

# Three feared killed as okada, tricycle operators resist ban in Lagos

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Three persons were yesterday feared killed and many others injured as policemen and tricycle operators clashed in the Ijora area of Lagos State. Commercial tricycle (Keke) and motorcycle (Okada) operators had taken to the streets to protest against the ban by the Lagos State government in 15 local councils on the first working day since the order came into effect on Saturday, February 1.

The police accosted the protesters who made a bonfire on the road and both sides engaged each other in a fight that left three persons dead while many others sustained injuries. The victims included a student, a woman in an Ilorin-bound vehicle, and a tricycle operator.

The fracas also led to destruction of vehicles and other properties in the area. A stray bullet hit a commercial bus driver identified as Baba Ibeji during the clash. The violence disrupted activities in the area as many school pupils were forced to return to their homes. The clash started at about 7:00a.m. at 7up bus-stop and spilled into streets within Ijora Oloye.

The Okada and Keke riders in the area had insisted on resuming operation in disobedience to the ban placed on their activities by the state government. The police on the other hand resisted them, leading to a shootout that left many passersby injured. It was in the heat of the violence that Baba Ibeji was hit on the stomach by a flying bullet.

“He was sitting in the bus while they were loading passengers for him. We don't know if he is dead or alive but he has been rushed to a hospital,” an eyewitness said. “A student and a little boy sent on an errand were also injured during the shootout.”

But in a sharp reaction, the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Bala Elkana, denied the alleged shooting, saying no casualty was recorded. Elkana said policemen dispersed the protesters, who according to him, set up a bonfire and attacked innocent citizens.

Eyewitnesses however insisted that the victims were hit by bullets as policemen attached to Badia division shot sporadically to scare the protesters away. Some tricycle and okada operators had gathered at the Ijora causeway axis of Apapa road, setting up a bonfire to protest the restriction order.



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The protesters were alleged to have vandalised some vehicles including that of a policeman. Having been dispersed from the earlier spot, it was learnt that the protesters regrouped at the front of the secretariat of Apapa Iganmu LCDA along Gaskiya road, where they were also chased away by the police.

Elkana said: “It was a violent protest because they attack innocent citizens and we can not fold our arms to watch them perpetrate evil. I am not aware of any casualty. From the brief I have gotten so far, nobody was killed or injured. The hoodlums caused major obstructions on the roads, burning tyres, looting and stealing from unsuspecting road users. Police officers from Ijora Badia, Area B Command and Special Strike Force on Social Miscreants were promptly deployed to the scene. The situation was brought under control. The obstructions were cleared for free flow of traffic. No life was lost. Twenty suspects were arrested. Investigation is ongoing, the suspects will be charged to court.”

Elkana also noted that the command wishes to reiterate that motorcycles used for courier services are not included in the restrictions placed on motorcycles in Lagos. According to him, “operators of courier services must strictly obey traffic laws and ensure that they do not drive against traffic (one-way). Dispatch riders must put on their crash helmets and should have the dispatch box fixed at the back of the motorcycle. The bike must strictly be used for courier purposes, no carrying of passengers. Power bikes are also not affected by the restrictions.”

It was, however, gathered that the protest had escalated to Ajegunle area of the state as Keke and Okada riders prevented commercial vehicles from carrying out their duties. An okada rider, Val, said: “There is no work in the country. The only lucrative work is crime. But we decided to be useful to ourselves by picking Okada and Keke. Today, the government has denied us and our families a means of livelihood. Is the government telling us to go into crime? We won’t allow vehicle drivers to operate because, instead of them to be in solidarity with us, they are busy jubilating and carrying passengers, even hiking the fare because many people are stranded.”

In spite of the ban, the usual traffic congestion in the metropolis continued yesterday. It was gathered that there was no significant difference in the traffic situation compared to when the operators were not banned. The gridlock along Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway, Agege Motor Road, Oshodi-Isolo and some other parts of the state continued.

A large number of commuters were stranded at Kola, Ile-Epo, Iyana-Ipaja, Iyana-Dopemu bus stops, seeking vehicles to convey them to their offices. While many were grumbling and complaining over the ban in most bus stops, some others resorted to trekking from Iyana-Ipaja to Ikeja and Oshodi.



