



April 2006

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

Note: The K&R and Extortion Monitor offers a monthly digest of media-recorded incidents of extortion, kidnapping and wrongful detention from around the globe. As the vast majority of these events go unreported, only incidents available through the public domain are described. This report does not include kidnappings of Iraqi citizens in Iraq.

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AFRICA

Nigeria, 14 March 2006: The militant Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) reiterated its demands and said that the remaining three hostages captured on 18 February would not be released until Shell paid US\$1.5 billion to Niger Delta villagers and three ethnic Ijaw leaders were freed from jail. The militants have split up the hostages, according to one of the hostages who was allowed to speak to the media. MEND has given foreign oil companies and their workers until 23 March to leave the region. (*AFP, 14 March 2006*)

On **27 March** the three foreign oil workers -- two Americans and a Briton -- were freed after being held hostage by militants in Nigeria since 18 February, a U.S. diplomatic source said. (*Reuters, 27 March 2006*)

Nigeria 23 March 2006: militants abducted three soldiers in the Soku area of Baylesa state near a major natural gas plant. Militants typically roam the delta in speedboats armed with weapons. It is not clear whether the kidnapping of the soldiers was carried out or provoked by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which has held three foreign oil workers hostage since 18 February. MEND is responsible for numerous attacks on foreign oil facilities and kidnappings and has warned Westerners to leave the region. (*alertnet.org, 24 March 2006*)

Somalia, 29 March 2006: According to an international piracy watchdog agency, a dozen heavily armed pirates have hijacked a UAE-registered oil tanker along with 19 Filipino crewmembers off the coast of Somalia. The report states that the pirates are holding the ship off the coast of Somalia and are demanding a large sum of money from the owners for its release. The international coalition forces -- consisting of U.S., British and Dutch warships -- helping to police the area have been informed of the latest hijacking. Since 15 March 2005, pirates have reportedly hit 40 ships off Somalia; however, many more attacks have gone unreported. (*int.iol.co.za, 3 April 2006*)

Somalia, 29 March 2006: Pirates have seized a South Korean fishing boat off the coast of Somalia. The 361-ton vessel with a crew of 25 was fishing with two other South Korean boats in international waters when two speedboats approached and eight armed men boarded the vessel. U.S. and Dutch naval ships gave chase, but held off when the attackers threatened the crew with guns. It is not yet known whether a ransom demand has been made in this case. Hijackings and piracy have recently surged off the Somali coastline, with maritime gangs demanding ransom for the safe release of crewmembers. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 5 April 2006*)

On **April 10**, village elders -- the traditional power base of rural Somalia -- in the area near where the South Korean fishing vessel is being held said the gunmen who commandeered it were seeking a payment of US\$400,000 as a "fine" for illegal fishing and not a ransom. (*mg.co.za, 7 April 2006*)

South Africa, 1 April 2006: Police officials are investigating a case of kidnapping after a man went missing from his Theresa Park home in Pretoria North. According to police reports, the victim was awakened by a noise in the early morning hours and went outside to investigate. His wife saw him through the window standing with three unknown armed men. She went to call a friend and when she came back to the window, the men and her

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husband were gone. No other information was released regarding the incident. (*sabcnews.com*, 1 April 2006)

ASIA PACIFIC

Afghanistan, 26 March 2006: Unidentified armed men kidnapped a truck driver working for a road construction company in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province. The truck, carrying asphalt for road construction, was on its way from Kandahar to the Sangin district and was attacked near the village of Nawroz. The abductors set the truck on fire before fleeing with their hostage. In recent months, southern Afghanistan has seen more frequent attacks by the Taliban on foreign workers of non-governmental organizations and road construction companies. The Taliban also are known to have burned oil tankers supplying fuel to the coalition troops stationed in the area. Unidentified gunmen torched two bulldozers and a truck in the same area about two weeks ago. (*upi.com*, 27 March 2006)

Afghanistan, 29 March 2006: Two Pakistani nationals were released from a private jail in Tora Bora, Afghanistan, after their relatives paid a Rs 1.5 million ransom. The two men, aged 24 and 26, went to Peshawar to buy used computers on 5 March when they were kidnapped and taken to Tora Bora. The two conveyed a message to their relatives to pay Rs 5 million for their release. An elder of the Afridi tribe helped in the negotiations and lowered the kidnappers demand to Rs 1.5 million. The captors reportedly tortured the two Pakistanis. (*dailytimes.com.pk*, 29 2006)

Australia, 27 March 2006: A 24-year-old man from Sydney was run over, kidnapped and told he would be killed unless an AUS\$20,000 ransom was paid. According to a police statement presented to the Liverpool Local Court, the victim was walking home when a car sped toward him and smashed into his legs. Two passengers jumped out of the car, punched and kicked the victim before bundling him into his own car. The victim, from Cabramatta, was ordered to phone his parents and tell them he would be killed unless the ransom was paid. The victim's parents could only raise US\$3,600, which they dropped off at a bus stop in Mount Pritchard as ordered by the kidnappers. The victim's parents then alerted police officials who dispatched officers to the area. Officers spotted the suspects' vehicle and pulled it over. Inside the car police found the three abductors, the ransom money and the injured victim. (*smh.com.au*, 28 March 2006)

China, 27 March 2006: Local police officials warned against a fraud scheme in which victims are tricked into believing that their relatives have been kidnapped. The terrified victims then give up 50,000 yuan (US\$6,233) to 100,000 yuan (US\$12,500) to free their family members, who in fact were never kidnapped in the first place. Police officials did not say how many such cases they had or whether they had made any arrests. They did say, however, that they had dealt with a number of kidnapping hoax reports during the second 10-day period this month. (*shanghaidaily.com*, 28 March 2006)

India, 20 March 2006: A branch manager of the national bank was kidnapped from a bus in the village of Bendi in Hazaribag. Several unknown armed men traveling on the same bus abducted the man, who traveled by bus frequently, along with the branch cashier. The armed kidnappers forced the driver to stop the bus near a deep forest in Bendi and took the two with them. The cashier was later released and informed the police, who ruled out any involvement of naxals rebels in the abduction. No ransom demand has yet been made. (*newkerala.com*, 22 March 2006)

India, 21 March 2006: A 21-year-old engineering student at a private engineering college in Mangadu, the daughter of a contractor from Kilpauk, was kidnapped while driving with her father on her way to college. A gang traveling in another vehicle intercepted their car on Poonamallee High Road. Three men got out of the car and threatened the contractor while taking his daughter. The father immediately contacted police officials, who then

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formed a special team to investigate the abduction. (*newstodaynet.com*, 21 March 2006)

Nepal, 27 March 2006: Four Polish hikers visiting the Nepal Esperanto (international language) Association were abducted by Maoist rebels while on their way to Lukla, a popular destination for foreign hikers in the Everest region, about 200 km/120 mi east of Kathmandu, the capital. While Polish officials said it was too early to call the incident a kidnapping, a top official of the language group said that one of the tourists had called the group, stating that the rebels kidnapped them. There was no comment from the Maoist rebels, who have not harmed foreign tourists in the past, and the state-run Nepal Tourism Board said it was trying to verify the report. (*Reuters*, 27 March 2006)

Shortly after their abduction the four Polish trekkers were released unharmed by their captors. It is not known if ransom has been paid for their release. (*polskieradio.pl*, 27 March 2006)

