

April 2007

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.

Table of Contents

Africa	2
Asia Pacific	4
Europe.....	12
Middle East.....	13
North America.....	14
Latin America & Caribbean.....	15
Russia and CIS.....	24

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

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AFRICA

Ethiopia, 20 March 2007: Rebels from northern Ethiopia who claimed responsibility for abducting five Europeans this month say they will kidnap foreigners who venture into their territory, Eritrean state media reported. A separatist group fighting for greater autonomy of the barren Afar region straddling Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti made its first direct claim for the kidnapping of five Europeans. The chairperson of the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Union Front (ARDUF) said foreigners traveling to northern Ethiopia need permission from the group or else they risk being kidnapped. There has been no word on the fate of eight Ethiopians who vanished while traveling with the Europeans. (*news24.com, 21 March 2007*)

Guinea, 30 March 2007: The Guinea chief of police announced that the kidnapped French national who heads the local office of a French oil conglomerate was found safe and well and his kidnapers have been arrested. The police official did not reveal details on how the victim was found, or on the number and nationality of his kidnapers. The victim was kidnapped on 29 March while leaving a restaurant in the center of Conakry. A police source speaking on condition of anonymity said the kidnapers had demanded a ransom for the victim but did not provide further details. The kidnapers, who stopped the victim's vehicle outside the restaurant, spoke in English, according to the police source. Kidnappings for ransom are rare in the former French colony, but armed attacks have become more frequent following civil wars in neighboring countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. (*AFP, 30 March 2007*)

Nigeria, 6 April 2007: Two Turkish engineers were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen who intercepted their car in Port Harcourt in Niger Delta. One of the men works for a Turkish firm that maintains telecom equipment on one of the oil platforms of an Italian oil company in the delta. The employer of the second captive is not known. (*Reuters, 7 April 2007*)

Nigeria, 2 April 2007: Two foreign oil workers were abducted in Bayelsa State in southern Nigeria. The two men -- whom unconfirmed sources say are Lebanese -- are working for a Nigerian construction company currently under Lebanese management. The men were working on a bridge at a construction site when they were abducted by a group of armed men in speedboats. (*alertnet.org, 2 April 2007*)

On **4 April** the two Lebanese workers employed by a Nigerian company, who were kidnapped during separate attacks by suspected Ijaw militants, were released unharmed by their captors. The two construction workers were kidnapped at a site near state-owned Niger Delta University where they were supervising a road construction job being undertaken by the company. (*allafrica.com, 5 April 2007*)

Nigeria, 31 March 2007: A Scottish oil worker was kidnapped from an offshore drilling rig owned by a Norwegian oilfield services company but leased to a local Nigerian company. The rig is situated about 40 mi/64 km south of the Niger Delta. (*Reuters, 31 March 2007*)

Nigeria, 23 March 2007: Two foreign construction workers, believed to be Lebanese, were kidnapped in Warri, near Port Harcourt. This follows the kidnapping only hours prior of a Dutch national by gunmen in Port Harcourt. The

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

suspects arrived in speedboats, exchanged gunfire with guards, and then abducted the Dutchman, who is the security manager of a German construction company. (*Reuters, 23 Mar 2007*)

On **25 March**, police officials in Nigeria said that the two construction workers kidnapped earlier this week have been freed unharmed by their captors. The sources provided few details on the release of the men, who are Indian and Lebanese citizens. (*voanews.com, 25 March 2007*)

Nigeria, 23 March 2007: Gunmen in speedboats kidnapped a Dutch security manager of a German construction company in Port Harcourt. The attackers invaded the waterfront construction yard of the German company and engaged the guards in a three-hour shootout. As the security manager went to investigate what was happening, he was abducted by the attackers. (*Reuters 23, March 2007*)

Nigeria, 19 March 2007: Two Chinese nationals and one Nigerian were kidnapped from a motorcycle assembly factory in Nnewi, Anambra State. Police officials suspect that the separatist group the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is behind the kidnapping, although no group has taken responsibility. Kidnappings and attacks continue to increase as the country prepares for the first democratic transfer of presidential authority with the 17 April elections. (*alertnet.org, 19 Mar 2007*)

Nigeria, 15 March 2007: Members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) released two Italian hostages whom they had kidnapped during a raid on an Italian oil company terminal in Brass on 7 December 2006. The company's CEO stated that no ransom was paid for the employees' release. In a statement to the press, MEND militants threatened to conduct additional attacks and kidnapping raids on oil facilities. The group also threatened to conduct car bombings throughout the Niger Delta region. (*afxnews.com, 15 Mar 2007*)

Nigeria, 16 March 2007: A French national who was kidnapped on 8 February in Nigeria's southern oil capital, Port Harcourt, was released by his captors. The man, who is married to a Nigerian woman, is employed as a logistics specialist under local contract for a French oil company. The conditions of his release were not immediately known. The man was kidnapped by armed men as he returned home late at night, alone in his car, which was later found a few hundred meters from his home. A week after his abduction, contact was made with the kidnappers. The French oil company made no statement during his detention. (*turkishpress.com, 16 March 2007*)

South Africa, 12 April 2007: A 24-year-old police officer who is a suspect in the 28 March kidnapping of her 5-year-old niece, appeared in court requesting bail. The state opposed bail for the Estcourt Police Station constable, saying that as a police officer she was in a position of trust and that there were fears that she might interfere with witnesses. Taking the stand for the state, the investigating officer said the evidence against the suspected kidnapper was strong, stating that she had planned everything regarding the kidnapping in detail. The investigating officer said the suspect had misled her sister by falsely claiming that she had raised the R20,000 ransom that was demanded, by borrowing half of the money from a money lender and pulling the other half from her own bank account, then demanding that her sister deposit R20,000 in her account. However, investigations revealed that only R2,500 was withdrawn from her account that day. The investigating officer also claimed that although the accused does not have prior convictions, she defrauded her mother of R4,000 after telling her that she had lost a state file and needed the money to repay the state, an incident that never occurred. Her lawyer claimed there is no reason to believe that she will interfere with the investigation. (*int.iol.co.za, 12 April 2007*)

South Africa, 25 March 2007: Three women employed as emergency operator staffers narrowly escaped being kidnapped in Diepkloof, Soweto, according to a spokesperson for the emergency services provider. Two of the women were waiting for a third to pick them up at a petrol station at approximately 0600 local time when five armed men

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

tried to force them into their cars. The two staffers managed to escape from the men and climbed into the car of the third woman as she arrived. They sped off but were chased by their attackers, who were driving two vehicles, both without license plates. As the women approached the Diepkloof police station, their pursuers gave up the chase and disappeared. (*news24.com, 25 March 2007*)

Somalia, 2 April 2007: Somali pirates armed with assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades hijacked an Indian cargo ship for ransom as it was preparing to dock at Mogadishu's port. The vessel was delivering nearly 900 tons of cargo when approximately 10 pirates in a speedboat overpowered its 14 crew members. The vessel, carrying various goods, including cooking oil, second hand clothing and rice, has sailed for Puntland, a semiautonomous state in northeastern Somalia from where pirates often operate. According to a Kenyan Seafarers Assistance Program official, the crew managed to call and report the hijacking. The official stated that the pirates have already made a demand for ransom. (*msnbc.msn.com, 4 April 2007*)

ASIA PACIFIC

Afghanistan, 4 April 2007: A spokesman for the Taliban claimed that the rebels have kidnapped two French aid workers and three Afghan colleagues in Nimroz province in southwest Afghanistan. A French Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that the ministry, as well as the French Embassy in Kabul, is following this matter closely in cooperation with local authorities and the French NGO. (*news.bbc.co.uk, 4 April 2007*)

Afghanistan, 27 March 2007: Afghan health officials confirmed that unidentified gunmen kidnapped an Afghan medical team, including a doctor, three nurses and a driver, in the southern province of Kandahar. The team was kidnapped from Zhari district, about 30 km/19 mi west of Kandahar city. Zhari has seen frequent Taliban activity in recent months. (*khaleejtimes.com, 28 March 2007*)

Afghanistan, 19 March 2007: The Taliban in Afghanistan released an Italian journalist two weeks after taking him hostage and threatening to execute him. The 52-year-old journalist was released to an Italian-run charity hospital in the southern Afghan town of Lashkar Gah. A Taliban military commander said the reporter had been freed after Afghan authorities released five senior Taliban officials, including his own brother. Speaking to reporters, the journalist said he was bound by hand and foot and moved around in up to 15 locations. A local translator who was kidnapped along with the Italian was also set free, but their driver was executed by the kidnapers. (*abc.net.au, 20 March 2007*)

On **27 March**, NATO allies raised concern that Italy's handling of the journalist swap with Taliban members could spark copy-cat incidents, and some called for a pact banning deals with hostage-takers. The United States and Britain had already denounced Italy's decision to release five Taliban last week in exchange for an Italian journalist. The issue was discussed at a closed-door Alliance meeting in Brussels. U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said there had been a consensus not to allow similar deals in the future. NATO's secretary-general said he would lead talks on whether it was possible to agree to a common NATO policy on dealing with such hostage situations. (*reuters, 27 March 2007*)

On **8 April** the Taliban spokesman announced that the group has beheaded the Afghani freelance journalist and translator who was kidnapped along with the Italian journalist and their driver who was beheaded earlier on during their captivity. According to the spokesman, the journalist was killed as the government had refused to meet their demands to release more of their imprisoned men. The spokesman for Afghanistan's intelligence service confirmed

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

the killing and said that the Taliban executed the victim on behalf of al-Qaeda. The spokesman named a former employee of the Italian-run hospital in Helmand's capital of Lashkar Gah as a person involved in the kidnapping (*english.pravda.ru*, 8 April 2007)

