

# TheMetroSection

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## Cash scarcity: Protests rock Benin, Warri, Ilorin, Benin, Uyo

From Godwin Ijedor and Monday Osayande (Asaba), Michael Egbajule (Benin City), Odun Edward (Ilorin), Rotimi Agboluaje and Moyosore Salami (Ibadan) and Ayoyinka Jegede (Uyo)

• Banks, POS operators attacked as parents, school children scamper for safety, as three feared killed • Ibadan commuters resort to trekking as fish sellers reject old notes • Okowa appeals for calm as police arrest five in Ilorin

COMMERCIAL activities were paralysed yesterday, in various parts of the country, as protesters took to the streets, barricading roads in protest against the hardship occasioned by cash scarcity and high costs of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS).

In Benin, the Edo State capital, residents barricaded the ever-busy Ugbowo-Lagos expressway and other major roads in the state capital to protest scarcity of the new naira notes.

The incident is coming weeks after a similar protest rocked the city, where residents marched against fuel scarcity and price hike, which led to setting up of a special Petrol Monitoring Committee by Edo State government.

Yesterday's protest resulted in gridlock in the Ugbowo area near the University of Benin, Kingsquare, popularly called Ring Road and other link roads and left motorists and other road users stranded for several hours.

Also, commuters plying the Ugbowo-Lagos expressway, which is a major Federal road that connects Benin City to the South-South and South-East routes, had a hectic time gaining access to their destinations.

Commercial Banks located within Ring Road and adjoining streets of Akpakpava, Mission Road and Forestry, recorded losses as customers and angry protesters attacked the banks, destroyed facilities and demanded their money.

The protests left school children in confusion as parents hurriedly rushed to pick them from schools for fear of being attacked.

Some residents, who spoke to The Guardian lamented their frustration, saying they had been going to banks for cash withdrawal, but they could not access their money.

The protesters who lamented the hardship said they became agitated when commercial banks refused to accept the old naira notes as deposits.

The protests were taken to the popular Akpakpava Road, housing most of the



Protesting fish sellers in Ibadan, yesterday. PHOTO: ROTIMI AGBOLUAJE

commercial banks head offices, as the angry protesters attacked the banks.

Youths and traders who formed the protests, erected road blocks and bonfires on major roads, stormed Point of Sale (POS) centres, destroying their cubicles, thereby disturbing commercial activities in the state.

Three people were feared killed in the protest, but the Public Relations Officer of the Edo State Police Command, Chidi Nwabuzor, was yet to confirm the number of casualties at press time.

Also, angry customers yesterday set fire on Access Bank in Warri, Delta State, to protest their frustration against cash scarcity and the refusal of Commercial Banks to accept the old notes.

The angry customers, mostly youths in the early hours of yesterday, in Udu road axis of the town also touched some vehicles, disrupted vehicular movements and destroyed valuable property in the area.

The protesting youths said the persisting scarcity of new notes caused hardship, while their money were seized at the banks.

Meanwhile, Governor of Delta State and Vice-Presidential Candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa has reacted swiftly, and appealed to angry customers and other Nigerians in the state to remain calm.

The governor's appeal was contained in a statement by the state Commissioner for Information, Mr. Charles Aniagwu in Asaba.

He called on the people to remain calm while also ap-

pealing to the Central Bank of Nigeria and the monetary authorities to increase the money supply in the system.

In Ilorin, youths took to the streets yesterday, barricading strategic motor roads in the ancient town. Worst hit areas were: the gate of University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UIITH), Old Jebba Way, Ogidi-Oloje, Oloje and Tanke.

Attempts at staging blockades at Maraba and Offa Garage area were thwarted by gun wielding police officers patrolling the areas.

Men of the 32 armoured brigade of Nigeria army, Sobi, were drafted to the UIITH to ward off the protesters. Sporadic sounds of gunshots were heard at the area as many of the protesters took to their heels, scampering for safety.

Maraba area, a commercial beehive of activities was deserted, leaving on the road, few privately driven vehicles and commercial tricycles.

This development, left many pedestrians stranded as many others trekked several kilometers to and from their destinations.

The Kwara State Police Commissioner, Paul Odama attributed the development to the activities of some disgruntled politicians.

He however urged parents to call their children to order. Already, five persons have been arrested over the incidence.

According to Odama, yesterday, in a chat with reporters, "Kwara State Police Command woke up to an unlawful burning of dis-used tires on some major roads in the Ilorin Metropolitan Area this morning, in spite of the earlier warn-

ing by the Command against such unwholesome behaviour by hoodlums in the wake of the Naira note swap."

He advised parents and guidance to warn their children or wards to avoid being used as cannon-fodder by disgruntled political activists, as anyone arrested in the process of committing any crime, either as a result of the fuel or Naira challenges, would be made to face the consequences of such actions alone.

"Once again, the good people of Kwara State are advised to go about their lawful daily endeavours. Enough security arrangements have been made across the length and breadth of Kwara State to ensure the safety and security of law-abiding citizens and residents. "The five suspects already arrested in the course of the disturbances this morning would be charged in court."

In Ibadan, residents resorted to trekking long distances to reach their destinations, as protesters barricaded major highways at different strategic points in many parts of the city.

The areas include: Iwo Road Roundabouts, Iyana Church, Agodi-Gate, Idi-Ape, Mokola Roundabouts, Queen Cinema, Ekotedo, Dugbe, Sango, Ojoo, Eleyele and Agbowo.

It was observed that many shops did not open while some eateries also operated skeletal services.

Some parents rushed to schools of their children to take them home. Those who could not reach the children's schools made calls that the students



A commercial bank on Akpakpava attacked by angry protesters yesterday, in Benin City. PHOTO: MICHAEL EGBAJULE

they got to the market on Wednesday morning. Adebayo said: "We came here to protest. We went to Bodija Market this morning to buy fish, they did not collect old notes from us. That is why we are here this morning."

"We want the government to extend the date for us. The development is affecting our sales. The notes we have collected are old ones. Each of us has about N30,000 of the old notes".

DEPOSITORS of old naira notes scampered for safety at the premises of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) along Banking Layout, Udo Udoma Avenue in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State capital as anti-riot policemen opened tear gas on them as they went to deposit their old notes, which traders, market women, transporters and others in the state are rejecting. Some who spoke with The Guardian lamented as they were unable to even eat due to scarcity of new notes and rejection of old notes.

Citizens woke up this morning to notice that old notes were being rejected as means of exchange in the state.

One Mfon, who spoke with The Guardian said he has not eaten, neither was he able to get transportation to visit his pregnant wife and children due to rejection of old notes.

Disturbed by the development, those in possession of the old notes moved in large numbers to the Central Bank of Nigeria to deposit them.

It was gathered that the number of depositors became so much that the policemen on duty had to fire tear gas to avert disorder at the apex bank.

But before the incident, many filling stations and business outlets refused to accept the old notes.

In Uyo city, commuters were unable to get to their destinations, including public sector workers who were stranded along the major roads in the metropolis as buses and taxis including tricycle operators rejected the old notes.

The rejection came amid growing scarcity of the new naira notes, as customers continue to besiege banks to no avail, looking for the new notes.