

Shooting in P-Harcourt

- One feared dead, police station attacked
- One Belgian businessman shot dead

By Jimitota Onoyume,
Emma Arubi with agency
reports

PORT-HARCOURT— PORT Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, was yesterday practically turned into a theatre of war after some people suspected to be supporters of a militant, Soboma George, went on a shooting spree throwing residents into
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AC RALLY: From left, Gov Bola Tinubu, Mr Babatunde Fashola, AC guber candidate for Lagos; and Rep. Ganiyu Solomon at a 'sweeping rally' in Lagos, yesterday. Photo by Shola Oyelese. ● More on Page 35.

INEC under pressure to stop Atiku

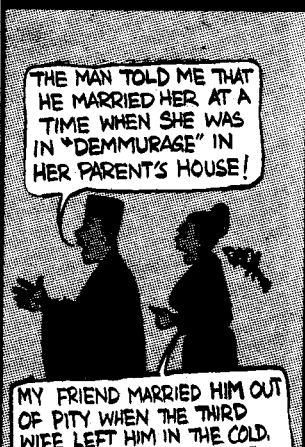
By Emmanuel Aziken

ABUJA— THE Action Congress (AC), yesterday, warned of the imminent release of President Olusegun Obasanjo's last joker against Vice-President Atiku Abubakar with a plot to stop him as the party's presidential candidate through the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The party in a statement said INEC under pressure from the presidency was now set

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panic. At least one person was killed while several others were wounded in the shooting.

The Central Police Station close to the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH) was also attacked

by the cultists. A Belgian businessman was also murdered overnight at Ekpan near Warri.

The Port Harcourt shooting, according to investigation, was triggered by the alleged arrest of Soboma George by the police. The police, however, denied arresting him.

The militants who launched their attack from different parts of the city shot their way to the Central Police Station where they thought Soboma was being kept. About nine police vehicles and a tanker were similarly razed.

The few shops and business offices that opened were quickly shut and the streets were almost empty.

Police Commissioner in Rivers State, Mr Felix Ogbauđu, said that the victim was shot accidentally in a two-hour gun battle between the police and the militants. He said the militants struck at noon, shooting sporadically, but that the police punctured their move, resulting in the shoot-out.

"They managed to escape and used lots of dynamites as they fled," Ogbauđu said.

He said no arrest had been made, but that the police, army and navy had been put on "red alert" to track the militants down.

The police commissioner expressed regret that a man was felled by bullets adding: "It is more painful as he was apparently returning from a church service."

He said while the shoot-out lasted, residents of Borokiri area of the Rievr State capital were marooned in their homes as no-one ventured outside. Ogbauđu said there was no evidence at the disposal of the police that any militant was in custody.

Meanwhile residents of Creek, Bedel, Niger, Marine base etc areas were seen fleeing their houses for fear of their lives. A source in the area said: "You need to see the shooting. As I am talking to you now, people are running out of their houses. We gathered it is Soboma George's boys that are behind it. We understand the police picked their

leader this afternoon. So they were battling to see whether they could secure his release. All commercial vehicles have deserted the roads."

Soboma George was among those who reportedly escaped from the Port Harcourt prisons during the 2006 jailbreak. He was the second in command to a cult leader in the state, Ateke Tom, who is currently on the wanted list of security operatives in the state. Sources said he parted ways with Ateke following his escape from jail.

Belgian murdered

Meanwhile, a Belgian businessman, Mr Morice Mamarek, was murdered overnight near Warri. "It is a fact, it is a murder. The suspect, his Nigerian girlfriend and his (victim's) driver have been arrested," Delta State police boss, Mr Udom Ekpoudom, said by telephone.

Ekpoudom said the killing was a clear case of murder and not linked to the current situation in the Niger Delta where armed militants have this year alone kidnapped about 40 foreigners, some of them working in the oil industry.

But the Belgian Foreign Affairs Minister's spokesman in Brussels, Rudy Huygelen, said the killing was caused by "a kidnap attempt."

During this attempt, "a gun-

shot" which was released wounded the businessman. He died in the hospital, the spokesman added.

A private security adviser in Warri, who declined to be named, also confirmed the killing of the Belgian, whose identity has not been disclosed.

He was said to have been shot at Ekpan where he allegedly stopped under an overhead bridge in company of his girlfriend and driver to buy fish.

Mr. Mamarek was the Managing Director of Eternit, an asbestos manufacturing company in Sapele, Delta State.

The incident which occurred at about 4:15 p.m. was not reported until four hours later when the medical director of the clinic he was rushed to in Warri, allegedly insisted on getting the police informed.

MEND admits shooting

However, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) last night claimed responsibility for the shooting, saying it deployed its men and successfully rescued Soboma from police yesterday.

It said as soon as it heard about this arrest, it deployed 60 of its men armed with rockets to rescue them, a task it said they accomplished.

INEC under pressure

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to stop Atiku from contesting the presidential election.

However, in a sharp response, Dr. Mohammed Jamuare, INEC Commissioner for Information, claimed ignorance of any such plot. "I don't know anything. I don't know anything," the commissioner said in a telephone interview with *Vanguard* yesterday.

Meanwhile, the party is to commence its campaigns for the April general elections with the commissioning of its presidential campaign office tomorrow.

The AC in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, said the plan to bar Atiku had been

The party said: "AC is fully aware of the President's supposed last joker, which is to force INEC not to clear the VP in contravention of the laws of the land. It is common knowledge that this Presidency based on its steepness in lawless and unconstitutional acts, will not hesitate to bring the nation down just to stop one man from contesting the presidential polls on April 21.

"However, we will like to warn that there is always a limit to political hubris, especially under a democratic dispensation in a politically-sophisticated country like ours," the party said.

Noting the incapacity of INEC to bar a candidate from the elections, the party said: "May we re-state our earlier position that INEC has no