China, 4 April 2007: China's General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), the national press regulator, has banned journalists and newspapers from accepting and extorting money in return for favorable news coverage. The GAPP has banned local newspapers and their staff from engaging in extortion by threatening to expose inside stories. The ban also applies to "paid news, forced subscription and forced advertising" in return for complimentary reporting. "Fake" journalism by people who pretend to be reporters for the purpose of extorting money from corrupt officials and businessmen has been a feature of China's media scene for many years. The GAPP also banned government officials from working as part-time reporters, and reaffirmed a requirement that reporters carry a "journalist's certificate" issued by the press regulator. The GAPP is believed to be referring to the case of an employee of the northern Shanxi province office of the Beijing-based newspaper who was beaten to death in January 2007 during his investigation into an unlicensed coal mine in Shanxi by thugs hired by the coal mine owner. Local officials claimed the man did not have official certification so he was not a legitimate journalist. They also suggested he may have been seeking payoffs in return for not reporting problems at the mine. In May 2006 four staff reporters working for local Beijing-based newspapers were arrested for extortion. The four journalists demanded money from institutions or companies "after learning about irregularities there," the official Chinese news agency reported. (*news.bbc.co.uk*, 4 April 2007)

India, 6 April 2007: A 7-year-old boy was kidnapped from his home in Faridabad by his family's tenants. The following day the family received a ransom call in which the kidnappers demanded Rs seven lakh. The kidnappers took the boy to the Faridabad railway station and boarded a train with him. Shortly after the train departed, the kidnappers tried to strangle the boy with a rope, fearing that they would be discovered. The boy managed to break free and jumped from the moving train. The boy fell onto the tracks and an oncoming train ran over him, severing his hand. The boy picked himself up, retrieved his severed hand and ran for help. Locals spotted him near the railway tracks and rushed him to a hospital. Doctors say his condition is stable but he is still in a state of shock. Based on the boy's testimony, police officers arrested his kidnappers. (*ndtv.com*, 11 April 2007)

India, 11 April 2007: According to police officials, a schoolboy was kidnapped for ransom at gunpoint in Darbhanga, Bihar state, as he was walking to school. Soon after news of the abduction spread, angry residents blocked roads to protest against the crime. A week earlier, police recovered the body of an abducted 10-year-old student in Munger district, leading to violent street protests. (*newkerala.com*, 11 April 2007)

India, 7 April 2007: According to police officials in Giridih, Jharkhand State, two bank officials and a medical doctor have been reported missing and are feared to have been kidnapped. The manager of a state bank disappeared while on his way to his office along with another bank official and the medical doctor. Worried bank staff lodged a missing person's report. Local police said that no ransom calls have been made. Jharkhand State has witnessed a recent surge in kidnappings. According to official figures, 630 cases of abduction were reported in 2006. (*eians.com*, 8 April 2007)

India, 31 March 2007: A 17-year-old male, the son of a furniture store owner, was kidnapped near Narol Circle, Narol, around 2130 local time. The kidnappers contacted the family shortly after the abduction and demanded an Rs 15 lakh ransom. No other details were released regarding this case. (*in.news.yahoo.com*, 1 April 2007)

India, 27 March 2007: The bodies of two boys who had been kidnapped by unidentified persons were found in the Senapati district of Manipur. The decomposed bodies of the 10-year-old boys, who were abducted from their homes in December 2006 from the Maram area in the Senapati district, were recovered from an area not too far from the district police headquarters. After the bodies were recovered, hundreds of people marched to the police headquarters

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

demanding justice. Reports said several social organizations had repeatedly appealed to the kidnapers to release the boys. So far, no organization or individual has claimed responsibility for the kidnappings of the two, although contact was made with relatives of the boys for a huge ransom. (*outlookindia.com*, 28 March 2007)

India, 24 March 2007: A 21-year-old woman was arrested for kidnapping children from Hyderabad and selling them in Maharashtra. The arrest led to the rescue of four children in Mumbai, Karimnagar and Medak. The six-week-long hunt for the most-wanted woman came to an end when residents of Saibabanagar in the Borabanda area of Hyderabad caught the woman. A local area leader, who helped capture the suspect, said she was moving in a suspicious manner and was trying to kidnap another child. Police officials had issued sketches of the woman based on eyewitness accounts of different incidents of kidnappings. During the questioning by top city officials, including the city police commissioner, the woman named two brokers in Mumbai as her accomplices in the kidnapping and selling of children. (*khaleejtimes.com*, 26 March 2007)

India, 24 March 2007: Seven people have been arrested for the 21 March kidnapping of the 3-year-old son of a garment manufacturer in east Delhi. According to police reports, the garment manufacturer sent his son along with his aid to buy chocolates. A while later the aid returned to the father stating that he handed over the child to “a friend of the father” who went with him to buy snacks, but the two never returned. An hour later the father received a call demanding a ransom of Rs 70 lakh. Police officials suspect that the father’s employees are behind the abduction, as they knew what went on in the household on a daily basis. Police officials, meanwhile, traced the ransom calls to bus stands in Etawa and Mainpuri and decided to monitor these locations. The officers arrested a suspect while he was making another ransom call. During interrogation the suspect confessed to being one of the abductors. Police officials said the suspect was arrested earlier this year by Uttar Pradesh police in a murder case but managed to escape. He admitted that he knew employees at the garment factory and with their help he and others kidnapped the boy. Police officials later arrested six other people, including several employees for involvement in the kidnapping. (*cities.expressindia.com*, 24 March 2007)

India, 23 March 2007: A 4-year-old boy, the son of an owner of a stationary-photocopying shop in Vadodara, was kidnapped for ransom but was found hours later in a shopping mall after he was abandoned by his abductors. The boy was kidnapped near his home in Gorwa after his father dropped him off following a visit to their neighborhood doctor. The father directed the boy to go inside the house and drove off to purchase medication. After a while, the child’s grandfather noticed that he was missing and a search to locate him began. Soon thereafter, the kidnapers contacted the family and demanded an Rs 20 lakh ransom, threatening to harm the boy if their demands should not be met. The family contacted police officials who immediately dispatched police officers to seal off all the city’s exit roads. According to police, the kidnapers, who apparently attempted to leave the area, abandoned the boy in Vadodara’s central mall, located near the city’s major road intersection. The boy was found by mall employees who discovered him wandering around unaccompanied. According to the boy, he was picked up by a man and a woman, who were in a rickshaw. He added that the woman had a mobile phone with her, and played with him in the mall, before disappearing. (*cities.expressindia.com*, 23 March 2007)

On **29 March** a police investigation revealed that the kidnapping was staged by the child’s own father with the help of friends. The father admitted he was trying to extort money from his father in order to cover debts he had accrued while betting on cricket. Vadodara police officials arrested the father and two other accomplices who confessed to planning and executing the kidnapping. (*cities.expressindia.com*, 30 March 2007)

India, 22 March 2007: A 22-year-old student was kidnapped and killed by two of his friends in Bhubaneswar, New Delhi, after they attempted to extort Rs 5 lakh ransom from his family. The body of the engineering student was recovered

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

by police in an abandoned pump house on the outskirts of the city. The two kidnapers were arrested by plainclothes police officers who ambushed them at a location where they had ordered the family to deliver the ransom. During their interrogation, they admitted to kidnapping and killing the victim. Police sources said the two admitted that they had taken the student to a nearby highway, where they forced him to make the ransom call to his family. They later stabbed him to death. (*hindustantimes.in*, 23 March 2007)

India, 18 March 2007: New Delhi's east district police claimed to have solved the kidnapping-murder case of a 14-year-old boy and arrested two suspects. According to police, the suspects demanded Rs 20 lakh as ransom from the victim's father, after killing him. One of the suspects was renting a room at the home of the victim's family. On 10 March the boy's father received a ransom call for his kidnapped son. The caller demanded Rs 20 lakh in order to release the boy. Police officials traced the calls to a mobile number in Kannauj, in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. On 16 March, the kidnapers ordered the boy's father to drop off the ransom at Sector-60 in Noida. Police officers monitored the drop-off area and arrested the two as they came to pick up the money. The two admitted to kidnapping and murdering the boy, stating that the ransom would be used to repay debts. (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*, 18 March 2007)

Indonesia, 2 April 2006: Three men were arrested on 1 April for holding a student from a Jakarta-based university hostage in a villa in Cipanas, Bogor. West Jakarta's police chief said one of the suspects was shot in the leg after he resisted arrest. On 30 March, the 21-year-old victim had voluntarily set off with one of the suspects for a weekend in Puncak. Shortly thereafter, the victim's family filed a kidnapping report with the West Jakarta Police after they received a phone call from the captors demanding an Rp 150 million (about US\$16,310) ransom. Police officials said the motive behind the kidnapping was purely financial. During the raid, police officers seized two cellular phones along with Rp 200,000 in cash from the perpetrators who had withdrawn Rp 9 million from the victim's bank account. (*thejakartapost.com*, 3 April 2007)

Indonesia, 24 March 2006: Police officers arrested two more suspects in the abduction of a 10-year-old who was kidnapped from his elementary school in Pulogadung, East Jakarta, on 21 March. According to the Pulogadung police commissioner, the boy was released on 23 March after his parents paid a ransom. The kidnapers initially demanded an Rp 300 million ransom, but following negotiations lowered the amount to Rp 80 million. According to police officials, the masterminds of the kidnapping were a couple who had previously been employed by the boy's family as a driver and nanny. (*thejakartapost.com*, 27 March 2007)

