

Gunmen attack Police station, kill 3

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agency reports

PORT HARCOURT — THREE policemen lay dead, yesterday, at Ahoada near Port Harcourt after an attack on a police station by a gang of gunmen. The attack came barely 48 hours after President Olusegun Obasanjo directed the security agencies to go after militants terrorising the Niger Delta.

Earlier on Wednesday, un-

known gunmen had kidnapped in Benin the first son of a PDP governorship aspirant in Edo State, Mr. Odion Ugbesia, just 24 hours after the abduction of a former President of the Nigeria Society of Engineer (NSE), Mr. Joseph Unjamen from his Benin residence.

Meanwhile, an unknown caller, yesterday demanded a N50 million ransom for the release of a Lebanese worker abducted on Wednesday in Port Harcourt by gunmen.

Vanguard gathered that the Ahoada gunmen rode to the police station in a bus and as soon as they got down, opened fire on policemen on duty. Three died on the spot.

Some of the policemen returned fire, according to sources, leaving some of the gunmen with bullet injuries.

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The police asked the people of Ahoada to report anybody with bullet injury.

The source said the gunmen were likely to be robbers who operated on the Ndele portion of the East-West road yesterday. According to the source, some of those robbed were at the Police Station making their complaints when the bus suddenly drove in with the occupants shooting sporadically.

Ugbesia's son abducted, escapes

However, Enahoro Ugbesia returned home yesterday after escaping from his abductors' hold. He was seized at about 9.30 p.m. Wednesday on Ugbowo road as he was driving home in his Passat car.

His father, a former Minister of Solid Minerals who was already getting worried that the younger Ugbesia had not returned home at that time of the day called his (son's) mobile phone. It was the abductors who picked it and asked for a N1.5 million ransom.

Scores of sympathisers and supporters trooped to the Ugbesia's residence yesterday to congratulate them.

Enahoro Ugbesia, narrating his ordeal to reporters, said: "I was driving home at about 9.30p.m when five boys with guns came out from their car and asked me to come out of my car. I was with my cousin in the car. They collected my watch, necklace and handsets and dumped us inside the booth of my car. So when we got to Textile Mill road, they stopped the car. One of them came out and requested the hand chain again but I told him that one of them had already collected it.

"After that he locked the booth again but as he was trying to lock it I now put my sandals there so the booth did not close well. Then they drove towards Upper Mission road to Upper Lawani. Meanwhile, I was overhearing them as they were asking each other what to do with me. They were arguing what to do and that was when my father now called my line, they picked it and told him to bring N1.5 million before they could free me. When we got to Upper Lawani when they were negotiating a bend, the car slowed down, that was when I jumped down and escaped from the booth," he said.

The police later recovered the car along Ugbowo where it was dumped by the hoodlums.

The former minister told newsmen that he would not know "who is doing this but I believe that politics should be played in the state without bitterness. Why would people want to abduct my son? I thank God the boy was able to escape. I wonder what would have happened to him. But all I can say now is that I am grateful to God for saving his life."

Speaking also, Director-General of the Ugbesia Campaign Organisation, Mr Henry Idahagbon, said: "Edo State is an enlightened state and should not bring the bitter politics of the South-West into this state. When people

N1.5 million ransom, it shows it is political, if not why now?"

The state Police Commissioner, Mr. Bola Hassan, said a team of detectives had been assigned to investigate the abduction.

Unjamen recounts ordeal

Meanwhile, the former NSE boss who is also back home said his abductors took him away in a 504 Peugeot car which he parked in his compound and drove him to Oghara, Delta State.

"They stripped me naked and said I should run into the bush. I thought they were going to shoot me but they did not shoot. They took my phone and started calling my friends, demanding a ransom of N7 million. So when they said I should continue running, I took off from there because they were busy calling my friends demanding money. Though I was naked, I did not care", he told the Catholic Bishop of Benin, Dr. Patrick Ekpo who went to sympathise with him.

"I came out of the bush at about 6:00a.m. using leaves to cover myself like a stone age man, until I met a man who attempted to run but I pleaded that he should help me. I narrated my ordeal to him so he went and brought clothes for me to wear," he said.

Caller demands N50m ransom for Lebanese

An unknown caller yesterday demanded a N50 million ransom for the release of a Lebanese worker abducted on Wednesday by gunmen near Port Harcourt, a senior company official said.

"This afternoon (yesterday), an unidentified caller phoned to demand N50 million to secure the release of our worker. He blocked his phone number and switched off the phone immediately he made the demand," the official of the Homan Engineering Company, employers of the Lebanese, said.

"There is no way we can get in touch with the caller since he coded his telephone number," said the official who asked for anonymity. "We still do not have any information about the whereabouts of the Lebanese worker. We have sent people around to locate where he is. We are also in touch with government officials in an effort to secure his release," he said.

The abduction of the Lebanese construction worker, yet to be identified, brings to six the total number of foreign workers currently being held by gunmen in southern oil-rich but volatile Niger Delta region. The others still being held are two Germans, a Briton, an Irishman and a US citizen.

Officials of the US embassy in Nigeria also said yesterday that they had no news yet of their kidnapped national.

The seizure of the Lebanese while going to work, came barely 24 hours after President Olusegun Obasanjo issued a stern warning about dealing "firmly" with kidnappers of expatriates. "We are going to be firm and say no to violence and hostage taking. Wherever we find hostage-takers now, we will hunt them down. We will not accept this any longer", he said at a meeting with state governors, security chiefs and heads of oil majors in the country.

He said armed forces and the police had been directed to meet the Niger Delta criminal elements' "force with force."

Homan is an oilfield and steel construction services firm based in Port Harcourt, the scene of a spate of kidnappings in recent weeks. The past weeks have seen some 15 foreign oil workers and expatriates taken prisoner in the country, and nine of them have been released this week.