Nepal, 31 March 2006: A Nepali millionaire who owns a company that runs businesses ranging from food commodities to fabric, was injured in an attack by a criminal gang operating from across the border in India. He was attacked after he refused to pay extortion money to the gang. Three men fired at the vehicle and threw a bomb at it as the businessman was driving in the Parwanipur district of the industrial city of Birgunj in southern Nepal. A doctor and an employee who were in the car with him were also injured. Though officials initially suspected Maoist guerrillas, who have been extorting businessmen to fund their decade-old insurgency, a criminal gang in Bihar, India, took responsibility for the attack. The gang called up journalists in Birgunj, stating that the businessman was attacked for refusing to pay the Nepali Rs.5 million demanded by them. (*in.news.yahoo.com*, 2 April 2006)

Pakistan, 14 March 2006: A special police team managed to locate and release a six-year-old boy, the son of an herbal clinic owner in Rampura, Batapur, a day after he was kidnapped. Police officers arrested three men and two women involved in the kidnapping, but one suspect managed to escape. Soon after the abduction, the kidnappers called the victim's father and demanded a Rs 1.5 million ransom. Police officials managed to track the abductors' call to a nephew of the boy's father. Officials then raided the nephew's residence in Okara and arrested the five suspects and released the boy. (*dailytimes.com.pk*, 15 March 2006)

Pakistan, 17 March 2006: According to a Radio Tehran report, two Pakistani engineers have been kidnapped from Bannu, about 50 km/31 mi east of Miranshah. The two were on their way to their office when a group of armed men intercepted their car in the Jamil Khel area and abducted them along with their driver. (*paktribune.com*, 17 March 2006)

Pakistan, 30 March 2006: A kidnapping victim was released at Hub River Road during the night after his family reportedly paid a huge sum of money in ransom. The victim and three friends were kidnapped on February 2 from Gadap. The kidnappers released two of them just a few hours after they were kidnapped and demanded Rs 20 million in ransom for the release of the other two hostages. During negotiations, the kidnappers killed one of their hostages, a contractor of the Irrigation Department. They dumped his body at Hub River Road, the same place where they released the first hostage. The Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) chief said that the kidnappers and the hostage's family were negotiating the release of the victim and it appeared that the family had paid the demanded ransom amount. (*dailytimes.com.pk*, 1 April 2006)

Phillipines, 16 March 2006: Authorities found the decomposing bodies of a first cousin and a nephew of the Misamis Oriental Governor who were kidnapped on their way to Iligan City from Cagayan de Oro City on 9 March 2005. The bodies were discovered in between the towns of Balo-i and Tagoloan in Lanao del Norte. The



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kidnappers also took the vehicle of one of the victims, which was found buried and covered with grass and soil. (*mindanews.com*, 16 March 2006)

Philippines, 23 March 2006: A 57-year-old Chinese-Filipino businessman managed to escape from his kidnapper's safe house in the posh Corinthian Gardens subdivision in Quezon City about three hours after his abduction. The victim was jogging in the village at around 2300 when the kidnappers forced him into a vehicle. The kidnappers left the victim alone at the hideout but told him that their accomplices had surrounded the house. The victim peeped out after his captors left and escaped upon realizing that he was alone. The Police Anti-Crime and Emergency Response (PACER) arrested a Chinese-Filipino man, who was involved in the abduction, and are now searching for his girlfriend who managed to escape. The suspects reportedly asked the victim's family for a 20 million-peso ransom. (*news.inq7.net*, 23c March 2006)

Philippines, 27 March 2006: Nine people were killed and 20 were injured when a bomb exploded in a grocery store on the southern Philippine island of Jolo. Although no one has claimed responsibility for the attack, police officials suspect that the Abu Sayyaf Group is behind the bombing. The grocery store had previously received extortion letters threatening bomb attacks unless money was paid. (*news.bbc.co.uk*, 28 March 2006)

Philippines, 29 March 2006: A bomb exploded inside of a bus as it entered the bus terminal at Davao City at around 1130 local time. Authorities said several people were injured in the blast but there were no fatalities. The bus company has been the target of extortion demands by criminal gangs for several years. This is the second attack on the bus company in the month of March. On 10 March, a bomb went off in another bus owned by the company. There were no injuries reported in that attack. (*abs-cbnnews.com*, 29 March 2006)

Philippines, 1 April 2006: Four suspected New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas stopped a bus in Purok Quezon, Barangay San Luis, Ginoog City, as it was traveling to Cagayan. The suspected rebels ordered the passengers to get off the bus and torched the vehicle. The military said the torching was in retaliation for the bus operators' refusal to pay extortion money, which the rebels referred to as revolutionary taxes. (*abs-cbnnews.com*, 3 April 2006)

Philippines, 8 April 2006: Unidentified gunmen abducted a trader and his companion in Wao, Lanao del Sur. The commander of the police forces in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao said the trader and his cashier were in a van with two others when seven gunmen flagged down their vehicle and abducted them at gunpoint. The driver and another employee were tied up and left inside the van, but later escaped and sought help from the police. No group has yet claimed responsibility for this latest abduction and no ransom demand has yet been received. (*abs-cbnnews.com*, 8 April 2006)

Philippines, 12 April 2006: A group of armed men abducted a businesswoman and her 30-year-old son from their house in Jolo, Sulu, at around 0600 local time. According to the city's mayor, the armed men arrived on board a jeep and a motorcycle and barged into the victims' house. The Jolo police chief said they sealed off entry and exit points to the town but failed to find the victims. Sulu is an area where the Abu Sayyaf group is known to operate, but the mayor said the identity of the group that snatched the two remains unknown. (*news.inq7.net*, 12 April 2006)

Philippines, 13 April 2006: According to an army spokesman, New People's Army (NPA) rebels burned a bus after forcing its passengers out at gunpoint in Misamis Oriental province in southern Philippines, in the second such attack in two weeks against a bus company which refused an extortion demand. The rebels attacked the bus, which belonged to the same company that was attacked two weeks ago, after its owners apparently refused to pay "revolutionary taxes." Authorities have bolstered road security to deter similar attacks in the province,



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which is located about 465 mi/750 km south of Manila. The government has long accused the rebels of extortion and economic sabotage. (*AP, 13 April 2006*)

Singapore, 16 March 2006: Two Indonesian men were rescued from their abductors during a police raid on a warehouse in Kaki Bukit, Singapore. The four suspects allegedly kidnapped the Indonesians, aged 35 and 53, from a hotel in the Orchard area on 10 March following a dispute over money. More than 10,000 Singapore dollars (US\$6,211) were seized during the nighttime raid. Police officials said the victims were forced to check out of their hotel and were taken to the warehouse. They were then forced to contact their families in Indonesia to raise the ransom money. One of the abductees' family members then contacted police officials. The punishment for kidnap for ransom in Singapore is life imprisonment and caning, or the death penalty. (*thejakartapost.com, 17 March 2006*)