Malaysia, 28 March 2007: Police officers arrested a gang of kidnapers in Kuala Lumpur's Cheras suburb, who had abducted a businessman from his Ketumbar Hill Condominium home on 21 March. The kidnapers burst into the 49-year-old businessman's house, attacked his son, stole RM7,000 and forced him into a waiting car. The kidnapers then took him to a safe house in Bukit Mewah where he was handcuffed and held captive. The victim's son contacted police officials after receiving a ransom call from the kidnapers. Guided by the police, he negotiated for seven hours and managed to bring the sum down to RM15,000 and agreed on a drop-off location for the ransom in Cheras town. Police officials tailed the kidnapers back to their hideout from there. A police raid team rescued the businessman and arrested four men in the house and five other people -- four men and a woman -- nearby. Police officers seized various items, including weapons and a forged police authority card. A police official stated that initial investigations indicate the victim knew his kidnapers but declined to elaborate when asked for a motive for the crime. (*thestar.com.my*, 29 March 2007)

Malaysia, 27 March 2007: A Bangladeshi worker contacted South Seberang police officials and stated that his friend had been kidnapped by five other Bangladeshi men at a construction site at Taman Ketitir in Sungai Bakap. He also claimed the kidnapers are demanding an RM3,000 ransom for the victim's release. A police official stated

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

that officers traced the caller's address from the complainant's cellular phone number. Police officials later raided a house in Taman Samagagah, Permatang Pauh near Bukit Mer-tajam. Three Bangladeshis who were in the house managed to flee, leaving the abducted victim, who is in his 30s, behind. (*thestar.com.my*, 4 April 2007)

Malaysia, 21 March 2007: Selangor police officials arrested seven men, six of them Bangladeshis, in a house in Cheras, shortly after the men released a 24-year-old woman they had kidnapped for ransom in Sungai Way on 18 March. The victim went with her family to a local market but decided to stay there as her family returned home. She was kidnapped by several men and forced into a vehicle while walking home alone. The men drove around for an hour before taking her to a house near a local hospital. Shortly after the kidnapping, the abductors called one of their victim's cousins and asked him if any of his relatives were missing. After making several calls, the cousin learned that the young woman was indeed missing. He was later contacted again by the abductors, who demanded RM800, 000 for the woman's release. Following negotiations, the agreed upon ransom was lowered to RM250, 000. Once the ransom was paid and the victim was released, a police team, which was informed by the family about the kidnapping, swooped in on the house and detained the men. (*nst.com.my*, 21 March 2007)

Malaysia, 21 March 2007: A 19-year-old girl from Kg Dusun Muda, located on the outskirts of Kota Baru, managed to escape her kidnapers as she was being taken to the Malaysia-Thailand border. The young woman was kidnapped at around 2100 local time from a market in Buluh Kubu after she was approached by a teenager asking for donations, which somehow caused her to lose consciousness. She regained consciousness some time later in a van driven by two men who were talking in Bahasa Malaysia with a foreign accent. Pretending to still be unconscious she reached for her cell phone and sent a text message to her family and friends. When the two men noticed that she was awake, they sprayed an unknown substance at her, causing her to lose consciousness once again. In the meantime her mother and brother rushed to the district police headquarters, while her father headed toward the border. When the victim woke up again, she noticed she was in a different van and there were two more teenagers in the van, including the one who asked her for a donation. When the four kidnapers stopped and stepped out of the van, and were engaged in conversation, the victim managed to sneak out of the vehicle and hide in nearby bushes. The kidnapers, noticing she was gone, turned the van lights on and searched the area, but due to the darkness they could not find her and sped away. The young woman ran to a nearby village and sought help from villagers, who called the police. (*thestaronline.com*, 21 March 2007)

Nepal, 7 April 2007: Less than a week after the formation of a new government in Nepal, an armed group in the Terai plains abducted a government official and warned of more unrest if the state went ahead with the June election without beginning talks. A faction of former Maoists led by a veteran rebel leader abducted a district education officer from Rajbiraj town in Saptari district. The kidnapers contacted the official's family, asking for a ransom of Nepali Rs5 million and warned that more violence would follow if the eight-party government went ahead with the election on 20 June, Nepal's official media reported. (*gulf-times.com*, 8 April 2007)

Nepal, 24 March 2007: The 14-year-old son of an Indian businessman, owner of a garment store located in a shopping complex in the capital's commercial area, was kidnapped while walking to school in Kathmandu's busy market area. The kidnapping occurred just 24 hours after the government gave a written assurance to the business community that it would be protected from threats, extortion and abduction. Within hours of his abduction, the kidnapers called the teenager's family, demanded a ransom and warned them not to report the matter to police. On 26 March more than 70 commercial associations began a protest that was soon joined by educational, professional and human rights groups. A strike was called hours later after a written assurance from the government and the Maoists provided security to business owners. However, the Marwari business community (comprised of residents who originated from

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

India's Rajasthan state), which had taken part in the protests, said they were not convinced the government would keep its word. The community has been bearing the brunt of abductions by organized crime gangs with more than 40 kidnappings having taken place so far this year. (*eians.com, 24 March 2007*)

On **26 March** the kidnapped Indian teen was released unharmed after his family and school successfully negotiated with his abductors. The ninth-grade student was left by his kidnapers near the city's famous pilgrim temple, after his family paid a ransom. To show their support for the family, the school sent a teacher to stay with the family and handle phone calls. Following negotiations, the family was able to lower the initially demanded NRS 4 million and convince the kidnapers to take NRS 500,000 and free the boy. (*eians.com, 26 March 2007*)

Nepal, 16 March 2007: A businessman and son of a former chief engineer in the Nepalese government road construction department, belonging to the Marwari community (the residents of which originated from India's Rajasthan state), was kidnapped from his car near his residence in Kathmandu. The kidnapers smashed the victim's vehicle windows and forced their way into the car. The man was then forced to drive to a busy hospital in another area of the city where he was transferred to another vehicle and his car was abandoned. The following day the kidnapers called his family demanding a ransom payment and warning them not to go to the police. Members of the Marwari community said there were reports of two more kidnapping attempts in the capital last week. But in both cases, the victims managed to escape. After a couple of initial reports to police, victims' families now prefer to quietly negotiate with the abductors, pay the ransom and get their kin released unharmed. Taking advantage of their preference for silence, the gangs have been targeting the community. Members of the community claim that since the beginning of the year at least 35 people have been kidnapped. (*eians.com, 19 March 2007*)

New Zealand, 7 April 2007: Police officials are investigating the kidnapping of an Auckland man who was held against his will and robbed in a three-hour ordeal. The man claimed he was kidnapped shortly after leaving an inner-city club at around 0530 local time and driven around Auckland for three hours. At least four men took his money and bank cards before dumping him at a gas station. According to police detectives, the victim entered his abductors' car after meeting them at a bar. The men then robbed him and let him go. (*nzherald.co.nz, 8 April 2007*)

Pakistan, 12 April 2007: Islamabad police officers recovered two kidnapped boys and handed them over to their parents. A spokesman for the police said that the two schoolboys were kidnapped while on their way to their school in Rawalpindi. The kidnapers somehow made the boys unconscious; however, while traveling on Kashmir Highway in the city, the boys regained consciousness and started shouting for help when they saw a traffic police officer. On hearing them, the police officer signaled the vehicle to stop but the driver ignored his signals. During the pursuit, the kidnapers threw the children from the vehicle and managed to escape from the scene. (*dawn.com, 13 April 2007*)

Pakistan, 7 April 2007: Four unidentified men allegedly abducted a local industrialist and two foreigners in Sheikhpura, but released the two unidentified foreigners shortly after in Saddar Muridke. According to local reports the industrialist, along with his two foreign guests, were driving to a factory near Muridke when the armed men intercepted their vehicle. Two of the kidnapers boarded the vehicle and ordered the driver to head toward Kot Pindi Das village where they released the foreign guests, abandoned the vehicle and forced the victim into their car and fled. Police officials believe the man was kidnapped for ransom although his kidnapers have yet to contact his family. (*dawn.com, 8 April 2007*)

Pakistan, 31 March 2007: The Police and Citizen-Police Liaison Committee arrested four men for the kidnapping of a local businessman for ransom. The garment manufacturer and exporter, a resident of Clifton, was kidnapped along with his driver from outside his factory in Korangi on 20 March. The kidnapers released him after the victim handed them more than Rs40, 000 in ransom and pledged to pay Rs5 million a few days later. Though the kidnapers

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

threatened dire consequences if he involved police in the matter, the victim's family contacted the police anyway. The police guided the victim to negotiate the ransom to Rs100, 000 and followed his driver, whom they suspected of working with the kidnapers, to Zainab Market where the kidnapers ordered him to deliver the money. The driver was arrested shortly after he returned to his home without delivering the ransom. During his interrogation, the driver gave the officers the names of his accomplices in the kidnapping, after which time they were arrested, although one is still at large. (*dawn.com, 1 April 2007*)

Pakistan, 21 March 2007: A building contractor from Jauharabad, who was kidnapped on 19 March along with his driver and a worker and held for Rs3 million in ransom; has still not been heard from. The three were kidnapped by three armed men who intercepted their pick-up truck while they were returning to Musakhel. The armed men robbed the three of their valuables and then released the driver and the other employee with a message that the contractor would be released only after ransom was paid. The victim's father, a prominent figure in the area, said the kidnapers have not yet contacted them again. A police spokesman stated that police were raiding hideouts of criminals, hoping to reveal their identities and arrest them soon. (*dawn.com, 21 March 2007*)

Pakistan, 16 March 2007: Anti-Violence and Crime Cell police officers arrested two kidnapers as they arrived to collect the ransom they demanded for the release of their victim whom they kidnapped on 11 March. The two were arrested in a hospital in east Karachi where the ransom was to be delivered. During investigations the two revealed that they have known the victim since their school days. They contacted him and lured him to a meeting and then kidnapped him and took him to a home at Sector 11-C North where they choked him to death then disposed of his body in a dump in North Karachi. They made several ransom calls to his family and after agreeing on the ransom amount, went to collect it, at which time they were arrested. (*nation.com.pk, 16 March 2007*)

