

2 Banks shut, cop killed, police, army take over Owerri, residents panic

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MOST banks hurriedly closed on Wednesday afternoon in Owerri, Imo State, as deafening sound of gunshots rent the air, causing panic in the state capital.

This was even as policemen and soldiers cordoned off roads leading in and out of the state capital.

The shooting spree, which took place around the MCC Road in the state capital, forced many residents to scamper for safety.

Traffic flow was immediately halted as the police beefed up security in front of the state Government House, Owerri Correctional Centre, Bank Road, Ama Hausa, Wetheral Road, Douglas and other major roads within the state capital.

Bank customers were immediately sent out and the banks shot afterwards as a result of the incident.

Our correspondent learnt that a police sergeant, Loveday

Obilonu, was on Wednesday shot dead in Owerri, the state capital by gunmen.

A bank staff, who confided in our correspondent, said, "The management ordered us to shut down immediately the shooting spree started. Our systems were disconnected immediately and customers sent out.

"We even closed without balancing our systems for the day. The panic was huge; the management was only being proactive."

A law student of the Imo State University, Owerri, was also attacked and his RS 330 SUV snatched on gunpoint at IMSU back gate.

The undergraduate, who spoke to The PUNCH, said he begged his attackers not to shoot him, but go with the vehicle.

The distraught undergraduate said, "Three of them pointed a gun at me as I stopped to deliver a message to my friend at the IMSU back gate. I immediately told them

to have the key and not to kill me.

"One of them wanted to shoot me but one of his accomplices told him not to shoot, that I wasn't proving stubborn. They zoomed off in my car with one of my phones which was inside the car."

One of our correspondents gathered that two persons were injured by stray bullets as a result of the shootings.

The traditional ruler of Hausa community in Owerri, HRH Alhaji Auwal Suleiman, said, "The soldiers at Ama Hausa area helped us yesterday because their target was Ama Hausa.

"They repelled the forces of the gunmen. The gunmen terrorised the area yesterday (Tuesday) with their intimidating shootings. We thank Allah that no person died in that shootout in such a very busy area."

When contact on phone, the state Police Public Relations Officer, Bala Elkana said that the gunshots were from two rival cult groups who engaged each other in a shootout.