The Federal Government on Wednesday in Abuja High Court arraigned four suspects and charged them with the kidnapping of expatriates as well as engaging in terrorist acts in the Niger Delta.

Since January, around 40 expatriate oil workers have been abducted and released after spending days or weeks in captivity.

Nigeria is the world's sixth biggest crude exporter with a potential daily output of 2.6 million barrels, but a quarter of that figure is lost to unrests in the Niger Delta.

Nigeria's democracy sick, says Oshiomhole

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Peter Odili of Rivers State, Comrade Oshiomhole warned that if any person was strictly elected President of Nigeria in 2007 based on regional or ethnic sentiment, such a president would suffer a crisis of confidence from other ethnic or regional groups in the country.

He argued that what Nigeria needed was a national president who had the capacity to keep the nation one beyond ethnic or regional sentiments. He listed some of the qualities of a truly Nigerian President as the capacity to build bridges across all the regions, a true democrat that must be able to galvanise and accommodate divergent views and harness such opinions for the growth of the nation and a person who must be able to use the state power to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number of Nigerians.

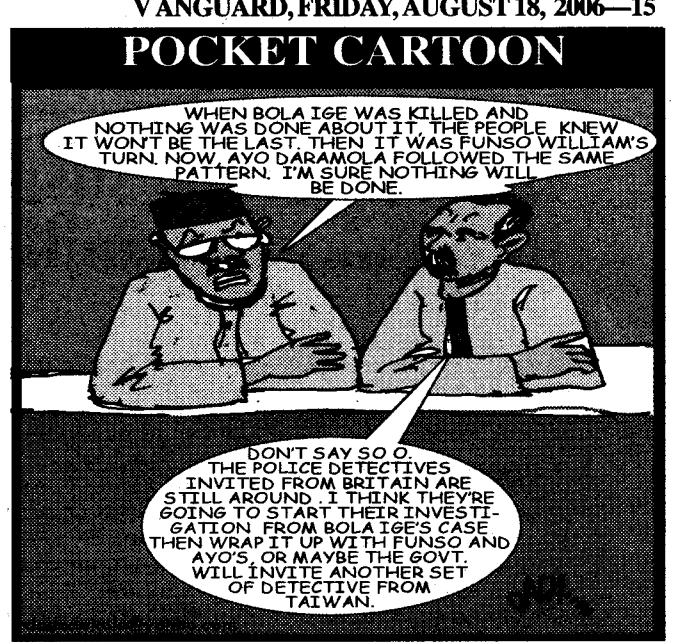
He said: "When people of the South-South, South-West, North-West or any other region talk about marginalisation, they do not talk

about the marginalisation within the zone. When people talk about power shift, has poverty shifted with power shift? The issue of power shift is used by the political class to shield themselves from accounting for their mis-governance of the country."

The NLC President expressed concern that "the way the political elite are going about regional interest, if care is not taken, it could lead to a very serious crisis for the country. A lot of people believe that Nigeria is in trouble, the system is not working. There are manifestations of instability everywhere. Over the past few weeks, politicians are winning and losing elections through assassinations. We also hear of tension and flashpoints here and there. Political rallies are like Israeli and Lebanon war and it is like war everywhere."

He stressed that these things were not happening because of democracy as greater violence and killings were perpetrated during the military era.

He condemned politicians who say for a particular sec-



Akala's convoy in road crash

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A source told Vanguard that it was divine protection that saved the governor and other vehicles in his convoy.

Only last week, one of the security men attached to the Governor's office unexpectedly collapsed and died. The deceased who resumed for duty at 7.30 a.m. on the fateful day

showed no sign of illness.

The security guard, according to an eyewitness was hungry and sent one of his colleagues to buy him food. But before the return of the colleague who went for the food, he had slumped and was seen sprawling on the floor gasping for breath intermittently. He later gave up the ghost.

Senate C'ttee worries over UBE graduates

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parastatals in Lagos yesterday, however, lauded the incorporation of the skill acquisition programme into the education curriculum, asserting that skill acquisition was the only solution to the social problem of unemployment facing the nation.

The Committee comprising Senator Emodi, vice-chairman; Senator Akin Olanikanmi and committee member, Senator Daniel Saror expressed concern during oversight visits to the National

Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Yaba College of Technology and the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos.

Noting what she described as the massive influx of pupils into the free and compulsory UBE scheme, Senator Emodi said higher institutions in the country would soon face a drain on their facilities.

"Given the improvement of the UBE scheme, you have a lot of challenges. Soon, there is going to be surge of JSS graduates knocking on your doors and that is why we need

to strengthen the Polytechnics," Senator Emodi said at the Yaba College of Technology.

She said the introduction of the skill acquisition curriculum and civic education would help to stem the tide towards increased unemployment.

"I am a very keen supporter of the skill acquisition programme and this is because we have a cankerworm eating into the fabric of our nation and that is the problem of unemployment, everybody wants to acquire certificates but without skills," she said.

Comrade Oshiomhole said from the antecedents of Dr Peter Odili, he had all the qualities to be the President of Nigeria not based on ethnic or regional consideration but purely on merit.

Speaking to journalists later on the spate of political killings, the NLC President said: "It shows that political power is in the hands of people who are desperate and that the electoral system is not clean. People believe that once they have a party ticket, they are already in Government House."

Rivers State Commissioner for Information, Mr. Magnus Abe, who represented the celebrant, said there was no doubt that Dr. Odili was an achiever who had transformed Rivers State. He said the governor had done much to prove that irrespective of your ethnic background, every Nigerian needs the other and that Nigerians must work together, live together to make the nation work.

He condemned those he called prophets of doom who have prophesied doom for the country.