

2 die, several injured in protest over abandoned road in Ilorin

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TWO persons were feared dead while several others including a policeman were seriously injured in a violent youth protest at Ilorin over abandoned Olulande-Ita-Alamu-Offa Garage unmarried portion of the road linking Ilorin, the Kwara state capital with three other states of the Federation.

The violent protest started as early as 6.30 am by the youths in the area. The angry youths barricaded major roads and all link roads to the major Offa Garage – Ajasse Ipo road with bricks and blocks.

They also set up several borne fire along the road from Michael Imodu National Institute of Labour Studies (MINILS) junction up to Ola-Olu/ Stella Obasanjo junction.

The protesting youths in their thousands were chanting anti government and war songs like "Kwara Must be free," "No to slavery by Saraki, Bukola and Gbemi" "Leave our state now Saraki," among others.

It took the combined efforts of anti-riot policemen several hours before they restored order on the road, while several canisters of tear gas were fired to disperse the protesters.

Officers and men of Kwara state Fire brigade Service were also brought in by the government to put off some of the borne fire and tyres set on fire by the angry mob.

One of the protesters who spoke under anonymity, explained that since the road construction started over ten months ago life had become unbearable for people living along the 2.5 kilometers road. He added that the health hazards from the road had led to the death of some promising young people in the area.

Reacting to the incident, Mr. Bode Olayemi, the state commissioner for works and transport told newsmen that the road was a federal government road being constructed by the state because of government's concern for the people.

He pointed out that the road was still on-going and not an abandoned project as claimed by the protesting youths, saying government was not unaware of the difficulties being faced by the people.

The Commissioner noted that a sum of N363 million had been paid as mobilization to the contractor handling the project, which is due for completion before the expiration of the tenure of the present administration in the state.

Olayemi who addressed the press briefing together with the state commissioner for Information and communication, Mr. Ben Duntoye appealed to members of the public and protesting youths to exercise patience.

He said the contractor was expected to move back to site today but could not due to the disturbance, saying that the contractor had been instructed to put speed breakers in order to reduce the dust in the area.

Mr. Ezekiel Dabo, the State Public Relations Officer of the Kwara State Police Command in his reaction, urged the people of Kwara not to take laws into their hands as government was doing everything within its reach to fix the untarred portion of Offa road.

He advised the residents of the area to stop violent protest and molestation of innocent citizens as government had put everything in place to complete the road without further delay.