

# Militants abduct 10 Indians in P-Harcourt

By Jimitota Onoyume

## PORT HARCOURT —

DARING militants in the Niger Delta region early on Friday morning attacked the Agbajo staff quarters of an Indian firm in Port Harcourt, Indorama Eleme Petrochemical Company Limited (EPCL) and abducted 10 Indians, including EPCL's managing director, Mr. Arun Taneja.

Also reportedly abducted on Friday by the suspected militants along with Mr. Taneja were two Indian women and two Indian children, whose identities were still clouded in secrecy at press time as well as five others, all Indians, working at the EPCL.

On Monday this week, the Indorama boss had joined royal fathers in Eleme, who paid him a courtesy call in his office and his company's workers' association to appeal to militants to release his two Indian-born staff members, who were kidnapped on May 19 this year, only for him (Taneja) to fall victim of the hostage-takers now.

The recent incident brings to nine the total number of Indian staff members of Indorama, the Indian core investor of the privatized EPCL, to be abducted by suspected militants within the past two weeks at their residential quarters at Agbajo in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital.

Although the head of corporate affairs in EPCL, Mr. Jossy Nkwocha, confirmed the kidnap saga to *Saturday Vanguard* in an interview on Friday, saying "only three workers of Indorama Eleme Petrochemical Company Limited were kidnapped", he, however,

declined to state specifically the identities of the hostages and whether or not the company's chief executive, Mr. Taneja, was among the three staff members kidnapped on Friday morning.

"For now (12.26pm), it is still unclear on the real identities of the Indorama workers kidnapped early this (Friday) morning", Nkwocha explained, adding that "security men have already stepped into the matter and once we get further information, we will get back to you".

Further independent investigations by our correspondents showed that about 40 heavily armed gunmen reportedly stormed the Agbajo staff quarters of Indorama at about 2.30am on Friday, attacked residents in the estate, mainly Indians with sophisticated weapons before eventually abducting 10 persons, all Indians from the estate.

Apart from the company's managing director and chief executive officer, Mr. Arun Taneja, it was learnt from reliable security sources in the state that three other management staff of Indorama, Mr. Fotedar, deputy managing director, Mr. Bang, head of commercial and Mr. Vinjay, head of marketing, were among the 10 persons taken hostage by the suspected militants.

In the crossfire that ensued between the suspected militants and mobile policemen (MOPOL) posted to guard the Agbajo residential quarters of Indorama, two MOPOLs, whose identities were still unknown as at press time, were reportedly shot dead by the gunmen.

Reacting angrily to the recurring cases of kidnapping of Indorama staff members in Eleme, hundreds of youths from the company's host community on Friday barricaded the Eleme-Onne Port Road to protest these abduction incidences.

The youths' spokesman, preferring anonymity, told *Saturday Vanguard*, that "the kidnap cases are obviously distracting this company from continuing with its revival of the hitherto dying Eleme Petrochemical Company Limited, which has offered jobs to many of us, Eleme indigenes".

The youth leader condemned the abduction as well as the porous security around the Indorama staff quarters at Agbajo, housing many Indians and appealed to the kid-

nappers to release the hostages, including the earlier two Indians taken away on May 19 "within the shortest possible time".

Though several telephone calls to the state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu and director of State Security Service (SSS), Mr. Kola Adesina, to confirm the incident were not answered, a top officer in the Rivers State police command, however, confirmed the Friday's kidnap incident.

The officer, who declined to state his name or number of persons abducted on Friday, said that security agents, including the joint military task force set up by the erstwhile Obasanjo administration to bring sanity to the restive Niger Delta region, have already swung into action with a view to getting the hostages released.

## ACTE to hold first event in Nigeria

THE Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) is holding their first-ever education event in Nigeria. The ACTE Lagos PowerTalk will be held at the Protea Hotel Oakwood Park on 25 June 2007. Based on ACTE's seven year history hosting events in South Africa and requests from corporate buyers to host events in extended African countries, further expansion into the African continent has become a key focus for ACTE's membership.

The Lagos education event is the first of a series of educational sessions, with subsequent meetings planned for the ACTE Middle East & Africa region in the near future. "My staff and I have attended several ACTE Global Education Conferences and are delighted that ACTE will be expanding into Africa with a launch event in Lagos.

"I have found ACTE's educational offerings to be extremely valuable and am excited about the role that ACTE will play to assist the Nigerian travel industry with education and networking opportunities," said Olawale Faba, Head of Corporate Travel for Shell Nigeria. The curriculum, designed by ACTE in conjunction with Africa-based corporate travel professionals, will focus on procurement issues that are of high importance to the market.

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