

Three feared dead as suspected militants clash

PARTS of Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, were turned into a theatre of war, as several gunmen suspected to be supporters of Ateke Tom and his rival Soboma George, yesterday engaged one another in a fierce gun battle. Three person may have died in the cross-fire.

It could, however, not be ascertained as at press time if there were casualties, but *The Guardian* learnt that two persons were struck by bullets along Aggrey Road, Port Harcourt.

Scores of gunmen suspected to be supporters of

*From Kelvin Ebiri,
Port Harcourt*

Soboma and who were dressed in black, had stormed the Emenike Street Junction by Ikwerre Road at about 4.30 pm and started shooting sporadically.

The militia men, having dispelled people in the area had attempted to raid the Mile One Police station, only to retreat to Emenike Street Junction where they continued their shooting spree, forcing shops and banks in the area to shut down.

A few minutes later, police men accompanied by an armoured tank repelled the gunmen who jumped into awaiting motorbikes to escape.

Sources told *The Guardian* that supporters of Soboma were apprehensive that members of Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilante were planning to storm Port Harcourt from Okrika and attack them.

Ateke Tom, who recently renounced violence with other factional militia groups, yesterday denied the allegation. He said those linking him with the shoot-

ing were merely trying to smear his name.

A police source disclosed to *The Guardian* that the gunmen detonated dynamite around the old Port Harcourt township area and killed one person who was burnt beyond recognition.

According to him, "amid the pandemonium caused by the shootings, a moving vehicle knocked down someone who was trying to escape around Station Bus stop area. The third casualty was said to have been killed by a stray bullet."

Court to hear