of raising a first class traditional ruler for Isiokpo, where Odili's possible successor, Mr. Celestine Omehia, hails from.

Omehia, a lawyer and longtime personal aide of Odili, is from Ubima in Ikwerre Local Government Area that had been under the control of a third class

chief.

Odili announced the upgrading of the stool during a ceremony to formally enthroned the new monarch at Adanta Playground in Isiokpo.

The governor has also directed the state Attorney-General, Mr. Odein Ajumogobia, SAN, to take necessary legal steps to upgrade the stool from third class status to first class with immediate effect.

Odili noted that it was wrong for the occupier of the stool to stagnate as a third class chief after many years of peaceful reign.

Odili noted, "From our records, this stool has never been in dispute and the area

has never witnessed any trouble and we must not fail to commend you for your peaceful leadership over the years and wish to plead with other communities in the state to borrow a leave from you.

"What we have learnt from you here is that wherever you find peace it means that there is justice. We urge you to maintain the status quo even in the years ahead."

The governor noted that the installation of new kings in many parts of the state had often been characterised by wrangling but expressed satisfaction with the ease with which the new monarch emerged.

Pro-Chancellor of the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Prof. Godwin Tasie, who spoke on behalf of the community, said the stool dated back to 1100 AD, when the first king mounted the throne and died in 1140 AD.

There were 12 high-ranking monarchs in the state before the upgrading of the Isiokpo monarch.

They include the Amanyababo of Bonny, Kalabari, Oba of Ogbanland, Eze Ekpeyelogbo of Ahoada and the Eze Gbagabaga of Evo Kingdom in Obio/Akpor local government.