A commuter, Mr. Saheed Raheem, urged the state government to expedite action on the Oshodi-Abule Egba Bus Rapid Transit corridor to reduce the pains of people living in Alimosho. He said: “Things are no longer the same. Things are not easy for commuters, especially those of us living along this Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway. I think the

government should have waited until the inauguration of this our BRT here. It would have reduced the stress.”

Meanwhile, the Ogun State government on Monday said it would absorb all the shock that its proximity to Lagos brings with the influx of commercial motorcycle (Okada) operators to Ogun border towns with Lagos. Speaking to reporters in Abeokuta, the state capital, the Transport Committee Chairman, Femi Adeniyi, admitted many of the operators have started pouring into Akute, Alagbole, Ajunwon, Sagamu, Ijebu – Ode, Ifo, Ibafo and Mowe areas of the state following the ban on their operations in some designated areas of Lagos.

Adeniyi said such migration from Lagos to Ogun has its advantages, as the new settlers would also join hands with others to drive the socioeconomic development of the Gateway State to a higher level. He stressed that should the “agents of darkness” among the genuine Okada operators dare try to practice what caused their eviction from Lagos, similar fate would befall such person or individuals.

Opposition political parties in Lagos yesterday berated Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) for the ban placed on operators of commercial motorcycles, tricycles in some routes across the state. In separate interactions with The Guardian, gubernatorial candidates of Action Democratic Party (ADP), Mr. Babatunde Gbadamosi; and Abundant Nigerian Renewal Party (ANRP), Abiodun Dabiri, expressed concern that Sanwo-Olu’s action would not only create bad blood among the ethnic groups but may also portray the state in bad light before the internal community, some of which invested massively in the organized Opay, Gokada, Max.ng and others.

They also expressed worry that the manner in which the police authority aggressively enforced the order even beyond restricted routes may defeat the aims and purpose for which the decision was issued. Some opposition also gave the government ultimatum to reverse itself on the issue.

Also, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has faulted the ban, stating that the action of government has shown that the ruling party is an elitist government that is insensitive to the plight of the masses. Taofik Gani, Publicity Secretary of the party, said it is already in talks with leaders of civil society organisations to stage protests in the streets of Lagos if the hardship being experienced by Lagosians as a result of the ban continues.

Jimi Agbaje, a chieftain of the PDP, said the outright ban on okada and tricycles in some parts of Lagos is not the solution to accidents and insecurity, which is the primary concern of government.

Reacting, spokesman of Lagos APC, Mr. Seye Oladejo, described such ultimatum as needless and inconsequential. He said Sanwo-Olu had merely implemented an existing law. He flayed the resolve to violent protest by the affected operators, saying: “While it

is within their right to protest, the resort to self-help or violence should also be addressed within the confines of the law.



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The chairman of Lagos State Council of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Alhaji Musiliu Ayinde Akinsanya aka MC Oluomo, has warned members of the union across the state not to increase the transport fare. The increment, he said, would inflict more pains on Lagosians.

Akinsanya spoke with the union leaders yesterday at the Agege union's headquarters. According to him, the crisis over the state government's policy on commercial motorcycles and tricycles calls for calm. "We are discussing with the state government. The matter requires wisdom because the government will always be government and no one can prevent the government from implementing its laws. Ours is to thread with caution and continue to engage the government on the way forward," he said.

He warned that any driver caught increasing fare would not only be punished, but the union leaders in the park such driver operates would also be sanctioned.

Some people at Ojuelegba could not hide their anger, saying that they trekked from Idi Araba, Ijesha and other places in Surulere to Ojuelegba, Yaba. A mother of two, who simply identified herself as Mummy AbdulMojid, said she trekked with her children from Banire St. to Nathan St., Surulere, a long distance, to take her children to school, urging the government to look into the ban.

A student of St Catherine Schools at Ojuelegba, Johnson Nwachukwu, said he trekked from Lawanson to Ojuelegba because he could not find a tricycle to pick him. "Most of us are trekking to schools because motorcycles and tricycles have been banned in Surulere, where we reside."



