

Militants kidnap five expatriates in Bayelsa, Delta

Militants in Bayelsa and Delta states have defied efforts to end the spate of hostage-taking in the Niger Delta by kidnapping five more expatriates.

While four were kidnapped in Sapele, Delta State on Friday, the fifth expatriate was picked up in Bayelsa State on Thursday evening. The foreigners were identified as two Indians and two Chinese.

The kidnapping in Delta State has, thus, led to the collapse of the peace initiative of the state Governor, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan. The expatriates were kidnapped in Sapele, headquarters of Sapele Local Government area and whisked to an unknown destination in the creeks of the state.

Also, the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope, on Friday admitted that its troops killed nine persons during an encounter in the creeks of Bayelsa on Wednesday.

Uduaghan, shortly after his inauguration on May 29, inaugurated a 17-man Delta State Waterways Security Committee, to restore sanity in the creeks and host communities of the oil multinationals in the state. The committee was made up of notable youth and community leaders from the major oil producing areas in the state.

Friday's incident apparently truncated the hope of Uduaghan that the committee would halt the occurrence of criminal activities along the waterways and oil producing communities in the state. Findings by our correspondent revealed that the expatriates, who worked for a rubber company in Oghara, hometown of the former Governor James Ibori, were abducted at Akintola Junction, Sapele, on their way to their office.

Investigation by our correspondent further revealed that the hoodlums, who fired sporadically into the air, blocked the vehicle conveying the expatriates to their office with a bus, thus creating a pandemonium at the scene. It was gathered that the hoodlums thereafter ordered the expatriates into their vehicle at gun points and sped-off to Geberikoko Waterside, in Sapele.

The kidnappers reportedly snatched a speedboat from a commercial boat operator

Bisi Olaniyi, Yenagoa and Sola Adebayo, Warri

when the one slated for the assignment could not be sighted within the vicinity of the waterside. The driver of their boat, who arrived at the waterside shortly after their departure in company with the expatriates, was later arrested by the men of the JTF.

Similarly, two persons, who surfaced to claim the bus abandoned by the hoodlums, were also promptly arrested by the detectives of JTF. However, spokesman of JTF, Major Omale Ochagwuba, confirmed that only three expatriates were kidnapped in Bayelsa and Delta states on Friday.

Ochagwuba said two Indians were abducted in Delta State while a Polish was kidnapped in Bayelsa. He gave the names of the Indians as Murugan Gopal and Anthony Mariam and that of the Polish as Mr. Adam Likowaski.

He said the JTF was on the trail of the kidnappers, adding that efforts were being intensified to ensure the early release of the hostages.

Meanwhile, the JTF on Friday, formally reacted to the report that its troops killed some harmless persons in the creeks of Bayelsa state on Wednesday. Ochagwuba, in a statement said the de-

ceased were militants, adding, "A reliable source positively identified those killed as militants from the camp of one Commander Isaac. The source said they were coming from Gbaran where they went for fortification in preparation for an attack against Agip oil flow station.

"Among those killed was one of their juju men. Those killed were on reconnaissance patrol to Agip oil flow station which they were planning to attack. When the militants opened fire on the soldiers protecting the Agip oil flow station, they defended themselves by returning fire. At the end of the fire fight, eight militants were killed, one was wounded and later died.

"After the clash and their boat was searched, 143 rounds of 7.62mm NATO and 40 rounds of 7.62mm special were recovered. The soldiers did not sustain any casualty during the clash," he added.

Our correspondent gathered that the Polish, who is an employee of Dredging Atlantic Company, was kidnapped on Thursday evening at Kaiama, headquarters of the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of the state. The Coordinator of the Bayelsa State-owned security outfit, the Bayelsa Volunteers, Chief

Joshua Benamesia, confirmed the hostage taking in Yenagoa on Friday, but said the details were still sketchy. Benamesia could also not ascertain what led to the kidnapping of the Polish, who had been moved to an unknown location in the creeks of the Niger Delta.

The Police Public Relations Officer of the Bayelsa State Command, Mr. Ibokette Iniobong, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, also confirmed the kidnap of the expatriate by "unknown gunmen."

Election materials disappear

Valuable election materials have been discovered missing from the offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission in Ekiti State.

Our correspondent gathered that the materials included direct data capture machines that had been used for the registration of voters for the April elections in the state.

INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioner, Dr. Gabriel Okafor, confirmed on Friday that 23 DDC machines, valued at about N2.3 million, had been discovered missing during a routine check by the head of the commission's internal computer technology department. A shocked Okafor said it was "an inter-

Afenifere lauds Obi's reinstatement

The Yoruba socio-political group, Afenifere, on Friday said Thursday's Supreme Court's judgment on the Anambra State Governor, Mr. Peter Obi, had shown that there was hope for Nigeria's democracy.

The Secretary-General of the group, Dr. Femi Okunroumu, who stated this in an interview with our correspondent in Abeokuta, commended the judgment of the apex court. Okunroumu also commended President Umar Yar'Adua for enforcing the judgment.

According to him, Yar'Adua's action was a clear departure from what was in practice during Obasanjo's administration. He said, "The Supreme Court has shown that there is hope for Nigeria. Its judgment is commendable. I also commend

Niyi Odebo, Abeokuta Yar'Adua for enforcing the judgment unlike the practice under Obasanjo."

The group had earlier met at the Ijebu-Igbo home of its leader, Senator Abraham Adesanya and issued a communiqué before the judgment was delivered. In the communiqué made available to journalists on Friday, Afenifere lamented the lawlessness in Oyo State, alleging that petitioners before election tribunals were being victimised.

The group said, "That such crude men now hold sway over Oyo is part of the legacy of the electoral banditry of April 14." It berated the Obasanjo administration for using the military, police and the Independent National Electoral Commission to impose "unelected leaders" on Nigerians at all levels.

Afenifere noted that "many of the beneficiaries of the great electoral banditry, who are already installed as governors in their states, have no regard for peace and rule of law." According to the group, obstacles are being placed in the way of petitioners in Oyo State. It alleged that petitioners and their lawyers were being terrorised.

Lamenting the condition in Oyo State, the group said, "The situation of anarchy is so frightening that many petitioners have been forced to abandon their homes." It called on Yar'Adua to "depart from the style of his predecessor of protecting gangsterism and lawlessness by his party loyalists."

Afenifere urged the President to intervene quickly in the problem in Oyo State by restoring law and order.