Philippines, 3 April 2007: A group of approximately 60 New People's Army (NPA) rebels attacked a gold mine operated by a subsidiary of a Canadian-based mining company. The attack occurred in Barangay village, Bariis, Aroroy town, which is located approximately 220 mi/350 km southeast of Manila. The rebels disarmed the mine's guards and set fire to five buildings and several pieces of mining equipment. Although an investigation into the attack continues, it should be noted that NPA rebels frequently attack the assets of companies that refuse to pay them protection or "revolutionary tax." (*newsinfo.inquirer.net, 3 April 2007*)

Philippines, 22 March 2007: A famous local actress and former beauty queen said she received text messages demanding ransom in exchange for her missing sister, whom the family suspects may have been kidnapped. The actress quoted one of the messages as saying: "raise P3 million or else I will kill your sister." The actress stated that she began to receive messages after television news reports flashed her contact number for informants who could provide information regarding her missing sister. The family has sought the help of the Police Anti Crime Emergency Response (PACER) unit to locate their missing daughter, whom they believe was kidnapped on 14 March in Las Pinas City. The family said their daughter's disappearance might have something to do with a dismissed complaint she filed against her estranged husband. (*abs-cbnnews.com, 22 March 2007*)

Taiwan, 30 March 2007: Six suspects have been arrested in connection with the kidnapping of a 10-year-old girl who was kidnapped while her father, a pig farmer, was taking her and her brother to school on a motorbike on the morning of 20 March in Tainan County, Southern Taiwan. Three people in a car stopped the family while they were riding on the motorcycle and one of the suspects held Huang at gunpoint while the other two grabbed the girl and put her in the car. The kidnapers made several calls that night, initially asking for a ransom of NT\$10 million, but following negotiations agreed to accept NT\$500,000. The 34-year-old prime suspect, who lives in the same township as the victim, decided to kidnap the girl for ransom after he learned that her family had just bought a car for some NT\$3 million, police officials said. The police investigation showed that the suspect, a construction worker and a divorced

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

father of two, colluded with a friend and four others to kidnap the child. The six suspects, who have no previous criminal records, got cold feet after they kidnapped the child and released her without holding out for a ransom, police said. The location where the child was initially held was not more than a 10-minute drive from the site where she was kidnapped and she had been able to see enough through her blindfold to know where the hiding place was. (*taiwanheadlines.gov.tw*, 30 March 2007)

Thailand, 12 April 2007: Thai police officers rescued a U.S. citizen who had been kidnapped and held for ransom for five days by a gang that included at least three policemen. The kidnapping ended when a 30-man SWAT team stormed a townhouse in Bangkok's Lard Prao district and rescued the 35-year-old victim. The kidnapers, claiming to be police, barged into the victim's home, beat him, forced him to hand over \$US400,000 and then took him away in handcuffs. They left a demand with his girlfriend for a \$US800,000 ransom. The victim's girlfriend went to police officials, and after checking tapes from a closed-circuit security video camera at their condominium, police officials were able to identify the three policemen who were involved in the kidnapping. The victim was held in two different budget hotels before being moved to the house from where he was eventually rescued. The victim said he had been deprived of food and water. He told police he had been involved in the oil and gas business in Texas, and had traveled back and forth to Thailand where he lives in a condominium with his Thai girlfriend. (*smh.com.au*, 14 April 2007)

Thailand, 26 March 2007: Two Thai police officers have been released three days after being taken hostage by a militia from neighboring Burma in an incident that prompted Thailand to close its border checkpoints in protest. The two were kidnapped on 23 March by members of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) from their post in Kanchanaburi province, located approximately 81 mi/130 km northwest of Bangkok. The kidnapping took place two days after a Thai soldier was killed on 21 March in a skirmish with forces in the northern Thai province of Mae Hong Son. Police officers said the kidnapping was launched apparently because the DKBA, which is allied with Burma's ruling junta, believed Thailand supported a rival Christian faction of ethnic Karen fighters. The DKBA is a small group estimated to have some 150 Buddhist fighters, that split away from the mainly Christian Karen National Union (KNU), which fights the Burmese junta. (*radioaustralia.net.au*, 26 Mar 2007)

South Korea, 15 March 2007: The body of a second-grade elementary student, who was kidnapped on 11 March, was found in a reservoir in Incheon. Police arrested a 29-year-old tow truck driver, the father of an 11-month-old girl, as a suspect in the kidnapping. Police officials say he abducted the child in order to obtain a hefty ransom from the child's family, which resides in Songdo City. According to police, the suspect approached the 8-year-old and asked for directions. He abducted the boy and got from him the telephone numbers of his parents, who are teachers in a high school and an elementary school. The suspect tied the child's wrists and ankles and put masking tape over his mouth and stashed him behind the passenger seat of his tow truck. The boy died about 10 hours later. The kidnapper called the victim's parents 16 times from a public telephone and a stolen cell phone and demanded a ransom of W130 million (about US\$139,000), believing that their address in Songdo City, currently being developed as an international city, was an indication of wealth. The kidnapper recorded the child's voice on a cell phone and played it twice to his parents. According to police, the suspect called the child's parents nine times after the victim's death and acted as if the child was still alive. After he was captured the suspect told police he kidnapped the child to pay off a loan of W100 million and an additional debt of W30 million that he had accrued through excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages. (*english.chosun.com*, 16 March 2007)

Sri Lanka, 16 March 2007: Traders in Colombo, mostly from the minority Tamil community, staged a protest urging police officers to stop their continuous threats of extortion and kidnapping for ransom of businessmen in the city. The traders, who planned a protest march through downtown Colombo, were blocked by police officers. International human rights groups have urged the government to stop the continued abductions and disappearances of civilians,

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

mainly from the Tamil community. The government last year appointed a special presidential probe panel to investigate 15 cases of kidnapping in the capital. (*xinhuanet.com, 17 March 2007*)

EUROPE

Cyprus, 2 April 2007: Local police officers are searching for two men, believed to be Iraqis, who broke into a Syrian man's home in Paphos and kidnapped his 19-year-old son. The two forced their way into the 52-year-old Syrian's home on the Navargos Estate in Paphos and attacked his three sons, beating two of them and finally kidnapping the youngest. One of the sons was slightly injured during the attack. The father was not home during the attack. The family is seeking asylum in Cyprus, except for their 25-year-old son, who turned out to be an illegal resident on the island. The Paphos head of police said that after examining the information they had collected, the police were looking for two men for whom arrest warrants have been issued, adding that there were indications of a financial dispute between the men, but the Syrians' testimonies have not been helpful. Reports say the kidnapers may have taken the 19-year-old abductee to the occupied north, from where they are trying to extract a ransom for his release. (*cyprus-mail.com, 4 April 2007*)

Greece, 19 March 2007: Police officers conducted coordinated raids on homes in Patras, Athens and Loutraki, located east of Athens, arresting 16 people who were allegedly involved in protection rings that had blackmailed businessmen in Patras for at least the last decade. Police officials are still searching for 17 other suspects, including an army lieutenant who allegedly trained some of the suspects to use firearms. The gangs allegedly forced owners of more than 30 bars and nightclubs to pay them protection money. Police said the gangs threw tear gas into the establishments of three businessmen who refused to pay. Officers said that they were led to the arrests after one of the alleged gang members turned himself in because he had begun to fear for his life. (*ekathimerini.com, 19 March 2007*)

Italy, 1 April 2007: Kidnappers of a 24-year-old Italian woman released her approximately 26 hours after seizing her. The abduction took place at approximately 2030 local time on 31 March 2007, on Fornari Street in a residential area of the town of Borgomanero. The victim is the daughter of a businessman from Miasino, located on Lago-d'Orta, who is involved primarily in the construction industry. Her vehicle was found abandoned with the window on the driver's side broken, the keys on the dashboard and the victim's mobile phone and jacket on the seat. In a note sent to the family, the kidnappers reportedly demanded a ransom of 4 million euros, although police have not confirmed this. The family also reportedly received two calls from the kidnappers within the first 24 hours. The woman confirmed after she was released that her kidnappers had told her that they were trying to obtain money from her father. She stated that she was treated well while in captivity. (*italianosdargentina.com.ar, 2 April 2007*)

On **5 April**, police officials stated that three people who were in police custody confessed to conducting the kidnapping. As required by Italy's anti-kidnapping laws, authorities blocked the family's assets to prevent a ransom from being paid. (*rainews24.it, 5 April 2007*)

Slovakia, 16 March 2007: According to a Slovak police spokesman, police officers have detained 10 members of a group known as the "Sykora gang," that allegedly forced owners of Bratislava restaurants into paying them "protection money." The gang operated throughout Bratislava, extorting 7,000-10,000 crowns (about US\$300-US\$400) a month from every pub owner in the city. (*ctk.cz, 16 March 2007*)

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

United Kingdom, 24 March 2007: A lorry driver was kidnapped by three robbers who drove off with his cargo of electronic utility tools. The men burst into the cab by smashing a window of the lorry, which was parked in a rest area between Spaldwick and Catworth, Cambridgeshire. The driver was ordered to lie face down in the cab before being forced into the trunk of a car. He was later set free in Preston, Lancashire, after riding in the trunk for hours. The burned lorry was later found in Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire. According to a Cambridgeshire police official, it was the second lorry to be hijacked from off the highway in 10 days. The other lorry driver was also kidnapped after parking in a rest area near Huntingdon on 14 March. He was released in Merseyside after the robbers had unloaded a container of 776 televisions intended for caravans. (*ews.bbc.co.uk, 24 March 2007*)