EUROPE

Bulgaria, 26 March 2006: Three Bulgarian men kidnapped a 58-year-old Greek businessman in the southern town of Kardzhali. The kidnappers initially demanded an 80,000 euros (97,000 dollars) ransom from his family but released the man on 28 March under the condition that he would subsequently pay them. Bulgarian police officials were alerted to the kidnapping after the family reported it to Greek police authorities. Bulgarian police arrested the three suspects. According to the director of the national service for combating organized crime, the victim was not tortured but was under severe psychological pressure and his captors threatened to kill him if the money was not paid. According to police officials, this is the second such case in recent months. (*AFP, 3 April 2006*)

Italy, 1 April 2006: The body of an 18-month-old toddler, whose kidnapping shocked the nation, was found dumped near a river near the city of Parma in northern Italy. The toddler, who suffered from epilepsy, was kidnapped from his home on March 2 during family dinner. Prominent Italian figures, including Pope Benedict, politicians, singers and soccer stars had appealed for his release. Police officials were led to the area by a mason, who had worked at the toddler's family home. The suspect told investigators the baby was killed on the night of his abduction as kidnappers tried to silence his crying. Police detained the mason, his partner and another man. On the day of the abduction, two masked men armed with a knife and what appeared to be a toy gun entered the toddler's home, bound his parents and took him away. Investigators said the kidnappers had meant to abduct the toddler for a short time to extort money from his family. (*Reuters, 2 April 2006*)

United Kingdom, 23 March 2006: A 22-year-old employee of a famous British department store chain was abducted and forced to return and open the store and hand over £12,000 (US\$20,900) in cash. According to the Haringey police report, the two suspects waited for the employee to lock up the food department in Crouch End Hill, then tracked him to a nearby bus stop in Crouch Hill where they forced him into a white van and took him back to the store's food department. A Haringey police spokesman stated that the suspects must have known where the victim worked, then watched him leave and followed him from the back of the store. The spokesman added that the crime was subject to detailed planning and preparation. (*watfordobserver.co.uk, 6 April 2006*)

MIDDLE EAST

Iran, 16 March 2006: Rebels from a group calling itself Jundollah (God's Soldiers), who were posing as police officers, joined with soldiers and reportedly attacked the convoy of a provincial governor, killing 22 soldiers. They also took seven hostages, including a senior security official. Tehran has accused U.S. and British intelligence services of encouraging Iranian rebels to attack people, and suspects the rebels may have fled to Afghanistan. (*alertnet.org, 17 March 2006*)



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On **21 March** an Arabic TV channel aired a video in which the militant group threatened to execute the seven abductees -- whom they claim work for the Iranian army, intelligence forces and the Red Crescent organization -- unless the Iranian government releases five jailed comrades. The Sunni militant group has claimed responsibility for kidnappings and killings of hostages in the past in order to press the Iranian government to release arrested members. (*People's daily.com*, 22 March 2006)

Iraq, 23 March 2006: Three Western peace activists -- two Canadians and one Briton -- were freed in an operation involving U.S. and British forces in west Baghdad, two weeks after one of their American colleagues was executed by their captors. A group calling itself the Brigades of the Swords of Righteousness abducted them on 26 November 2005 and threatened to kill them unless all Iraqi prisoners were released. (*Associated Press*, 23 Mar 2006)

Iraq, 23 March 2006: U.S. female reporter Jill Carroll, who was kidnapped and held hostage for nearly three months, was set free by her abductors. According to Iraqi police, the 28-year-old journalist was dropped off near the Iraqi Islamic Party offices in Baghdad. She walked inside, and people there called U.S. officials. In a brief interview on Baghdad television, the journalist stated that she was treated well, but didn't know why she was kidnapped. A previously unknown group calling itself the "Revenge Brigades," claimed responsibility for her January 7 kidnapping in West Baghdad, during which her translator was killed. Her captors had demanded the release of all female detainees in Iraq by Feb. 26 and said Carroll would be killed if that did not happen. The date came and went with no word about her fate. (*Associated Press*, 30 March 2006)

Israel, 2 April 2006: A carjacking and attempted kidnapping took place on the Husan bypass road in Gush Etzion. Three Arabs ran onto the road, entered a motorist's vehicle and forced him to drive from the location. The driver jumped out of the vehicle near the Jewish settlement of Nakhlim, and ran on foot to the Israeli military Tunnels Road checkpoint. The police force and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted searches in the area where the incident took place. (*IsraelINN.com*, 2 April 2006)

Palestinian Authority, 14 March 2006: Following a spate of violence sparked by the storming of a jail in Jericho by Israeli troops, Palestinian gunmen, demanding the IDF halt its Jericho operation, reportedly abducted 17 foreigners -- 14 in Gaza and three others in the West Bank. The kidnappers have threatened to execute some of them if the operation is not stopped. The abductees included two French females, a Swiss member of the Red Cross, a U.S. teacher, two British citizens, four journalists -- two South Korean, one French and one Iranian -- and another U.S. national who was kidnapped in Jenin. Four other foreigners, whose identities are unclear at this time, were also abducted. Two Australians and one U.S. national were later released. The Palestinian police commander in Gaza ordered troops in Gaza City to fire on any gunmen attempting to hurt foreign nationals. Meanwhile, foreign nationals from France, Britain, Germany and South Korea sought refuge at the Palestinian police headquarters in Gaza City. (*ynetnews.com*, 14 March 2006)

On **15 March**, Palestinian militants released the last four foreigners they had kidnapped a day earlier to protest an Israeli military raid on a prison. Palestinian security officials escorted the four hostages -- a South Korean journalist, two French citizens and a Canadian -- into the headquarters of the Palestinian preventive security agency in Gaza City. Security officials had worked through the night to secure their release. The other hostages were freed shortly after their abduction. (*news.yahoo.com*, 15 March 2006)



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NORTH AMERICA

Canada, 4 April 2006: The son of a Vancouver millionaire was abducted at gunpoint during the morning hours as he drove his car through the city's affluent Southlands area. The Vancouver Police Department spokesman confirmed that "police are investigating a serious incident that happened before noon in South Vancouver," but gave no other details. According to a local TV channel, witnesses saw the drivers of two cars force the young man, who was driving his Volkswagen Golf, off the road. The 23-year-old was then dragged from his car and into another vehicle. An eyewitness, who asked not to be identified, stated that she left her house around 1040 local time and was driving on the same street when she saw some cars blocking the road. She noticed that all but one of the cars sped away and a young, distraught woman came running toward her. The young woman asked her to call 911, stating that several armed men had taken her boyfriend away -- and had taken her cell phone. (*theglobeandmail.com*, 5 April 2006)

On **12 April** police officers raided a house in Vancouver, rescued the young man and arrested six people in connection with his abduction. Police officials provided no details about the operation, saying only that the victim had been confined in a suburban Surrey home from where he was rescued. (*news.yahoo.com*, 13 April 2006)

United States, 31 March 2006: According to police officials in Manchester, New Hampshire, two men kidnapped a woman at gunpoint, blindfolded her and strapped what they said was a bomb to her back, then drove her to get an ATM card and money from a family member. Police say the men then took her to several different banks and forced her to withdraw cash from ATMs. After about two hours, they left her and her car in a motel parking lot. (*cbs4boston.com*, 3 April 2006)

United States, 6 April 2006: A woman from Columbus, Ohio, claimed two armed men kidnapped her from her apartment complex on West Town Street overnight. The woman told police that the men forced her to withdraw money from an ATM. She was put in the trunk of a car and dropped off near Mount Vernon Avenue. (*nbc4i.com*, 6 April 2006)

