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Police recover N359m from armed robbers

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The Rivers State Police Command has recovered N359m from a 20-man robbery gang that seized a bullion van near Owerri, Imo State.



Mike Okiro

About \$50,000, £2,000, four AK 47 rifles and one general purpose machine gun were also recovered from the armed robbers.

The Commissioner in charge of the command, Mr. Bala Hassan, made this known on Wednesday just as eight people lost their lives in two separate incidents that had to do with armed robbery and a clash between rival cult groups in Ondo and Rivers states on Wednesday.

The bullion van, belonging to Squadron 29 of the Police Mobile Force, Awka, Anambra State, was snatched on Tuesday while conveying the sums from a first-generation bank in Aba, Abia State.

Hassan, who spoke with our correspondent in Port Harcourt, said the gunmen trailed the bullion van to Eberie Omuma in Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State and opened fire on the policemen

escorting it.

He said hours after he received a distress call from his counterpart in Imo State, Mr. Innocent Iloezuoke, that the robbers fled towards Rivers State, he dispatched a team to go after them.

The team, according to him, traced the bandits to Uwaza in Abia State where it engaged them in a gun duel.

The police chief said that seven of the armed robbers were killed; but he was silent on the fate of others.

Hassan said, "We are happy to record yet another major breakthrough in our operations. Not long ago, we did it and now we have done it again. Our men have recovered N359m from robbers who seized a bullion van in Owerri.

"I will recommend all the officers and men who participated in this 'Greater Bullion Van Recovery Operation' for promotion immediately. They have done us proud."

He said that the command would soon investigate how the recovered weapons got into the hands of the robbers.

The police chief added that three additional corpses were recovered from the scene where the police confronted the robbers while trying to escape with the loot.

One of the policemen who escorted the money told one of our correspondents that the fleeing robbers used gas-welding equipment to open the bullion van before stashing the money in 16 Ghana-Must-Go bags.

He said, "As they made to leave the village, the robbers observed that commercial motorcyclists were watching the opening of the bullion van from a distance and started throwing some of the money on the road.

"While the okada riders struggled to pick the money, they fled into a border community in Rivers State. Unknown to them, we were still monitoring them.

"When our colleagues from Port Harcourt arrived, we moved in and engaged them in heavy shooting and recovered the money."

Meanwhile, four people lost their lives when armed robbers attacked a commercial bank in Ore, Ondo State, on Wednesday.

An unspecified number of persons were also said to have been injured by the bandits who made away with an unspecified sum of money.

Our correspondents gathered that the robbers, on arrival at the bank around 9.30am, started shooting sporadically.

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The victims, said an eyewitness, were hit by bullets that were fired during the gun duel that ensued when policemen arrived at the scene.

The eyewitness who gave his name simply as Soji said that the robbers, numbering about eight, arrived at the bank in a commercial bus painted in Lagos State colour. He added that the bus had its number plate covered.

He said, " They started shooting at the bank immediately they came. Some of them went inside while some stayed outside. The rotor doors at the bank located on the ever-busy Benin-Ore Expressway were shattered and everybody ran away.

"One of the victims was shot dead in front of Mr. Biggs. An okada rider was also killed. But those that were injured were taken to a nearby hospital for treatment."

Meanwhile, in Abonema, Rivers State, a soldier and three members of rival cult groups died in a clash.

A source disclosed to our correspondents that a patrol vehicle in which members of the Joint Task Force in the community were being conveyed was attacked by one of the cult groups, leading to the death of the soldier.

He said members of the rival cult groups led by Soboma George and George Fara had clashed after holding separate meetings in the community.

He said as soon as supporters of the two rival groups started shooting, many residents of Abonema fled to the neighbouring communities.

When contacted on the telephone, the JTF spokesman, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, confirmed the attack on the troop.

He said, "There was a clash between two rival cult groups in Abonema which disrupted socio-economic activities in the area.

"As a result of the crisis, most of the residents of the area scampered for safety while some sent distress calls to our troops to come to their aid.

"Our troops immediately responded by moving to the troubled area but were ambushed on the way and one of our men was killed. Three of the cultists were also killed during the attack."

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