MIDDLE EAST

Iraq, 3 April 2007: Iraq's foreign minister confirmed that an Iranian diplomat kidnapped in Baghdad two months ago has been released. Gunmen in Iraqi army uniforms seized the second secretary at the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad on 4 February. Iranian authorities blamed the U.S. military, which denied any involvement. The Iraqi foreign minister stated that the negotiations were very difficult, as all sides denied holding him, making the diplomat the only person who actually knows who was holding him. (*news.scotsman.com, 3 April 2007*)

Palestinian Authority, 15 April 2007: A previously unknown Palestinian group calling itself "The brigades of Tawheed and Jihad" sent a statement to news organizations claiming to have killed the British journalist kidnapped over a month ago by gunmen in Gaza City, to support demands for the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. In a statement sent to news organizations, "The brigades of Tawheed and Jihad" said it killed the 42-year-old BBC Gaza correspondent to support demands for the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. However, the BBC and the Palestinian government both said there was no evidence to back up the claim. The group claiming to have killed him is unknown in Gaza, but the name has been used elsewhere in the Middle East by organizations linked to al-Qaeda. Both the British media outlet that employs the journalist and the Palestinian Authority said there is no information to confirm the claim. (*msnbc.msn.com, 15 April 2007*)

On **9 April** the chief of the British media outlet Middle East Bureau denied reports that a missing British correspondent may have staged his own kidnapping in the Gaza Strip, or that the company was considering terminating him. The development came shortly after several Arabic papers reported that Palestinian security forces were investigating the possibility that the man staged his own abduction, waited 15 minutes for his "captors" to pick him up, and has been held willingly in an undisclosed location since 12 March. (*jpost.com, 9 Apr 2007*)

Palestinian Authority, 7 April 2007: A 46-year-old Israeli Arab visiting his wife and children in the Gaza Strip was kidnapped by four armed men outside the family house, according to family relatives. The victim is a resident of the Israeli port city of Jaffa, near Tel Aviv, but his wife, a native of Gaza, does not have permission to live in Israel and still resides in Gaza with their children. No one has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, and there was no immediate comment from police officials. (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 8 April 2007*)

On **8 April**, the Israeli Arab who was kidnapped a day earlier in Gaza was released unharmed. No group has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and the reason behind it remains unclear. (*jpost.com, 10 April 2007*)

Palestinian Authority, 16 March 2007: Three masked Palestinian gunmen fired on a vehicle carrying the chief of a major international aid organization in Gaza and tried to kidnap him. According to the official, he was traveling along with a driver and a security official in an armored vehicle from the Erez border post in a convoy to Gaza City when the

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

gunmen jumped out of a white vehicle and opened fire. The gunmen tried to force open the armored vehicle's door, but the driver extracted himself from the situation and sped away as the gunmen continued firing. The vehicle, which was hit by 11 bullets, was marked with the organization's insignia and a flag. There has been no claim of responsibility as yet. (*gulfnews.com, 17 March 2007*)

Saudi Arabia, 24 March 2007: Saudi police officials arrested two women suspected to be part of an all-female gang that kidnapped two young girls after sedating them. One of the abducted girls, a 9-year-old, stated that her kidnappers sprayed her face with a substance that left her unconscious. They tied her hands and legs and taped her mouth to muffle her screams. The girl was taken to an old house where she saw another girl who was also kidnapped. The kidnappers then carried the girls on their backs, moving them to another location, during which time the tape covering the mouth of one of the girls fell off and she began screaming for help. Hearing the girl's screams, people hurried to her aid. The kidnappers then abandoned the girls and ran away. One of the girls had seen her kidnappers begging in the neighborhood. Her uncle added that he saw a jeep come every morning to drop beggars off at major intersections. Police officers arrested two women and charged them with kidnapping after the 9-year-old girl identified one of them. The motive behind the kidnapping is still under investigation. (*arabnews.com, 26 March 2007*)

NORTH AMERICA

Canada, 17 March 2007: A 24-year-old Port Hardy man, whose name police are not releasing, is unharmed after being kidnapped in the Comox Valley on 14 March. According to a Courtenay Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) press release, "The hostage's mother received a call from him on his cell phone advising he was being held against his will, in a vehicle, and required a sum of money to secure his release or he would be killed." The man called his mother again, advising her that he was now being held at an unknown location and reiterated the demand for cash. The man's mother contacted the Port Hardy RCMP and they forwarded the call to the Comox Valley detachment, where the Island District General Investigation Section launched an investigation. As a result of this investigation, an undisclosed ransom was paid for the hostage and he was released unharmed. A Port Hardy man was arrested when the money was picked up near Campbell River on 15 March. Police officials also arrested and charged two Comox Valley residents in connection with the abduction. (*northislandgazette.com, 22 March 2007*)

United States, 10 April 2007: Two out of three suspects in the kidnapping of a Redwood City, California, resident, who is the owner of a chain of small markets, were arrested following a police pursuit. On 8 April police officials received a call from the wife of the 45-year-old victim who was kidnapped for an undisclosed ransom. Arrangements were made to drop money at a certain location, but the money was never picked up, and the kidnappers released the victim unharmed several hours later. However, the kidnappers later contacted the victim and made a second demand for money, threatening to hurt his family if the money was not paid. The victim then worked with police officials on a second money drop. This time the kidnappers picked up the money, and were followed by police detectives to Fremont. The detectives contacted Fremont police officials, who assisted with a traffic stop and a subsequent search of the area after two of the suspects tried to flee. One of the suspects was arrested shortly after while the other managed to escape. The third suspect was arrested in the vehicle before he could get out. According to the Redwood City police captain, at least one of the three suspects is an acquaintance of the victim. (*redwoodcitydailynews.com, 12 April 2007*)

United States, 22 March 2007: A 57-year-old woman, who was kidnapped for ransom from her home in the Riverside, California, neighborhood of Canyon Crest, was recovered several hours after her abduction and the suspected kidnapper was arrested. According to officials from the Riverside police department, the woman was kidnapped on

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

21 March from her home and about two hours later, her husband received a note demanding money for her return. Several hours after the kidnapping a Lake Hills resident called police and reported a suspicious white van parked near a water tower on Lake Pointe Drive. Riverside County sheriff's deputies responded to the call and discovered the kidnap victim in the van and arrested a 47-year-old man from Victorville. (*signonsandiego.com*, 22 March 2007)

On **27 March** it was reported that the kidnapper may have plotted to kidnap 15 other people for ransom, using a specially-constructed soundproof chamber fitted into a van. According to a police spokesman, the coffin-like wooden box was fitted with a twin-size mattress and a fan for ventilation while the walls of the box were padded with foam. Police also seized a stun gun and paperwork indicating the kidnapper had planned the woman's abduction as early as November 2006 and had obtained information on 15 other couples. According to the police spokesman, the list was composed of business people of varied wealth levels, as the kidnapper felt they would be able to come up with the ransom amounts he was seeking. (*contracostatimes.com*, 27 March 2007)

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina, 5 April 2007: Police officers in Buenos Aires arrested three people while they were attempting to cash-in a ransom they requested for the release of a 12-year-old boy, who had been missing since 3 April. After the arrests, police officers found the child inside the trunk of a vehicle. According to reports, the boy was kidnapped outside a private school located in the district of Escobar and the criminals later demanded a 5,000-pesos ransom for his release. Residents of the area stated that the family of the boy owns three trucks, and that this may have caught the attention of the kidnapers. (*infobae.com*, 5 April 2007)

Argentina, 18 March 2007: A soccer referee was kidnapped in front of his house in Esteban Echeverría and hours later, following negotiations with his family, was released unharmed in an establishment of the Buenos Aires locality of San Francisco Solano, in the department of Quilmes. Police officials identified the victim as a well-known referee who attended international games on behalf of the Union of Referees of the Argentine Republic. A police official confirmed to reporters that the two kidnapers communicated with his relatives, initially demanding a 2,000-pesos ransom, which was later reduced. The victim was released unharmed two hours after his abduction in San Francisco Solano after being robbed of 200 pesos. (*lavoz.com.ar*, 27 March 2007)

Argentina, 20 March 2007: Police officers found the body of a 55-year-old businessman who was reported missing on 16 March, and for whose release criminals demanded 180,000 pesos. The body was found in a rural area of Guatrache, in La Pampa. The man disappeared after visiting a bank in the town of Doblas. After the first ransom call, the criminals contacted the victim's wife twice, and the businessman was allowed to ask her to comply with the criminals' demands. The man was found shot in the head, and authorities are investigating whether his murder is related to a 1994 cattle robbery. (*clarin.com*, 21 March 2007)

Argentina, 15 March 2007: A 10-year-old boy was kidnapped and released hours later in Cordoba. According to reports, the boy was abducted by three men outside of his school, located in the residential district of Urca. An hour after the abduction, the criminals contacted the boy's family and demanded a ransom in US\$. The family paid the ransom, and the boy was released unharmed shortly thereafter. Another kidnapping for ransom incident occurred on 14 March, when criminals abducted a man who specializes in buying and selling auto parts. The victim was released after paying a 2,000-euros ransom. (*clarin.com*, 16 March 2007)

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

Argentina, 14 March 2007: Four armed men intercepted a man who was driving in Buenos Aires and kidnapped him for ransom. According to police reports, the criminals were demanding a 20,000 pesos ransom for his release, which had to be paid at a gas station located in the town of Pilar (Buenos Aires province). One of the criminals was arrested while trying to cash in the ransom, while a second suspect was arrested at the intersection of Route 202 and Panamericana Highway. The victim was released unharmed. (*infobae.com, 15 March 2007*)