United States, 6 April 2006: Police officials are searching for a taxi driver, an employee of an independent cab company, who appears to have been kidnapped in Otay Mesa, California. Authorities were called to Pequena St. at around 1030 local time where witnesses say three men broke the window of the cab driver's vehicle, pulled him out and forced him into a 1990s van. Witnesses also say the man was beaten. Investigators found blood at the scene. The owner of the company said two men drove that particular cab, and it was unclear which one was kidnapped. (*kfmb.com*, 6 April 2006)

On **10 April** the 40-year-old cab driver was found alive in Tijuana. The victim reportedly contacted police officials and told them he had been taken to Mexico. (*kfmb.com*, 10 April 2006)

Upon his return to California, the victim told reporters that the kidnapers gave his family 15 days to pay a US\$30,000 ransom. He said that he contacted his family in Tijuana and that after a cousin paid part of the ransom money, his kidnapers released him. (*nbcсандiego.com*, 13 April 2006)

United States, 13 April 2006: Three men armed with guns and dressed as policemen kidnapped a 38-year-old man in front of his home. The victim was about to drive away from his home in Bonita, California, at approximately 0750 local time when the men, wearing blue clothes and vests with the word "police" on them, blocked his exit, witnesses told Sheriff's deputies. The victim was pulled out of his van, thrown to the ground, handcuffed and

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put in the back seat of another vehicle, the witnesses said. A local sheriff confirmed the kidnapping, adding that no law enforcement action was involved. The sheriff stated that there has been no communication with the abductors and no motive has been established. (*signonsandiego.com*, 14 April 2006)

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina, 16 March 2006: Several criminals abducted a 17-year-old boy, whom they intercepted as he was traveling with his mother through Buenos Aires' Quilmes District. The victim was released in the district of Avellaneda, approximately three hours after his abduction, following the payment of a 3,000 pesos ransom. (*diariohoy.net*, 17 March 2006)

Argentina, 21 March 2006: Police officers thwarted the abduction of a woman whom criminals had intercepted after she stopped at a traffic light in an area known as La Horqueta. A witness reportedly notified authorities about the incident, prompting a rapid police action that resulted in the rescue of the victim near Tigre. The two kidnappers were taken into custody. (*clarin.com*, 21 March 2006)

Argentina, 23 March 2006: Unidentified assailants kidnapped a couple after intercepting the vehicle they were driving in the Recoleta neighborhood of Buenos Aires. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of US\$4,000 from their victims. A truck driver who witnessed the abduction reportedly contacted the police force, successfully thwarting the crime. The criminals, who managed to escape, are believed to be part of a gang specializing in express kidnappings that has staged several abductions in the recent past. Most of the kidnappings took place in Buenos Aires' downtown area, with the victims being released after the payment of a ransom in southern Buenos Aires, particularly in the neighborhoods bordering the Buenos Aires - La Plata Highway (*clarin.com*, 23 March 2006)

Brazil, 14 March 2006: At approximately 2230 local time, four armed criminals abducted an employee of a local air carrier while he was driving along Marilia de Dirceu Street, located behind Congonhas International Airport in Sao Paulo. The criminals, with the victim inside the vehicle, robbed a pizzeria and engaged in a shootout with police officers shortly afterward. One of the criminals was killed in the shootout, two others were arrested and a fourth assailant escaped with the arms used in the crime. After robbing the pizzeria, the criminals intended to force the victim to withdraw cash from ATMs.

Also on 14 March, unidentified assailants abducted a female civil police officer in southern Sao Paulo with the intention of forcing her to withdraw cash from ATMs. Police officers thwarted the criminals and the victim was released unharmed. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 15 March 2006)

Brazil, 15 March 2006: Authorities in Campinas, Sao Paulo State, arrested a man accused of kidnapping a dentist on 9 March. According to reports, the victim was going to a nightclub in Jundiai, when two armed criminals intercepted him and took him away in his own vehicle. The criminals later contacted the man's family demanding a ransom, which was paid on 10 March. The victim was released unharmed. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 20 March 2006)

Brazil, 21 March 2006: Military police officers in the city of Poa, located in the greater Sao Paulo area, rescued an architect and his girlfriend who were abducted while leaving a restaurant in Bertiooga on 18 March. According to reports, the rescue occurred after employees of a bank branch contacted the police, suspecting that he was the victim of an express kidnapping, as he had withdrawn an amount of money considerably larger than usual. One of the kidnappers, a minor, has been arrested; however, authorities stated that the gang consists of at least



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10 people. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 21 March 2006)

Brazil, 24 March 2006: Police officers in Sao Paulo rescued two couples who had been abducted in different parts of the city -- one couple in the neighborhood of Belem, the other in the neighborhood of Sao Miguel Paulista. Police officers found the victims inside a house in Itaim Paulista, eastern Sao Paulo, after arresting two suspects who were in possession of one of the victim's credit cards. Two other suspects were arrested during the rescue operation. (*geral.dgabc.com.br*, 24 March 2006)

Brazil, 24 March 2006: According to local reports, approximately four people fell victim to express kidnappings in Sao Paulo each day during the first three months of 2006, with approximately 100 cases reported each month. The statistics are not very different from those in 2005, when 1,347 cases were reported during the first quarter. Despite the fact that the police force has increased the number of patrols and is using unmarked vehicles along with regular patrols, these incidents continue to take place.

In the past, criminals targeted random victims while they were in their cars, primarily at traffic lights. However, nowadays the criminals are targeting people living in upscale neighborhoods as they are entering or exiting their homes, offices or universities, or while driving along roads with very light traffic. The criminals reportedly look for targets of opportunity and prefer to abduct those who are by themselves, which is why many locals have resorted to using very dark tinted windows in order to avoid criminals seeing who is inside a vehicle. Police reports indicate that most of the time, the victims who do not show resistance are released unharmed after their accounts are emptied or a small ransom is paid. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 28 March 2006)

Brazil, 29 March 2006: Authorities in Rio de Janeiro arrested four civil police officers who allegedly attempted to extort a couple in February by demanding a bribe of 500,000 reais. According to reports, the police officers had discovered that the couple had used false documentation during a commercial transaction. The officers are facing a trial and if found guilty, they will be suspended from the force. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 31 March 2006)

Brazil, 30 March 2006: Police officers in Sao Paulo rescued a college student who was abducted on 29 March along the Estrada do M'Booi Mirim Highway, near the neighborhood of Jardim Angela in southern Sao Paulo. Police reports state that the criminals contacted the victim's family, who agreed to pay a ransom of 8,000 reais. Police officers rescued the victim and arrested four suspects -- including a minor -- while they were forcing the victim to withdraw the ransom money from an ATM. (*geral.dgabc.com.br*, 30 March 2006)

Brazil, 2 April 2006: A 13-year-old kidnapped boy was released in Embu, on the western side of the greater Sao Paulo area, after police officers came close to the house where he was held captive. According to police reports, the boy had been abducted in front of his school on 24 March. The criminals reportedly demanded a large ransom for the child's release, which the father, a businessman in the gardening sector, was unable to secure. Due to police searches, the victim was moved three times before he was released. A police representative stated that the kidnapping gang primarily operates in the Vale do Paraiba area and that it also affects the city of Sao Paulo. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 3 April 2006)

