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3 DIE IN FIREFIGHT AS MILITANTS ENGAGE NSCDC MEN

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An intense shootout between suspected militants and operatives of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) after a sudden attack on the Esuk Otu community in Calabar, the Cross River State capital on Monday left at least three people dead, our correspondent learnt yesterday.

Reports said the suspected militants had chased some fishermen and traders through the Calabar Channel to the Esuk Ata beach where the NSCDC men intervened, resulting in heavy exchange of gun fire. Another account had it that some villagers died during a fire exchange between pirates and militants in the creeks. Vehicles belonging to the NSCDC were reported to have been set ablaze.

A text message circulated to Calabar residents warned: "If you are in Calabar, please avoid going through UNICAL Library and Esuk Atu village. There is heavy fighting and burning of houses between suspected militants and loads of security details. Please spread this info." About six persons were said to have been arrested by the NSCDC in connection with the incident.

Officials of the NSCDC were not available for comment but the state police spokesman, ASP Hogan Bassey, confirmed an invasion of the community by militants who were later repelled.

"I can confirm that there was a reported case of such incident around the satellite town area of the area called Esuk Atu. I hear that some arrests were made by the NSCDC personnel but I am yet to know if they were militants. We will get to know that when we finish with our joint investigation", he said on phone.

Though Bassey confirmed the death of one person, witnesses said they saw at least three dead bodies at the scene of the shooting. Last week, the father of the deputy governor, Mr Efiok Cobham, was kidnapped in the Creek Town neighbourhood but was later released.

Speaking recently on efforts at combating the increasing wave of crime in the Calabar Channel, the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Naval Command, Rear Admiral Joe Aikhomu said: "We can assure that the Calabar maritime environment is very safe.

The security situation in Cross River State is very safe. The Navy is working hard to ensure that we maintain security in this state and its surroundings. We won't accept criminal activities by a few elements around our maritime environment".

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