

Six feared killed as Onitsha boils again

John Ameh, Onitsha

RENEWED clashes between hoodlums and members of the joint police and military team in Onitsha, Anambra State, reportedly led to the death of six more people on Monday.

The team, which was deployed in Onitsha in the wake of the violence between the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra and the Nigeria Association of Road Transport Owners, was said to have clashed with the hoodlums in Okpoko.

Okpoko, a suburb of

• It's a lie —Police

Onitsha, is believed to be one of MASSOB's strongholds in Anambra State.

Our correspondent gathered that Monday's fighting followed fresh rumours that the team planned to bomb Okpoko to fish out MASSOB members hiding in the crowded suburb.

The Onitsha Police Area Commander, Mr. Mathew Uyanna, an Assistant Commissioner of Police, however, denied the killings.

Uyanna, who spoke with journalists, also denied the al-

leged bombing plan. But he said the police and the military would not relent in their determination to flush out all armed groups from Onitsha.

He said, "What we want to do is to make sure those miscreants vacate those areas, especially those places seen as their strongholds in the commercial city and elsewhere.

"As for the issue of dead persons, there was no shooting and nobody was killed; it is mere speculations."

But two residents, Ndukwe James and Martins

Okonkwo, who were seen fleeing Okpoko on Monday, claimed that security agents had been conducting a house-to-house search in the area, looking for MASSOB loyalists.

Okonkwo said, "They believe that these people are hiding in the neighbourhood.

"Last Saturday, they came and issued warnings that the next time they would visit Okpoko, they would deal with us."

It will be recalled that a similar rumour of a planned bombing of central Onitsha on Monday last week later became a ruse.

Anambra State Governor,

Mr. Peter Obi, reacting to allegations of excessive use of force by the team, said in Awka that most of the claims were exaggerated and intended to portray government's measures as not working.

Meanwhile, in Onitsha, influential personalities, including market leaders, are reported to be going into hiding to avoid the wrath of suspected MASSOB members.

It was gathered that MASSOB members had accused some of them of giving information to the police on their hideouts.

Last week, the Methodist Bishop of Onitsha, Bishop Chibuzor Opoko, was attacked by persons who identified themselves as MASSOB members for allegedly giving them away to the police.

Opoko denied doing so.