Brazil, 3 April 2007: Three army sergeants have been arrested in Macapa, after being accused of the kidnapping for ransom of the daughter of a businessman. The woman was held inside a house in a military villa in Macapa and released on 1 April. The victim's sister, who was negotiating the ransom, was able to recognize the voice of one of the officers who was a family friend, and contacted the police. No further details are available. (*oglogo.globo.com, 3 April 2007*)

Brazil, 2 April 2007: Authorities in Rio de Janeiro were able to rescue a housewife, who was kidnapped while going to pick up her children from school. The woman was abducted while driving her vehicle and taken to a house located in the area known as Baixada Fluminense. The victim was rescued after military police officers stopped one of the criminals while he was attempting to withdraw money from an ATM with the victim's bankcards. (*estadao.com.br, 3 April 2007*)

Brazil, 2 April 2007: Police officers in Sao Bernardo (Sao Paulo) arrested four people while they were trying to withdraw 70,000 reais from a bank account. The suspects are part of a kidnapping gang that primarily operated in Ribeirao Preto, and the cash they were about to withdraw was product of a ransom paid for the release of a kidnapped businessman. Authorities identified the gang after monitoring the bank account of a nurse, with an average reported activity of 200,000 reais per month. According to investigations, once the gang received a ransom, they deposited the cash in an account, and then transferred it to the nurse's account after a period of approximately two months. (*dgabc.com.br, 3 April 2007*)

Brazil, 28 March 2007: A 12-year-old boy was released unharmed approximately 30 hours after being abducted, and following the payment of a ransom. The incident took place in the greater Recife area. During his captivity, the child remained locked inside a car. Authorities arrested four people, including one employee of the boy's family. (*oglobo.com.br, 30 March 2007*)

Brazil, 25 March 2007: Two Argentinean tourists were intercepted in Rio de Janeiro's Ipanema district while traveling in a taxi to Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport (SBGL/GIG). According to police reports, the taxi driver was stopped at a traffic light on Avenida Vieira Souto, when three armed men forced him to move to the backseat. The criminals then drove the tourists and the driver through the city and released them approximately 30 minutes later, after robbing them of their belongings. (*oglobo.globo.com, 26 March 2007*)

Brazil, 24 March 2007: A man was killed after becoming a victim of an express kidnapping in Campinas. According to police reports, the victim went to the downtown area to pick up two friends when three armed criminals subdued the three and took them to the Sao Domingos neighborhood. The men were left with one of the criminals while the rest went to withdraw money from ATMs. One of the kidnapped men made a sudden move, scaring the criminal, who shot him dead. The man then shot at the other two victims but missed and they escaped. (*oglobo.com.br, 26 March 2007*)

Brazil, 22 March 2007: A university student became a victim of kidnapers in Sao Paulo during the night. Police reports indicate that the criminals first intended to force him to withdraw money from ATMs, but when they were unable to do so they contacted the victim's family and demanded a 50,000 reais ransom. The man was later stuffed into his

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

vehicle's trunk and abandoned near Caieiras. He managed to get out of the trunk and requested the assistance of the highway police. The two kidnappers reportedly took the victim's wallet, which contained 450 reais. Reports did not specify if the ransom was paid. (*oglobo.com.br*, 23 March 2007)

Brazil, 20 March 2007: Police officers raided a house in Sao Bernardo dos Campos, Sao Paulo, and rescued a woman who had been kidnapped on 12 March. The victim was a businesswoman who worked with her father at a car dealership located near Sao Caetano. The woman was kidnapped from this business. According to police reports, officials were not aware that a woman was being held hostage in the house, and they were actually investigating a gang that specializes in purchasing vehicles with counterfeit documents. (*dgabc.com.br*, 21 March 2007)

Brazil, 17 March 2007: Three truck drivers who were kidnapped in the state of Rio Grande do Sul were released unharmed on 19 March. According to local sources, two of the men were the drivers of cargo trucks transporting dairy products, while the third was the assistant of one driver. Authorities believe that the hijackings were planned from inside a local jail. (*oglobo.com.br*, 19 March 2007)

Bolivia, 2 April 2007: A former senator and now businessman from Santa Cruz was kidnapped along with a friend immediately after leaving a restaurant. Police sources indicate that the kidnappers were four men, possibly Argentinean nationals. The criminals first demanded a US\$15,000 ransom, but released the victims three hours later, taking only the victims' wallets and mobile phones. Authorities suspect that the criminals changed their intentions after police officers set up checkpoints on the roads leading into and out of Santa Cruz. (*eldeber.com.bo*, 4 April 2007)

Chile, 13 March 2007: Authorities in Santiago are investigating an express kidnapping of a woman and her 10-month-old daughter. The two were kidnapped from Plaza Victoria while strolling with the woman's husband. According to reports, the two were forced into a taxi by several men. Shortly thereafter, the man received a call from the kidnappers who demanded a 450,000-pesos ransom. The man agreed to pay the ransom and drove to the place the criminals had designated, but with a police escort. The officers were then able to apprehend the suspects, who confessed but claimed that the man owed them money. (*elmercurio.com*, 15 March 2007)

Colombia, 12 April 2007: The Colombian Senate approved legislation that will allow a designation of kidnapping for ransom for cases in which the victims are abducted for brief periods, which is known as express kidnapping. The proposed law establishes that those found guilty of kidnapping for ransom will have to pay a fine equivalent to between 2,600 and 6,000 of the average monthly minimum salary for Colombians, and spend up to 40 years in prison. Senators based their decision on the fact that many judges have designated express kidnappings as robberies, while some saw them as kidnapping with extortion purposes. (*Caracol.com.co*, 12 April 2007)

Colombia, 11 April 2007: According to official statistics, Colombian police officials received 1,652 reports of extortion in 2006, 167 less than in 2005. The reports showed that while in most of the cases the extortionists demanded cash; in at least 10 percent of the incidents they demanded items such as boots, pre-paid phone cards, clothing, food and medicine to combat tropical diseases. Authorities believe that at least 50 percent of the extortionists are common criminals, who many times attempt to pass as leftist rebels or paramilitary fighters. Statistics for the period between 1 January and 22 March 2007 accounted for 130 reported extortions. (*eltiempo.com*, 11 April 2007)

Colombia, 8 April 2007: Five people were abducted from an illegal checkpoint set up by rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) Marxist rebel group. The incident occurred between the municipalities of Carepa and Chigorodo, on the road leading to Uraba. The victims were reportedly taken to Abibe Sierra. (*caracol.com.co*, 9 April 2007)

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

Colombia, 5 April 2007: Anti-kidnapping police officers in Cali saved a U.S. citizen and his Colombian wife from becoming the victims of express kidnapers. According to police reports, the couple hailed a taxi, and shortly after departing, two men boarded and demanded that they hand over their belongings. Police officers who witnessed the incident demanded that the taxi stop, but the criminals began shooting at them. Police officers were able to arrest the two criminals and the taxi driver on Simon Bolivar Highway. (*elpais.com.co, 5 April 2007*)

Colombia, 1 April 2007: Police officers in the department of Antioquia confirmed they had rescued a 56-year-old coffee grower, whom members of the 34th front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had kidnapped on 28 March in Concordia. The rebels were requesting a large ransom for the victim's release. (*caracol.com.co, 2 April 2007*)

Colombia, 30 March 2007: A cattle rancher was released in a remote area of El Choco, approximately 26 months after his abduction. Members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group are responsible for kidnapping the man, who is a former candidate for councilman. Further details about the release were not disclosed. (*elpais.com.co, 30 March 2007*)

Colombia, 17 March 2007: The brother of the governor of Caqueta was released unharmed more than a year after being abducted. The 39-year-old businessman was kidnapped on 28 January 2006 along with his driver, who was also released early this year. The Teofilo Forero Column of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was responsible for the abductions. (*caracol.com.co, 19 March 2007*)

Colombia, 13 March 2007: Authorities confirmed that alleged rebels of the 37th front of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) kidnapped 18 employees of a Colombia-based mining company. The abduction took place in the Dagua municipality of the Chocó department. The rebels stated that they intend to negotiate a ransom with the company for which the nine geologists and their nine assistants work. This is the first abduction to be reported in the area. (*caracol.com.co, 14 March 2007*)

On **28 March**, FARC rebels released four of nine geologists who were kidnapped two weeks ago while prospecting for gold in the western jungle province of Choco, according to an international humanitarian organization official. The organization spokesman stated that there is no information regarding the other five hostages. (*alertnet.org, 29 March 2007*)

Honduras, 26 March 2007: Reports indicate that the problem of kidnapping for ransom in Honduras -- which seemed to have been brought under control in the period 2003-2005 -- re-emerged in 2006 and continues on an upward trend. At least 23 kidnappings for ransom have been reported in the country since the beginning of 2006. Of these, 11 occurred during 2006 and 12 during the first three months of 2007, with nine of those occurring in March alone -- indicating a sharp upward trend. Most incidents this year are concentrated in the northwestern part of the country, in the departments of Cortés, Santa Bárbara and Copán, although the capital city of Tegucigalpa has also been affected. Not only has the number of kidnappings increased, but criminals have also widened the range of their victims. Wealthy local businesspersons remain favorite targets because they can command the highest ransoms, but criminals now also target middle-class Hondurans, from whom they demand smaller ransoms. (*aprensa.hn, 26 March 2007*)

Honduras, 24 March 2007: Two sons of a former politician and businessman, who owns several bakeries and cane plantations, were kidnapped by four armed men who intercepted the vehicle in which they were riding -- along with the pregnant wife of one of the sons -- on the outskirts of El Progreso. The woman was later released. A US\$600,000

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

ransom has been demanded for the safe release of the two. However, their father told reporters he has no intention of paying ransom. Another son of the businessman was abducted about 10 years ago and released after a ransom was paid. (*elheraldo.hn*, 24 Mar 2007)

