

# Port Harcourt: Police, gunmen engage in shootout

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Casualty figure rises to 18 in Rivers' military invasion

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THERE was palpable fear and tension as the police engaged some gunmen suspected to be robbers in a shootout at the GRA axis of Port Harcourt metropolis, the Rivers State capital, at about 7.20 p.m., on Wednesday.

Sporadic gunshots sent motorists and passers-by scampering for safety as the GRA and its environs became deserted.

An eyewitness disclosed that traders and passers-by took to their heels, even as security operatives were still trailing the hoodlums as of the time of filing this report, while the entire area had been cordoned off by policemen.

An unconfirmed report had it that the suspected robbers had attacked a new generation bank located in the area, even as speculations were rife that they made away with a huge amount of money snatched from a man.

"I don't actually know where the robbers operated, but I noticed that some people were running helter-skelter as they shot into the air to scare people in order to escape.

"I also learnt that some policemen were moving in a hurry, probably to catch the criminals," the eyewitness said.

When contacted, the state police spokesman, Ahmad Mohammad, confirmed the incident, though he said he was yet to get the full details of what happened.

He said the police were currently on the trail of a group of suspected criminals, adding that "I am not sure now if it is a case of bank robbery or whether it is a house or vehicle that was attacked. I will give you the details later when I am fully briefed."

Meanwhile, more than 18 persons have been reportedly killed in the heavy shootout that happened between some soldiers and ex-militants in Yeghe community in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Nigerian Tribune gathered late Wednesday evening that about 18 persons were killed in the shooting.

A source who did not want his name in print confirmed the casualty figure, as he said there may be an increase in the number of dead, given the scores who allegedly suffered severe bullet wounds, which extended to Bori in Khana Local Government Area.

Chairmen of Gokana and Khana local government areas, Austin Sor and Tambari Sydney, respectively, condemned the military invasion in their areas.

Reacting to the killings and destruction of property, Sor chastised the military of claiming that there was no casualty, stressing that the level of destruction in Yeghe community was provocative.

Similarly, his Khana counterpart, Sydney, said he was yet to ascertain the number of deaths,

believing that the figure would increase.