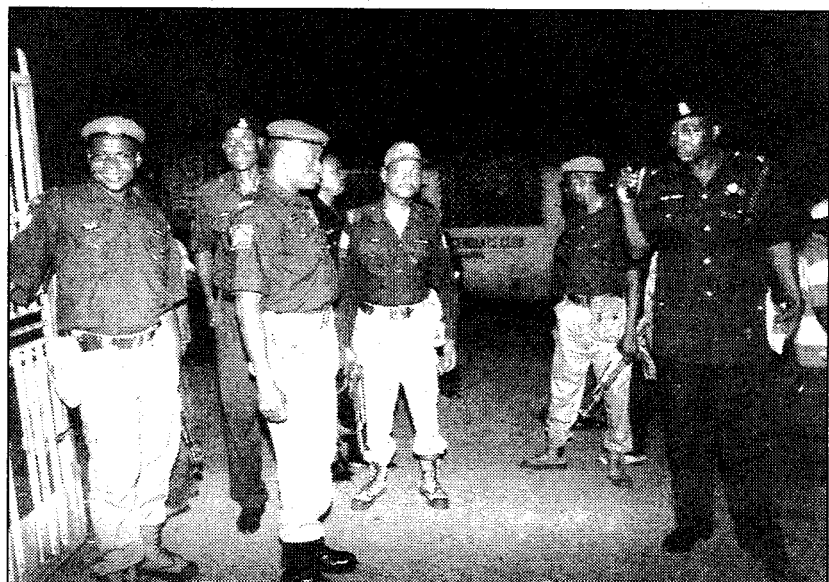


No breather yet from Lagos robbers

...Lagosians lament rising cases of violent crimes, demand frequent police patrol



• Arms and ammunitions recovered from robbers in... Lagos recently



• Men of the police force...

THOUGH their area derives its name from the nation's Maximum Security Prison, people around Kirikiri Road, Olodi-Apapa area of Lagos had always counted themselves lucky.

When their friends and relations in other parts of the metropolis told sad tales of their experiences in the hands of armed robbers Kirikiri Road residents had always been liberal with their sympathy.

They had also, somehow, imagined such things happened elsewhere, that violent crimes would not find a place in their midst.

They were wrong.

On Sunday, August 20, armed robbers visited Kirikiri Road, Olodi-Apapa.

Seven days after that, they came again.

About the same time around Oyeyemi Bus Stop in Akute-Ajuwon area, a nursing mother was attacked by three young men in their twenties who burst into her shop as she was loading her phone to serve some waiting customers and snatched the phone from her.

Her husband whom she alerted, ran to rescue her from the strange men but was shot in the groin by one of them. He died before help could reach him.

Forty-year-old mother of six, Mrs. Angelina Harry is yet to recover from the Kirikiri Road robberies, while the Ajuwon woman has vowed never to return to Lagos after her husband's burial in Benin.

Shortly after midnight that Sunday, Mrs. Harry was praying on the second floor of the four-storey hospital, where she was nursing a hypertensive patient.

They were interrupted when the robbers, numbering over 20, started firing indiscriminately to scare away the police and other people. The robbers, said to be in their 20s, had come to raid a fast food joint.

Mrs. Harry recalls that all sick patients in the hospital, including the hypertensive patient, newly delivered women, all ran out of the wards to the ground floor in fear.

"It was like hell was let loose", she said, adding: "Did they need to shoot like that to get whatever they were looking for?"

Many people including security guards in the neighbourhood were injured in the confusion that followed.

The hypertensive patient suffered a relapse.

She said: "I thought this kind of death was going to be too fast. At least, the hypertension had not killed me for three days prior to the shooting. May we never see such again", she said.

A couple whose window was shattered by stray bullets on the opposite side of the fast food joint, said they forgot prayer points they were taught in catechism classes at a time of danger.

The lactating mother said she reached for her three-month-old son in the cot and "all I could say in terms of prayers was: 'Holy Mary! Holy Mary!' I did not know what else to add", the 28-year-old lady who did not want her name in print, related on Wednesday.

According to her, though some forms of violent crimes have been synonymous within the neighbourhood but that particular incident had remained the talk of residents of the area.

"In the wee ours when we should be enjoying our sleep, the youthful armed robbers held our community hostage for about an hour", the lady's husband said.

He added: "What baffled some of us was that for the time the shooting lasted, there was no police presence until much, much later".

The situation at Olodi-Apapa that Sunday was one

By
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of the many cases of violent crimes most Lagosians have been witnessing of late.

At many bus stops in the city, especially those along the Lagos-Badagry Expressway, sorry tales of residents who have fallen into the hands of bandits operating in both night and broad daylight abound.

Such bus stops include Iyana-Iba near the Lagos State University, Ojo, Volkswagen, Alaba-Rago and Okokomaiko.