On **5 April** the two men were released around Sion Mountain, located near Tela. After walking for several hours to a nearby community, where someone let them borrow a cell phone to call their family. They were then picked up by authorities and taken to San Pedro Sula. According to the men, they were treated well by the kidnapers, who kept them blindfolded the entire time. Although negotiations took place no ransom was paid. (*laprensa.hn*, 6 April 2007)

Honduras, 19 March 2007: At approximately 0800 local time the vice-president of the company Honduras Chemical (Honduchem) & American Petroleuma was released in the el Virrey area, located in Santa Barbara. Local reports state that the family paid a large ransom for his release. The 22-year-old man was kidnapped around noon local time on 1 March in the town of San Vicente de Paul, located in the Department of Cortez. The victim was trying to enter Honduchem, a family owned business, at the time of his abduction. (*tiempo.hn*, 20 March 2007)

Honduras, 15 March 2007: The wife of a well-known veterinarian was rescued during a police raid one day after being abducted in Pita Arriba village, located in Cofradia, Cotes department. Authorities arrested 11 people -- including one minor -- in connection with the case. During the raid, police officers confiscated a revolver and cell phones. (*laprensa.hn*, 15 March 2007)

On **26 March** reports in the local media revealed that there is evidence indicating that the recent kidnapping of the wife of a well-known Honduran doctor on 15 March 2007 in Honduras was staged from prisons. Furthermore, it was found that there are several organized kidnapping gangs in prison whose leaders contract outside people to work for them. The gang leaders manage to direct the kidnappings by sending their orders via cell phones or by sending messages with their family members, who often work in collusion with criminals. They also manage to select their own victims, as they will look at social magazines or the social section of newspapers and then choose those who appear most often. In addition, it was found that after all gang members who participated in a kidnapping receive their share of the ransom, the remainder is used to hire an attorney to get the leaders out of prison. It was also found that most people who have recently been kidnapped do not necessarily belong to wealthy families, and therefore, ransoms have been as low as US\$10,000-\$20,000.

Reports indicate that up to this point in 2007 approximately 11 kidnappings have been reported. In 2006, 11 were reported between January and August. However, authorities believe the numbers are likely higher for this year as many incidents go unreported. (*aprensa.hn*, 26 March 2007)

Mexico, 11 April 2007: According to an official with Mexico's federal police force, known as AFI, a team of federal officers helped reduce ransom payoffs to only about 5 percent of the nearly US\$104 million demanded by kidnapers in the cases they worked on last year. The specially-trained agents are dispatched to set up command posts in private homes, where they do everything from coaching families on ransom negotiations to conducting rescue operations. From 2001 to present, federal agents rescued 879 people and arrested 657 kidnapers. The official stated that fewer than 2 percent of the victims — in cases managed by federal agents — end up being murdered, but declined to give specific numbers of those killed. Mexico is wrestling with a reputation as the kidnapping capital of Latin America, and crime is so common that people can call the federal teams on a toll-free number. According to a psychology professor of a Texas-based university who grew up in Mexico City and recently made a documentary film on kidnapping, the AFI is not perfect but is gaining public respect. The AFI is Mexico's rough equivalent of the FBI, in that its agents are

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

college graduates, are subjected to a battery of tests before being hired, and are paid better than most Mexican law enforcement officers. (*chron.com*, 11 April 2007)

Mexico, 4 April 2007: Mexico City police officers arrested a gang of seven kidnapers, belonging to a larger gang headed by a person known as the "the Software," who was arrested in October 2006 along with 10 other gang members who participated in at least 11 kidnappings during 2006. During the raid on the gang's safe house in Camino Verde, in the La Presa district, the officers rescued the 43-year-old owner of an assembly plant who was kidnapped on 29 March while driving with his wife in a subdivision of Colinas de Agua Caliente, when armed men traveling in a recent model pickup truck intercepted them. Police investigators suspect that the kidnapping is connected to the kidnapping gang led by "the Software," which operates in the same way and is characterized by not demanding huge ransom amounts and even lowering the amounts little by little through negotiations. Intelligence work allowed police officials to arrest the leader of the cell, who confessed to the crime and led the officers to the safe house where the rest of the gang members were arrested and the victim was rescued. (*frontera.info*, 7 April 2007)

Mexico, 2 April 2007: A 42-year-old medical surgeon from Veracruz lodged a complaint of an extortion attempt made against him. According to the medical doctor, a person identified as Sanchez X has been calling him and demanding several million pesos from him, threatening him with kidnapping if he does not pay. The doctor was at his parent's house when the caller asked to speak with him. Fearing for his security, the doctor lodged the complaint. (*diariodelistmo.com*, 7 April 2007)

Mexico, 27 March 2007: The president of the Citizen Council for Public Security (CCPS) of Baja California State said that the organization registers a kidnapping case every week. According to the group's president, since 12 February 2007 there have been more than 20 reported kidnappings, mostly in Tijuana, which continue to frighten the community in spite of increased security measures implemented by the federal government. The president praised the heightened security but stated that it is insufficient, as many of the criminals disguise themselves as police officers and abduct people from their houses. The president said that every day the CCPS is contacted by people from all levels of society who offer reports of relatives who have been kidnapped or detained by criminals. The president stated that he learned of two more cases during the weekend -- the kidnapping of a foreign industrialist and that of an engineering student who was kidnapped on 10 February. The CCPS will meet in Mexicali in order to discuss the results of Operation 1 and assess whether the federal intervention has had any noticeable results since the operation began three months ago. (*frontera.info*, 27 March 2007)

Mexico, 23 March 2007: Elements of the Judicial Police force of Ecatepec, Mexico State, are being screened by authorities of the State Justice Attorney, after several officers sheltered members of a kidnapping gang for monetary gain. The director of public security in Ecatepec stated that an investigation has been launched by the Public Ministry of Ecatepec in order to detain these persons. The investigation started after three suspected kidnapers were caught following a shootout with police officers, as they attempted to flee in a taxi. According to the statements given by one of the victims of the gang, for whom a ransom of 5,000 pesos was demanded, the criminals negotiated his release inside the courthouse. The investigation could come to an end when the police officers who offered protection to the kidnapers are identified, following attempts by the Judicial Police to try and block the Municipal Police from detaining the suspects. (*todito.com*, 23 March 2007)

Mexico, 18 March 2007: The republic's attorney general accused a man and a woman of probable responsibility in various kidnappings of businessmen that took place in different cities. An investigation was conducted in relation to the supposed crimes of organized criminal activity and illegal liberty privation in the form of kidnapping, for which the accused were brought to court. The attorney general revealed that the 29-year-old woman, with a lengthy criminal

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

record, confessed to participating in four kidnappings, one of them in Baja California, in which the manager of a well-known electronics enterprise was kidnapped. The suspects also planned the kidnapping of the son of a farmer in Sinaloa, as well as the kidnapping of an unidentified victim in Sonora. The woman is also implicated in the killing of a businessman in Guasave while trying to abduct him. (*jornada.unam.mx*, 18 March 2007)

Mexico, 17 March 2007: Officers of the Justice Attorney General of Mexico State engaged in a shootout with two kidnapers who were attempting to cash-in ransom money they had received from the abductions of two victims whom they were holding captive. According to primary investigations, around 2000 local time on 16 March two criminals intercepted a man and his girlfriend while they were driving in the Bosques del Lago neighborhood. After being threatened, they gave the kidnapers their relative's phone numbers and the criminals demanded 150,000 pesos for each of the victims. The mother of the woman and the father of the young man went to the police to report the kidnapping, at which time they received counseling on how to stop the criminals. In a second phone call, the kidnapers ordered the relatives to place the money in a bag and leave it on the corner of Convento Merced and Convento La Esperanza streets. Minutes later, two men arrived in a car to pick up the ransom but were surprised by police officers. Trying to flee the scene, the kidnapers opened fire on the officers, who pursued them. The fleeing kidnapers crashed their car. One of the criminals was wounded and was taken to the hospital while police interrogated the other one who disclosed that the couple was left tied inside their vehicle in a parking lot in Naucalpan. (*cronica.com.mx*, 17 March 2007)

Mexico, 16 March 2007: According to Mexican authorities, a suspect accused of masterminding the 5 March kidnapping of an assembly factory (maquiladora) executive in Tijuana earlier this month, was also involved in the high-profile 1996 abduction of a Japanese executive in this city. Baja California's attorney general stated that the 29-year-old suspect is the leader of a group of four men from the state of Sinaloa who spent two months planning the kidnapping of the executive from his electronic component manufacturing and assembly company parking lot in eastern Tijuana. The local executive was released after paying a US\$100,000 ransom. Authorities are also linking the suspect to the kidnapping of a Japanese vice president of a famous electronics company who was abducted in Tijuana in 1996. The victim was released after payment of a US\$2 million ransom. The suspect is also wanted by authorities in the state of Sonora and Sinaloa, where he allegedly participated in the killing of a rancher during a kidnapping attempt in December 2006. The suspect and his accomplice were arrested on 13 March after a truck matching the description of the one used to kidnap the executive was spotted. Two other suspects in the kidnapping are still at large. (*signonsandiego.com*, 16 March 2007)

Paraguay, 1 April 2007: A 62-year-old Japanese man, owner of a local property management company, and his 37-year-old Japanese secretary, were kidnapped in Paraguay along with two local police officers. The two police officers witnessed the incident and tried to stop it, but were kidnapped as well. The kidnapers have already demanded a US\$150,000 ransom for the release of the four abductees. (*khaleejtimes.ae*, 3 April 2007)

On **4 April** police officers suspended the search for the two Japanese and two Paraguayan nationals, who were abducted in the Caaguazu department, fearing that the kidnapers might kill the victims. This is the fifth kidnapping for ransom case reported this year in the area. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the criminals first demanded US\$25,000, then 150,000, 500,000 and finally 750,000. The significant increase of the requested amount allegedly occurred after the criminals realized that one of the Japanese victims was the president of a multi-million dollar company. (*univision.com*, 4 April 2007)