Brazil, 2 April 2006: Police officers in Sorocaba, located approximately 92 km/57 mi from Sao Paulo, raided a house and rescued a couple who had been abducted earlier. According to reports, the raid was carried out after police officers received an anonymous tip. Police officers also arrested 13 people, including four women and two minors, who are believed to be involved in the abduction. In addition, the officers seized four rifles, three pistols, two bulletproof vests as well as ammunition. Authorities suspect that the kidnappers were seeking to abduct the son of a local rancher, but mistakenly abducted one of the rancher's employees and his girlfriend. The criminal

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organization reportedly had a notebook containing names and notes about the rancher and members of his family. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 4 April 2006)

Brazil, 7 April 2006: Reports state that an increasing number of victims of express kidnappings in Sao Paulo are being abducted from the parking garages of shopping centers and hypermarkets in the city. Police reports indicate that in some cases the criminals employ a child as a distraction, and that most attacks occur in shopping centers located in affluent parts of the city, including the city's most sophisticated mall. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 7 April 2006)

Brazil, 10 April 2006: Armed criminals intercepted a school bus in southern Sao Paulo at approximately 1200 local time. After forcing the driver out of the bus, they kidnapped a 6-year-old girl. The incident reportedly occurred while the bus was driving along rua do Jabaquara Street. No further details are available.

Meanwhile, on 10 April, after receiving a tip, police officers raided a house located in Diadema (greater Sao Paulo area) and rescued a 35-year-old businesswoman who had been abducted on 8 April in Taubate, Vale do Paraiba. Three armed men had intercepted the woman while she driving her vehicle.

Local statistics indicate that during the first quarter of 2006, authorities in the state of Sao Paulo accounted for 24 kidnapping-for-ransom incidents; police officers discovered the captivity site in seven of those incidents. The number of incidents reported in the first three months of 2006 is 15 percent fewer than the number reported in the same period in 2005. (*oglobo.globo.com*, 11 April 2006)

Bolivia, 20 March 2006: A Brazilian national informed authorities that at approximately 1100 local time on 9 March, five armed criminals forcibly entered his house, allegedly searching for cash, and when they were unable to find any, proceeded to kidnap him and lock him inside a house located in Pampa de la Isla, department of Santa Cruz, where he was held hostage for 10 days. The criminals were reportedly demanding a US\$10,000 ransom for his release, which was not paid, as the victim managed to escape on 18 March.

In unrelated developments, a Peruvian national reported that two men alleging to be police officers intercepted him and forced him into a taxi, where they stole the approximately US\$5,000 he was carrying. No further details about this incident were disclosed. (*eldeber.com.bo*, 20 March 2006)

Bolivia, 2 April 2006: According to the La Paz chief of police, the bodies of an Australian couple who disappeared a few days after arriving in Bolivia on 24 January, were found in a La Paz graveyard. In an interview, the police chief told reporters that the pair were forced to empty their bank accounts and were eventually shot to death sometime between February 17 and 19 by their captors. The families of the couple alerted Bolivian authorities of their disappearance in February after the couple missed their flight from Chile to Australia. Three suspects have been arrested but the crime's alleged mastermind is still on the run. (*cnn.com*, 4 April 2006)

Colombia, 22 March 2006: Alleged members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) kidnapped two park rangers in the town of San Plato, located in the southern part of the Bolivar Department. The rebels have reportedly demanded a ransom for the rangers' release. (*elcolombiano.terra.com*, 23 March 2006)

Colombia, 3 April: Police officers in Cali arrested three alleged extortionists who were demanding money from local businessmen. The trio, claiming to be members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group, threatened the businessmen and their families. (*elpais.com*, 4 April 2006)

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Colombia, 4 April 2006: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group has released a German national who was abducted near Bogotá on 16 March 2001. The German Foreign Affairs Ministry released a communiqué stating that the release was the product of joint efforts of the Colombian government, an international aid agency and the Catholic Church. The victim, who is married to a Colombian woman, was a businessman linked to the hotel sector, and is a Colombian resident. FARC rebels never made any political demands in exchange for releasing the victim. Sources refused to indicate whether the release, which occurred on 4 April, was a result of the payment of a ransom. (*el-universal.com*, 5 April 2005)

Colombia, 5 April 2006: Military officers clashed with a gang of kidnapers in the town of Buenos Aires, Cauca department, killing seven suspects. According to reports, the suspects were responsible for extorting businessmen from the town as well as from Cali, and at the time of the firefight they were about to carry out a kidnapping. The would-be kidnapping victims were later to be "sold" to the 30th front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). (*eltiempo.terra.com.co*, 6 April 2006)

Colombia, 6 April 2006: Rebels of the Manuel Hernandez front of the National Liberation Army (ELN) released a 50-year-old man, who was abducted from a mine in the department of Choco on 1 September 2005. The victim was reportedly handed over to members of the Catholic Church and an International aid group in the department of Risalda. Reports state that the victim appeared to be in poor health, which may have prompted his release. (*caracol.com.co*, 6 April 2006)

Colombia, 11 April 2006: A 77-year-old cattle rancher, who is also a bacteriologist and a former military officer, appeared unharmed at his home located in Cartagena's Bocagrande sector, after being abducted from his ranch located near the town of La Paz, in the northern part of Bolivar Department on 19 November 2005. It is not known if a ransom was paid or whether the abductors were part a rebel group operating in the area or merely common criminals. (*eluniversal.com.co*, 12 April 2006)

Colombia, 12 April 2006: The most recent statistics indicate that the number of kidnappings committed in Colombia during the first quarter of 2006 dropped by 50 percent, in comparison to the same period in 2005 -- from 252 cases down to 126. The most notable departments where the number of kidnappings declined include Antioquia, Valle del Cauca and Bolivar. While leftist guerrilla groups continue to carry out kidnappings, criminal gangs are becoming increasingly involved in kidnapping incidents by specializing in abducting victims who are later sold to Marxist rebel groups. The preferred victims continue to be businessmen and wealthy ranchers, as they are usually able to pay large ransoms in a short period of time. (*caracol.com.co*, 12 April 2006)

Costa Rica, 19 March: Several men in three vehicles abducted a 47-year-old businessman from his residence in Las Orquideas de San Luis de Santo Domingo de Heredia as he was returning from a business trip. Unofficial reports indicate that the kidnapers have asked for a ransom of US\$3 million. (*aldia.com.cr*, 19 March 2006)

Ecuador, 12 March 2006: The targeting of Manta residents for kidnapping has left the community in a state of concern. In a recent incident, two taxis intercepted a resident driving his car to a supermarket. He was then kidnapped and forced into one of the taxis. He was driven to a safe house on the outskirts of the city where he was held hostage for three days. His abductors contacted his family and demanded US\$15,000 for his safe release. In the following days, the family gathered US\$10,000, and as agreed, they contacted one of the kidnapers who was in Portoviejo. One of the victim's brothers took the ransom and met the abductors. The victim was abandoned on the road to Manta. The family never contacted police officials because the abductors demanded that they negotiate directly with them.

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On 11 March another resident, who declared that he has been threatened since November, managed to save himself from being kidnapped. The man said he noticed that a man who was taking pictures with a cell phone was approaching him. He told the approaching man that he is an agent and then called police officers who captured the man and arrested him.

