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Gunmen Abduct 6 Russians in A/Ibom, Kill Driver

• *Army rescues kidnapped Chinese national*

In what is thought to be the first attack by militants on foreigners in Akwa Ibom State, gunmen yesterday kidnapped six Russian workers of United Company RUSAL, the Russian aluminum giant. The men's apartment was

*From Ahamofula Ogbu in Port
Harcourt, Emeka Osondu in Anha
and Fidelia Okwuonu in Lagos*

blown up and a Nigerian driver attached to them was killed, fuelling fears that militant attacks may be spreading into

more areas in the Niger Delta. No previous armed attack had been recorded in Akwa Ibom.

The incident took place shortly after the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), said it would

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GUNMEN ABDUCT 6 RUSSIANS *Cont'd from P1*

cease attacks for at least a month to pave the way for the new government to work on measures towards a peaceful Niger Delta. The Ikot Abasi incident happened just as the Nigerian Army claimed it has rescued one of the two Chinese nationals who were kidnapped three months ago.

According to RUSAL's general manager, Felix Nxong, the gunmen blew up the Russians' homes with dynamite before taking them away. He said it was not clear which group carried out the attack. A Russian diplomat who confirmed the attack to the *BBC* implored the Nigerian government to take "urgent measures" to ensure the men's release.

President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua had, in his inaugural address last week, described the conflict an urgent matter and asked for a permanent cease-fire to allow for mediation toward a long-term peace. But violence continued at the weekend, with gunmen seizing four more foreign hostages in Port Harcourt.

However, it was cheerful news for one of the two Chinese nationals kidnapped at Nnewi by suspected members of Movement for Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MAS-SOB). Eric Niuhas was rescued at the weekend by some intelligence officers drafted from Nigeria Army, 82 Division, Enugu. The Chinese nationals were kidnapped in March at Nnewi by unknown persons.

Presenting the captive to the Anambra state Governor, Dr. Andy Uba in Awka, the representative of the Commanding Officer 82 Division, Col. H.M Hussani, said the Niu was rescued from a hideout in a thick forest at Ebonyi State.

Hussani said Niu was rescued after a tough battle with the persons suspected to be members of MASSOB. The two men, he said, were kidnapped and blindfolded while working in their factory in Nnewi, Anambra State. According to him, "It was a very difficult and tough job, but we are trained for it. In fact, we

stormed the hideouts of the militants several following a tip-off." He said that efforts were under way in search of the other Chinese.

Also in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, two Filipino sailors abducted at a bush bar at Onne were yesterday evening freed by men of the police arm in charge of containing crime in the State.

The sailors, Manlino Domingo and Soman Jang Carlos came down from their ship, MV Seacor for a social time-out when the militants allegedly swooped on them and took them away.

However, intelligence sources informed the police that they were being kept at a flat at the Elemenwo water front not too far from their point of abduction and the police stormed the house and freed them.

In the process, community sources said, one of the militants was shot dead while others escaped with bullet wounds and are still being trailed.

Contacted, the Commissioner

of Police, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu confirmed the kidnap and freeing of the Filipinos but would not comment on casualties.

"They have been freed and I am about now (7.26pm) handing them over to their employers. They are sailors who came down to have some drinks and were kidnapped.

Our men from the SOS stormed the place and freed them", he confirmed.

There has been an upward spiral in kidnap cases in the Niger Delta within the past two weeks as four workers of Schlumberger were kidnapped Saturday from their base in Port Harcourt.

Also, two kidnaps have been carried out at the Indian quarters of Indorama, operators of the former Elerme Petrochemical complex. Two were kidnapped from the location on May 9 while another seven were taken from there last week.

No words have been heard on those kidnapped from Indorama and Schlumberger.