On **10 April** the 37-year-old assistant of the Japanese business executive was freed by the kidnapers. The woman arrived in a taxi at her house after being freed in the area where the 1 April kidnapping occurred, at Kilometer 185 on the highway linking the capital with Ciudad del Este on the border with Brazil. The captors continue to hold the

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

executive as well as a policeman and his girlfriend who happened upon the scene as the kidnapping was in progress. (*efenews.com*, 10 April 2007)

Paraguay, 26 March 2007: A businessman of Lebanese origin was released unharmed, following the payment of a US\$150,000 ransom. Police reports stated that the criminals had originally demanded a US\$3 million ransom. The victim was abducted in the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguacu, where he allegedly was held captive for about four days before being transferred to the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este. This is the fourth kidnapping for ransom to be reported in Paraguay year-to-date. (*univision.com*, 26 March 2007)

Peru, 2 April 2007: Authorities arrested a national police officer who is involved in the kidnapping and alleged murder of a 29-year-old used car dealer. The victim was abducted while traveling between Lima and Tacna on 25 March. On that date, the criminals contacted the man's family and demanded a 30,000-soles ransom. The victim's brother negotiated the ransom and agreed to pay 15,200 soles, and deposited the amount as ordered on 30 March into a bank account, which turned out to belong to the police officer. Authorities believe that the kidnapped man may be dead, as in the last contact the kidnapers established, they asked officials to search for the body in Tacna's Calana district. (*larepublica.com.pe*, 3 April 2007)

Peru, 6 April 2007: A businessman in the poultry industry was kidnapped from his ranch located in Chilca, on the 71st km of Panamericana Sur Highway. At the time of the abduction, the man was having a party with approximately 40 other people. Police reports indicate that eight heavily armed men traveling in three vehicles arrived at the ranch, and forced the businessman, his wife and his butler to board his own vehicle. The criminals drove the three people to the businessman's home in Lima's Surco district, but security guards from the area suspected something was wrong and contacted the police. The criminals fled with the businessman and were able to escape from police officers. The businessman was found shot to death inside his vehicle in the district of Chorillos approximately 30 minutes later. (*correoperu.com.pe*, 7 April 2007)

Peru, 17 March 2007: The 24-year-old daughter of one of the directors of a leading local bank was released by her kidnapers, who abducted her on 13 March shortly after leaving her house in San Vicente de Cafete, about 75 mi/120 km south of Lima. Her kidnapers initially demanded a large ransom, reportedly exceeding US\$50,000. According to eyewitnesses, four armed suspects forced her into a station wagon taxi. She was released unharmed at around 0300 local time near Ave. Industrial in Independencia, a northern district of Lima. A taxi driver who found her drove her to the nearest police station. She was later transferred to the kidnapping task force of Lima's office for criminal investigation (Dinincri) for debriefing. Her father claimed that no ransom was paid for her release. (*journalperu.com*, 17 March 2007)

On **18 March** Peruvian authorities declared their suspicions that the young woman faked her abduction. Authorities confirmed that on 13 March, the woman withdrew 3,500 soles from a bank and disappeared immediately thereafter. (*larepublica.com.pe*, 19 March 2007)

Peru, 13 March 2007: Two foreigners were kidnapped in Lima, on the Costa Verde beach circuit. The first incident occurred in the district of Barranco, where a Chilean businessman was abducted and forced to withdraw money from ATMs before being released three hours later. The second incident involved a female Argentinean tourist, who was abducted near Los Delfines Beach as she was traveling in a taxi, en route from Jorge Chavez International Airport. As of midnight, the victim was still being held captive. There is no indication that the taxi driver was involved in the abduction. (*elcomercio.com.pe*, 14 March 2007)

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

Venezuela, 4 April 2007: A kidnapped 34-year-old electrical engineer was released unharmed after his family paid an undisclosed ransom. Police reports indicate that the man was abducted on 31 March from his father's ranch, located in the Miranda municipality of Zulia State. Authorities suspect that the kidnappers are common criminals. (*panorama.com.ve, 9 April 2007*)

Venezuela, 1 April 2007: Unidentified armed individuals abducted a 62-year-old businessman of Italian origin from his ranch located in the Valmore Rodriguez municipality, in Zulia state. The kidnapped businessman is a partner of a company that specializes in providing services to the oil industry. The victim is also the president of a foundation that trains workers for different industrial occupations. This is the 10th abduction to be reported in Zulia state year-to-date. (*panorama.com.ve, 2 April 2007*)

On **12 April** the 62-year-old Italian businessman was released. According to reports, he was released in the Baralt municipality. The victim's family did not pay the demanded ransom and stated that they believe the man was released due to his poor health condition. (*panodi.com, 13 April 2007*)

Venezuela, 31 March 2007: Three armed men wearing masks kidnapped a 30-year-old electrical engineer, a resident of Maracaibo, while he was visiting his father's farm in Miranda municipality. The kidnapping took place in Maporal-Quiroz, San Antonio department, as the farmer's vehicle was about to cross a bridge over the Maporal River and the kidnappers surrounded it. An employee of a nearby farm who was near the bridge was forced into the vehicle in which the father and son and two of their employees were traveling. Arriving in another municipality the criminals changed cars, at which point the farm worker recognized the kidnappers, but despite his pleas, the abductors shot and killed him. Shortly thereafter the kidnappers freed the victim's father and his employees and fled with the victim. (*panorama.com.ve, 1 April 2007*)

Venezuela, 29 March 2007: Officers from two police forces exchanged gunfire on the Petare-Santa Lucia road in eastern Caracas during an operation to rescue a kidnap victim. At least seven officers and one civilian were injured in the unclear incident. During the operation, however, authorities rescued a man who had been abducted three days earlier and was being kept hostage in a refrigerated cargo truck. (*globovision.com, 30 March 2007*)

Venezuela, 27 March 2007: On 24 March, three unidentified armed men abducted a 48-year-old man, who is the brother of the Trujillo State governor. Though his whereabouts are unknown, it is believed that he is still in the southern part of Trujillo State. According to police sources, no ransom has been requested for his release. The only information regarding the case was given by the guard who was accompanying the victim when he disappeared, who stated that the event took place on the road to El Alto in Escuque municipality, where the victim has a house that is under construction. It is believed that the kidnappers studied the victim's routines, as he was visiting the construction site every night to supervise the work. The guard was tied up by the armed men but managed to untie himself and report the incident to police officials, who immediately launched a massive search, and checkpoints were posted at all main exits of the state. (*panorama.com.ve, 27 March 2007*)

Venezuela, 27 March 2007: A group of alleged students from the Technological Institute of Valencia, in Carabobo State, hijacked three cargo trucks and later demanded a ransom for the release of the truck drivers. Police officers, however, managed to rescue the drivers and stated that this is the first time in the past two weeks that masked demonstrators have hijacked trucks and demanded ransoms. (*elobersvador.rctv.net, 28 March 2007*)

K & R AND EXTORTION MONITOR

Venezuela, 15 March 2007: A police force composed of several units rescued a 6-year-old boy in Campo Ameno Village, Sucre Municipality, in Portuguesa State. The boy, who was kidnapped on 10 March in Viscocuy, Portuguesa State, was rescued unharmed after police officers and the people guarding him engaged in a shootout, in which two kidnappers were killed. The National Guard Brigade General stated that the intelligence and tracing actions continue, in order to locate the other kidnappers. The National Guard, in both regions, coordinated the investigation and search operations until the boy was located. (*panodi.com, 15 March 2007*)

Venezuela, 14 March 2007: Authorities in Barinas state found a skeleton that presumably belongs to an Italian cattle rancher who was kidnapped in November 2006. Authorities suspect that the rancher was kidnapped and killed as revenge by someone who was financially involved with the victim. The body was found after a suspect led authorities to it. (*panodi.com, 15 March 2007*)

Venezuela, 10 March 2007: Unknown individuals kidnapped a 30-year-old woman, the daughter of a local businesswoman, forcing her into a vehicle in Salom, where her mother's manufacturing plant is located. Meanwhile, three other men located her 28-year-old husband in Nirgua and kidnapped him as well. A neighbor of the abducted couple stated that the kidnapped man received a phone call stating that his wife had been kidnapped and he had to pay 60 million Bolívares as soon as possible. (*panorama.com.ve, 7 March 2007*)

Venezuela, 6 March 2007: Six days after the kidnapping of a 23-year-old student, the victim's family stated that the kidnappers have not established any further communication with them. The day of the kidnapping, the criminals called the family twice. Sources close to the investigation said that the calls were made from the municipalities of San Francisco and El Varillal. The officer in charge of the investigation team refused to comment on the results of analysis made to a white SUV that was found abandoned a few meters from where the kidnapping took place. This is the fifth kidnapping case in Zulia State this year. One of the cases ended tragically with the death of the victim while being held hostage. (*panorama.com.ve, 7 March 2007*)

RUSSIA AND CIS

Russia, 23 March 2007: Unidentified gunmen kidnapped an uncle of the president of Russia's southern region of Ingushetia, which borders restive Chechnya. One of the victim's bodyguards and two of his relatives were reportedly wounded during the kidnapping, which took place in the Barsuki village mosque, outside the region's largest town of Nazran. Police officials could not immediately confirm the kidnapping and were checking the reports while local officials were not immediately available for comment. Kidnappings and shootouts are not unusual in Ingushetia, an impoverished region with a high crime rate where many separatist rebels from neighboring Chechnya fled after being forced out by Russian troops. (*Reuters, 23 March 2007*)