The last reported incident was of a 19-year-old woman, who remained a hostage for several days until her family paid a ransom of more than US\$30,000. A fisherman in Manta stated that the insecurity in the city is due to the fact that in the popular Tarquie beach area cash circulates in large quantities, which make the area a magnet for criminals. (*elcomercio.com*, 12 March 2006)

Guatemala, 17 March 2006: A Costa Rican citizen was kidnapped and his Italian traveling companion was shot in a rural area in the southern part of Guatemala. The two men were visiting a ranch in the municipality of Taxisco, Santa Rosa, located approximately 30 km/19 mi south of Guatemala City, when the kidnappers attacked them at gunpoint. No further details are available. (*18 March 2006 miami.com*, 18 March 2006)

On **18 March** Guatemalan police rescued a kidnapped Costa Rican businessman, shooting dead two of his alleged captors during the rescue operation. The 47-year-old victim was unharmed in the shootout, which took place on a dirt path near the village of Taxisco about 20 mi/32 km south of the capital. The victim was abducted a day earlier as he drove down a nearby country road. (*Miamiherald.com*, 22 March 2006)

Jamaica, 18 March 2006: Five armed men, posing as policemen, abducted a man and his girlfriend from their home in the community of Hendon in Glendevon, St. James in Montego Bay. The couple has been identified as a 35-year-old mechanic, and a 36-year-old businesswoman who owns a retail clothing business, a hairdressing salon and an auto-mechanic business that was managed by her boyfriend. Police reports state that the couple was at home with five children, three of their own, including a 23-month-old baby, when the abduction took place. The children were not harmed, but an undetermined sum of cash and three cellular phones were stolen and the house was ransacked. The family was reportedly at home around 2130 local time when they heard a knock on the front door and someone claiming to be "the police" demanded that they open the door. After the criminals ransacked the house, the couple was forced into their own vehicle and driven away by the kidnappers. (*jamaica-gleaner.com*, 20 March 2006)

On **20 March**, burnt remains, believed to be those of the Montego Bay couple who were abducted from their home on 18 March, were found in their stolen car near Ironshore, St. James. Police officials reportedly received an anonymous call directing them to the location at Home Hill Road where the charred remains were discovered. The motive behind the abduction is still unknown. (*jamaica-gleaner.com*, 21 March 2006)

Jamaica, 8 April 2006: Police officials arrested a St. Mary taxi driver and charged him with the kidnapping of an 11-year-old boy, the son of supermarket owners, on 7 April. Police were looking for two other men whom they believe can assist them in their investigation. According to police, the boy was kidnapped from Ocho Rios and taken to an undisclosed location by his abductors who shortly thereafter contacted his parents and demanded a US\$1.5 million ransom for his safe return. The parents provided the cash, which was picked up by the kidnappers that same afternoon. The boy was later released unharmed. Following intense and coordinated police investigations, the suspect was picked up a day later. Police recovered about US\$1.3 million of the ransom payment. A source close to the investigation stated that the suspect was well known to the parents and had, in the past, performed pick-up duties for them using his taxicab. (*jamaicaobserver.com*, 13 April 2006)

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Mexico, 21 March 2006: Police officers rescued a Mexico City magistrate who had been kidnapped while driving through the capital's Tlalpan neighborhood. Two armed men boarded the magistrate's vehicle at a stoplight at the corner of Altillo and Acoxta streets. One of the men took control of the vehicle, while the other restrained the woman. Witnesses observing the incident notified police, who responded and arrived on the scene within minutes. After realizing that police officers were in pursuit, the kidnappers stopped the vehicle and opened fire on the officers. During the gunfire exchange, one of the kidnappers suffered a gunshot injury. Police officers detained the two suspects shortly afterward. A police officer was also wounded in the gunfire. (*cronica.com.mx* 22 March 2006)

Mexico, 25 March 2006: Mexican authorities arrested a member of an anti-kidnapping police task force in Morelos state, for allegedly conspiring with kidnappers in the abduction of a farmer in Jonacatepec, Morelos state. The accused police officer had been assigned to assist the family of the kidnapping victim, offering advice and participating in the negotiations with the abductors, who demanded a ransom amount of 500,000 pesos (US\$45,200). The farmer was eventually freed on 27 February 2006 following a ransom payment of 360,000 pesos (US\$32,500). Police investigators surmised, upon comparing the writing in the letter sent to the family by the kidnappers with the writing of the officer, that he had been involved in the abduction. (*launion.com.mx*, 25 March 2006)

Mexico, 25 March 2006: During a police raid, members of an anti-kidnapping police task force rescued a kidnapping victim and arrested three kidnappers in the city of Mexicali, in Baja California. The kidnappers, all residents of Mexicali, had abducted the 40-year-old merchant a day earlier as he left his residence in Mexicali's Villas del Palmar district. The kidnappers demanded a ransom amount of 300,000 pesos (US\$27,500) from the victim's family. The victim suffered no injuries. (*estadis.eluniversal.com.mx*, 25 March 2006)

Mexico, 27 March 2006: Members of Mexico's Federal Agency of Investigations (AFI) detained seven suspected members of a Mexico City-based kidnapping ring known as Los Santeros, freeing a kidnapping victim in the process. The group reportedly operated in the Mexico City neighborhood of Iztapalapa, an area known for its high crime and lack of security. The operation that led to the arrests occurred at the corner of Estado de Mexico Street and Colonia Parajes Buenavista, in the Iztapalapa neighborhood. The kidnappers abducted the victim on 23 March and demanded a ransom of 3,000,000 pesos (US\$271,200) for her release. According to reports, the kidnapping ring consists of an estimated 30 members. (*proceso.com.mx*, 28 March 2006)

Mexico, 2 April 2006: A property realtor, who was abducted on 26 March as he arrived at one of his properties in the Rosarito neighborhood of Hacienda de San Fernando, managed to escape from his kidnappers. Baja California state police officers arrested the victim's brother-in-law on 5 April for his alleged involvement in the kidnapping. According to police, the brother-in-law was present during the abduction, identifying the intended target and giving directions to the kidnappers. The kidnappers kept the victim in a "safe house" in the Tijuana neighborhood of Santa Julia, and demanded 2 million pesos (US\$180,000) in ransom from the victim's family for his return. Investigators suspect that the kidnappers intended to kill the victim despite making the ransom demand. (*signonsandiego.com*, 6 April 2006)

Mexico, 5 April 2006: A commission comprised of Mexico state police officials, members of Mexico state's House of Representatives and other state officials, recently passed an initiative aimed at penalizing those found guilty of attempting to extort by making death and kidnapping threats by telephone, a practice sometimes referred to as "virtual kidnapping." Under the new law, those found guilty of extorting or attempting to extort in this manner will be sentenced to seven years in prison and forced to pay a fine.

