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Seven Handguns and Assault Rifles Seized in Hospital Ground in 72 Hours, Outbreak of Neighborhood Gun Violence ‘Not Random’

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Robert Moore **April 12, 2020**

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Virgin Islands Police make show of force with roadblocks on St Thomas Friday night. (Robert Moore, VI Consortium) By. ROBERT MOORE, VI CONSORTIUM

Police have confiscated at least seven illegal firearms over the past 72 hours in the Hospital Ground neighborhood on St. Thomas, Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor said Saturday.

The weapons were mostly handguns, but included several AK-47s or similar assault rifles, Mr. Velinor said. Police so far have identified 32-year-old Kenan Thomas as a suspect arrested on gun charges. When stopped in Hospital Ground, authorities found assault rifles and two semi-automatic handguns inside his vehicle, police reports said. The suspect was charged with

possession of an illegal firearm, possession of ammunition and possession of a gun within 1000 feet of a public park. He was remanded to the Bureau of Corrections after failing to make bail of \$25,000.

A man was found dead in Hospital Ground early Friday. He is the third person killed by gun violence in the area in recent days. He was the third shooting victim in the neighborhood this week. Two men were shot and killed in separate incidents early Wednesday. A woman who was walking in the area of Goat Street was struck twice by bullets fired by two masked men running through the Hospital Ground area firing handguns, police said.

No arrests have been made in any of the shootings, though some residents say a long-running drug war involving known gang members was behind the recent violence. Mr. Velinor told the Consortium he would not speculate about what is driving the violence. "I am confident in saying it is not random," Mr. Velinor said, "but I will not speculate as to the cause. This is the purpose of the investigation."

Police officers have been stationed at the main roads leading into and out of Hospital Ground. Among other things, they are asking drivers about their business in the community, said the police commissioner. "Like the members of the community, we are very, very concerned about the shootings. That is why we are out there asking the community for help," he said.

Anyone having information regarding any of the Hospital Ground shootings is asked to call 911, the Criminal Investigation Bureau at (340) 774-2211 extension 5606, or Crime Stoppers USVI at (800) 222-TIPS.