For example last week Wednesday at about 2.30 a.m., gun men invaded the Auto Spare Parts Market Dealers' Association in Lagos International Trade Fair Complex, carting away goods estimated at millions of naira.

During the attack, there was sporadic shooting by the bandits to scare night guards and police patrol in the area.

But for the arrival of the police from the FESTAC Town Divisional Police Station about 30 minutes later, the bandits who came with sledge hammers and wielding materials, could have broken into several shops.

The robbery came on the heels of a five-man gang that raided a company at Igbogbo in Ikorodu Local Council in Lagos.

Though, no life was lost in the incidents, several people were however injured in an attempt to escape from the robbers.

Also at the popular Aswani Market Road intersection with the Apapa-Oshodi Highway, tales of sorrow by Lagosians in the hands of marauders, especially motorists and pedestrians abound.

Miss Biola Akinfenwa narrated how a young woman's bag was snatched by armed bandits on motorcycle as she came out from a bank along Oslo Way last week.

According to her, the lady was sent by her employer to cash some money for their operations. She was about entering the company's car when the robbers struck in a commando style. The robbers sped towards the airport, as the lady was transfixed to the spot.

Her story represents what many Lagosians pass through, as the robbers do not only target banks, big shops, homes or companies but also pedestrians.

At the same Aswani Market junction two weeks back, some daredevil robbers were pursuing a vehicle. A motorist with a passenger inadvertently ran into the operation. The driver, sensing danger, attempted a decoy. He sped over the seven-millimetre embankment. He managed to make it but his car's new alloy rims, bumper, and headlamps were damaged.

Three people were reportedly killed in that incident.

However, to ensure that life and property are more secured for Lagosians especially as the "ember" months speed on, some residents have convened a stakeholders' meeting to raise about N1 billion to procure equipment for the police and aid her fight the rising crime in the city.

But in what seemed an admission of Police helplessness in the crime war, the Inspector-General, Mr. Sunday Ehindero on Monday said the Police lack equipment to combat the rising waves of armed robbery and political killings in the country.

Ehindero, who spoke at the pre-launch of stakeholders on police equipment fund at City Mall, Lagos noted that robbers in the recent times had

adopted a new mode of operation and devices of heavy shelling and use of gas cylinders to break bank strong rooms and safes.

He said, "our experience at Surulere, Lagos is instructive where a crack team of police anti-robbery patrol foiled a well planned robbery operation at a bank".

He said the present administration inherited police that were ill-equipped, decimated in numerical strength, deprived of necessary logistics and lacking as it were, moral and public support necessary for effective performance.

The rising wave of armed robbery has continued to pose worries to Lagosians who expressed concern over the insecurity to lives and property.

According to Muiyiwa Ologunde, "robbery has taken a different dimension in Lagos. While some robbers specialise in robbing banks, some operate in buses called 'one chance'. Touts also frequently transform into robbers in solitary areas at night".

Ologunde said that the last encounter he had with robbers on the Third Mainland Bridge last week when his car broke down was so scaring, adding that there should be constant patrol of the bridge by security agents.

In the encounter, "about six young men armed with guns and dangerous weapons came out, demanded for our phones and money.

"When I lied that I had no phone, one of them smashed my windscreen with an iron and threatened to set the car on fire if I failed to cooperate. I had to oblige them".

In June, residents of Omole Phase I at Ojuda were thrown into panic as seven armed robbers stormed a building at Muyibat Oyefusi Crescent, killing the security guard before starting their operation. It was thwarted as a resident informed the police which came to the rescue.

Also, at Ago Okota recently, a 35-member gang of armed robbers exchanged gunfire with the police for over two hours in an attempt to rob a bank.

In the process, a security guard of the bank was killed while huge amount of money was carted away.

Another 15-member gang stormed a bank in Ayetoro area of Epe Township in August at about 1.45 a.m.

The robbers were said to have raided some residential houses around before proceeding to raid the bank. Police's quick intervention stopped the raid.

A police officer and two security guards attached to a bank at Ogudu were killed recently when robbers attacked a bank in the area.

The armed men arrived at the bank at about 9.00 a.m., when full-banking operations had started. Their sporadic shooting overwhelmed the security men on duty before going entry into the bank.

Another of such gruesome robbery occurred at ACME, Ikeja branch of a new generation bank in mid-August, leaving a commercial bus operator dead during a shootout between the police and the robbers.

Lagosians who use pedestrian bridges at night are also routinely robbed mid-way on the bridge.

According to Muyibat Akani, a trader who resides at Onipanu, Palm Groove, while I was going home after the day's business, three young men double-crossed me on the bridge pointing a gun at me and two other persons to surrender our money. N3,000 was collected from me before we were let go".