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According to findings by the commission, of the 200 estimated telephoned extortion threats made daily, 20 of those originate inside prisons in Mexico City and Mexico state, a difficult figure to accept considering the restrictive measures instituted by prison officials. Prior to the new initiative, neither federal nor state legislators had passed legislation focusing on this form of extortion. (*eluniversal.com.mx*, 5 April 2006)

Mexico, 6 April 2006: A gunman abducted a high-ranking U.S. executive of a textile manufacturing company in eastern Tijuana. Baja authorities stated that the victim, who is in his fifties, was driving a vehicle with Santa Fe, California, license plates when was intercepted around 0700 by a white Toyota with tinted windows. A man with a large firearm forced him into the Toyota. No ransom demand had been made as of the afternoon of 6 April. Wealthy or middle-class Mexican businessmen and their relatives have been frequent kidnapping targets in Mexico, but foreign executives have not been targeted for years. (*kesq.com*, 7 April 2006)

On 7 April, the U.S. executive abducted in the violent Mexico-U.S. border city of Tijuana managed to escape his kidnappers who had dozed off. The 53-year-old U.S.-born citizen of Korean descent was kidnapped as he drove to his business early in the morning the previous day. The victim escaped the small home where he had been taken, grabbing a gun from his kidnappers and running into the street where he tried to jump aboard a passing gasoline truck. The scene caused such a commotion that neighbors called the police. Authorities arriving at the scene went with the man back to the house where he had been held, but the kidnappers had fled. Police officers recovered three pistols, two of which were plastic. The victim had been blindfolded and had his hands bound, but could tell by listening to the voices of his abductors that two men and one woman were involved. The victim stated that in the early morning, only two of his abductors were present and he waited until they fell asleep to escape. Authorities believe the kidnappers were not professionals because they used an older car as well as toy weapons to pull off the abduction and also used an ordinary cell phone to call their victim's company and demand a ransom payment within hours of his kidnapping. (*nbcсандiego.com*, 7 April 2006)

Mexico, 14 April 2006: Mexican and U.S. authorities are working together to free a Chinese-American merchant who was kidnapped in Tijuana. The governor of Baja California Norte said that the Tijuana-based seafood wholesaler, a U.S. citizen, remains missing, although the kidnappers released an individual whom they had abducted along with the merchant. The merchant was kidnapped outside his business after arriving in a car with California plates. Both Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agencies have been tight-lipped about the case. (*officer.com*, 14 April 2006)

Peru, 23 March 2006: Police officers in Huancayo rescued two businessmen, 47 and 44 years old respectively, who had been kidnapped in Satipo on 18 March. Police reports indicate that three criminals involved in the abduction were arrested while negotiating a large ransom. No further details are available. (*larepublica.com.pe*, 24 March 2006)

Peru, 25 March 2006: Following the payment of the requested ransom, a local businesswoman was released unharmed in Lima's Callao district, 16 days after her abduction. The woman is the owner of a company that produces clothing made of alpaca fur. (*elcomercio.com.pe*, 27 March 2006)

Peru, 28 March 2006: At approximately 2020 local time, four heavily armed men abducted a 36-year-old industrial engineer as he was driving his luxury vehicle along San Borja Norte Street in Lima on his way home. Private security guards who witnessed the abduction attempted to rescue the victim, but were unable to do so as the criminals attacked them. The criminals fled using the Panamericana Sur Highway. (*larepublica.com.pe*, 29 March 2006)

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Peru, 29 March 2006: Nine hooded men abducted a Spanish businessman at gunpoint from his vehicle near Lima. According to newspaper reports, the victim was shot three times during the attack and may have been hit in the arm and foot. His kidnapers have already been in contact with the victim's family, and are demanding €2.5 million (US\$3 million) in ransom. Police are focusing on the ports of Callao, Huarmey and Chimbote, where trawlers owned by the victim operate. (*.thinkspain.com, 31 March 2006*)

Peru, 30 March 2006: A group of four criminals, two of whom were armed, attempted to kidnap a businessman as he drove along Carlos Arrieta Street in Santa Beatriz, Lima. The businessman reportedly resisted the attempted kidnapping by activating the alarms of his car and by yelling. The criminals, who managed to steal US\$5,000, reportedly told the victim before fleeing that they wanted him alive. (*elcomercio.com.pe, 31 March 2006*)

Peru, 3 April 2006: Police officers arrested a criminal who was extorting businessmen in the district of Cachachi Cajabamba, located in the department of Cajamarca. According to reports, the suspect, who had been previously arrested on terrorism charges, threatened his victims by telling them that he was a member of the Sendero Luminoso terrorist organization. In the past, the suspect had told his victims that he was a member of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). (*elcomercio.com.pe, 4 April 2006*)

Peru, 6 April 2006: Unidentified assailants kidnapped a young girl, for whose release they are demanding a US\$100,000 ransom. According to reports, the victim was abducted near the metro station in Lima's Los Olivos district. The victim's mother was present at the time of the abduction and was reportedly injured. (*elcomercio.com.pe, 7 April 2006*)

Peru, 10 April 2006: Unidentified assailants abducted an attorney while he was driving from his house in San Isidro to Chorrillos, Lima. The criminals contacted the victim's family and demanded a US\$50,000 ransom. (*expreso.com.pe, 12 April 2006*)

Peru, 10 April 2006: At approximately 1430 local time, unidentified criminals abducted a 6-year-old boy, the son of peddlers, while he was leaving his school located in Lima's Callao district. According to reports, the boy was released near the La Pampilla refinery approximately 10 hours after his abduction, after the family paid a 500 nuevos soles ransom. Reports indicate that the criminals had originally requested a 10,000 nuevos soles ransom. (*larepublica.com.pe, 12 April 2006*)

Peru, 13 April 2006: According to local reports, the latest kidnappings in Lima indicate that the wave of kidnappings for ransom affecting the capital city is no longer a phenomenon exclusively targeting wealthy businessmen. Common and often inexperienced criminals -- usually working alone -- are abducting people randomly for ransom, in an attempt to obtain a quick ransom without taking the risks that high profile abductions represent. There have been 12 kidnappings for ransom in Lima year-to-date.

In the interim, in an attempt to control the increasing number of abductions occurring nationwide, the Peruvian congress is studying a project that would charge kidnapers with no less than 30 years in prison, and in the case of aggravated assault, to life in prison, and does not allow them to obtain any penitentiary benefits such as sentence reductions, etc. (*expreso.com.pe, 13 April 2006*)

Trinidad and Tobago, 8 April 2006: Two men involved in the used-car industry were kidnapped between 6 and 8 April, bringing the total kidnappings of used-car salesmen this year to three. In the first incident, on 6 April, a son of a used-car dealer who owns a business in St. Joseph was kidnapped by two armed men and forced into their vehicle at around 2100 local time as he went to visit his girlfriend in St. Helena Village, Piarco. In the

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second incident, on 8 April, a managing director of a used car business was abducted shortly after 1700 local time at the Southern Main Road, McBean, Couva. (*trinidadexpress.com, 8 April 2006*)

On **10 April** police officers found the 35-year-old part owner of a foreign used car dealership, who was abducted in Maracas/St Joseph, unharmed. A helicopter used by police spotted several men running through the bushes but lost them in heavily forested hills near Wharf Trace, Maracas/St Joseph. Police officers on the ground found the victim handcuffed after his abductors abandoned him in a bushy area. The kidnappers initially demanded TT\$2 million for the victim's safe release. (*guardian.co.tt, 11 April 2006*)

Venezuela, 13 March 2006: At approximately 1930 local time a group of eight people kidnapped the daughter of a renowned Lebanese businessman. The abduction occurred in the town of Upata, in the southern part of Bolivar State. This is the second time the family has been targeted by kidnappers. In 2004 the victim's brother was abducted and released following a ransom payment. Since the beginning of the year there have been five reported kidnappings in Bolivar State. Two victims have been released, two remain in captivity and one has been found dead. Police officers in the state have indicated that they are attempting to control the increasing crime rates in the area. (*el-universal.com, 15 March 2006*)

Venezuela, 18 March 2006: A 12-year-old boy who was abducted on 2 March was left on the highway near El Mojan in the municipality of Mara. According to reports, the victim was rescued after someone recognized him as he walked along the highway. Unofficial reports indicate that no ransom was paid. (*19 March 2006 panorama.com.ve*)

Venezuela, 19 March 2006: Authorities in San Antonio, Tachira State, arrested two alleged paramilitaries as they attempted to extort a local businessman. The two were demanding a payment of 100 million bolivars (US\$46,600) in exchange for not harming him or his family. Police sources indicate that the suspects had extorted several businessmen in the area by calling them on their phones. (*eluniversal.com, 20 March 2006*)

Venezuela, 19 March 2006: At approximately 0800 local time, unidentified armed assailants broke into a house located in the San Miguel neighborhood in Cumana, Sucre State, and abducted a 9-year-old girl. The criminals entered the house through the garage door and did not activate any of the home's security systems. The criminals also stole several valuables from the house before fleeing with the girl, whose father is the owner of several lottery ticket sales points in the city. The kidnappers have yet to contact the family. (*eltiempo.com.ve, 23 March 2006*)

Venezuela, 22 March 2006: Authorities in Barquisimeto, capital of Lara State, rescued a businesswoman who had been abducted at approximately 1200 local time the previous day. No further details are available. (*el-nacional.com, 23 March 2006*)

Venezuela, 28 March 2006: Late on 28 March 2006, unidentified assailants abducted a businessman, owner of the El Aragueño newspaper and the TVS TV station, as he was driving along Las Delicias Avenue in Maracay, capital of Aragua State. Following the abduction, which the businessman's driver reported to local authorities, police officers set up dozens of checkpoints in order to prevent the criminals from leaving the area. (*ElUniversal, 29 March 2006*)

On **29 March**, local authorities found the body of the businessman one day after his abduction. According to reports, a gang of three to six people wearing uniforms similar to those used by the police of Aragua State set up an illegal checkpoint along Las Delicias Avenue in Maracay to abduct the businessman. Local authorities

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state that the kidnapers never contacted the victim's family demanding a ransom. This, coupled with the fact that the body of the businessman appeared tortured, has led authorities to suspect that the killing may have been an act of revenge or that someone hired assassins to kill him. The body of the man, an Italian who had lived in Venezuela for approximately 50 years, was found in the Torres municipality of Lara State, along the road connecting Carora and Barquisimeto. (*Panodi.com, 29 Mar 2006*)

Reports on 4 April 2006 indicate preliminary investigations have shown that two active members of the police force of Aragua State may be involved in the abduction and killing of the prominent Italian businessman. According to emerging reports, the businessman, who owned several companies in the city of Maracay, had a GPS microchip implanted in his body. Once the victim was abducted, the company in charge of tracking the device alerted local authorities of the victim's whereabouts. Police officers reportedly contacted the officers involved in the kidnapping, who then decided to kill the victim. Following allegations of police involvement in this crime, the Ministry of the Interior and Justice decided to intervene. So far, investigations have shown that approximately 10 percent of the 5,000 active members of the force are involved in some type of criminal activity. (*Panodi.com, 4 April 2006*)

Venezuela, 30 March 2006: Sources linked with the investigation of the kidnapping of three boys holding Canadian and Venezuelan citizenships have reportedly stated that the kidnapers have contacted the victims' families from the cities of Merida, Maracay and Maracaibo as well as from neighboring Colombia. The last time the kidnapers contacted the family was on 25 March. In addition, local authorities believe that the abduction was carried out by a highly organized criminal organization, of which members of several security agencies are allegedly involved. Furthermore, it has been disclosed that the gang has attempted on at least three occasions to "sell" the victims to Colombian rebel groups, but that the negotiations have collapsed due to the large numbers of officers involved. The victims are believed to still be in the Caracas metropolitan area. (*panodi.com, 29 March 2006*)

On **5 April**, the Venezuelan justice minister announced that authorities had found the bodies of three Canadian brothers and their driver, who were kidnapped more than a month ago, near an electrical tower about 30 mi/50 km west of Caracas. The three were abducted on 23 February when unidentified men posing as police officers stopped the vehicle they were traveling in on the way to school in Caracas. Officials say the kidnapers initially demanded a ransom of more than US\$4.5 million. The children's father is a Canadian businessman who has been living in the country for more than 20 years. (*abcnews.go.com, 5 April 2006*)

Venezuela, 31 March 2006: Reports released on 31 March indicate that a Chilean businessman who was abducted 23 days ago is still in the hands of an unknown guerrilla group. The victim was abducted by seven armed criminals wearing military fatigues along with three of his employees as they were driving in a sparsely populated area in La Guajira, located near the border with Venezuela. The three workers were released shortly after their capture and stated that the abductors had Colombian accents. The victim had lived in Maracaibo for approximately two decades and is the owner of a prospecting mining company that was conducting a contract job for the state-run mining company at the time of the abduction. The kidnapers have reportedly contacted the family and demanded a ransom and have threatened to kill the victim if it is not paid. (*emol.com, 31 March 2006*)

Venezuela, 7 April 2006: A 32-year-old businesswoman who was kidnapped on 6 April along with her 3- and 8-year-old daughters was released unharmed. Police reports indicate that the woman was intercepted while driving her daughters to their school located in the city of Maturin, in the state of Monagas. The criminals



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reportedly entered the woman's car, forced her to drive and then made her call her brother to state that she had been kidnapped. The victim's brother contacted authorities, who launched a special operation resulting in the retrieval of the vehicle, which had been abandoned near the town of Caripito. Police reports also indicated that the criminals had demanded a 700,000 bolivars (US\$330) ransom, which was not paid. This is the second kidnapping case reported in the state of Monagas in 2006. (*el-universal.com*, 7 April 2006)

RUSSIA AND CIS

Georgia, 25 March 2006: Tbilisi police officers arrested members of an armed gang allegedly involved in kidnapping a man and holding him captive in a rented apartment in the Gldani district of the city. The suspects reportedly demanded a US\$3,500 ransom, but were given a car instead to secure his release. The vehicle has been confiscated, and an investigation has been launched. The circumstances of the kidnapping were not reported. (*messenger.com.ge*, 27 March 2006)

Georgia, April 6, 2006: Information posted on the Website of the Georgian Ministry for Internal Affairs reveals that a 53-year-old resident of the Vazisubani district in Tbilisi was detained on suspicion of taking a U.S. citizen hostage. Agents of the Interior Ministry organized crime unit raided the suspect's house and detained him. The incident is under investigation and no other details have been released. (*eng.primenewsonline.com*, 7 April 2006)

Russia, 6 April 2006: Sources in Chechnya's law enforcement revealed that a local resident of Grozny has been kidnapped. According to the source, a woman informed the Staropromyslovsky District Police Department that five unidentified men wearing camouflage and masks broke into her house on March 3 and abducted her son at gunpoint. (*interfax.ru*, 7 April 2006)