

21 Die In Auto Crash In Ondo

By Yemi Akintomide
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT, Akure

Twenty-one people lost their lives in an accident involving two commercial buses, which occurred at Bolorunduro, in Ondo East Local Government area of Ondo State along Ondo/Akure highway.

The buses a 14-seater Toyota bus and 18-seater Mazda bus had only three survivors, that includes a two-year old boy.

According to an eyewitness, the accident occurred at about 6.30 am on Thursdays when the two buses had a head-on collision which resulted into the death of the passengers.

It was learnt that the Lagos bound 18-seater bus was coming from Akure, when its driver overtook another car, but lost control and faced the other bus at a high speed.

The 14-seater bus was said to have on board, market women on

their way to Alade Idanre market in Idanre/Owena local government area of the state.

An eyewitness told *Daily Independent* that the accident would have been avoided if the two buses were not on high speed.

"It is fortunate that these people lost their lives at this time Christmas. I am imploring the government to do something on this road by dualising it so as to prevent this kind of accident on the road", he said. When *Daily Independent* con-

tacted the Ondo State Sector Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Kongari Ahmed Hassan, he confirmed the accident, saying that the survivors have been taken to the State General Hospital-Ondo, while the remains of the deceased has been deposited at the morgue of the Hospital.

He advised road users, especially commercial drivers to exercise patience on the highways during the yuletide season.

Fares Soar As Fuel Scarcity Hit Port-Harcourt

With less than a week to Christmas, intra and inter state transport fares went up as fuel scarcity hit Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that many filling stations in the city and its environs have had no fuel since Sunday and that those who have, hiked the

price to N90 per litre.

Consequently, intra-city route fares that usually go for N40 now goes for N50 or N70 depending on the distance, while inter-state routes have gone up by over 15 per cent. From Port Harcourt to Enugu by bus is now N800 as against the original N700, while Port Harcourt to Umuahia goes for

N600 as against N400.

Similarly, fares from Port Harcourt to Calabar by bus now go for N1,000 as against N900, while the Port Harcourt-Uyo route goes for N700 as against N600.

The public affairs unit of the Department for Petroleum Resources (DPR) in Port Harcourt declined to speak on the issue but a member of

the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN), Martins Nworgu, attributed the scarcity to technical problems at the Port Harcourt refinery. Nworgu, a former national auditor of IPMAN said that the refinery had power failure and that it halted the supply of petroleum products to customers.

ACAMB Lauds CBN Over MPR

The recent introduction of the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), as a replacement for the Minimum Rediscount Rate (MRR), has been described as another bold initiative that would fast track the growth of the nation's economy.

This assertion was made by the Association of Corporate Affairs Managers of Banks (ACAMB).

According to the Association, "the MPR being a flexible rate would make funds more accessible to loan-seekers, impact positively on other rates, control liquidity in the system and ensure sustainable economic growth".

ACAMB also described as a good omen the introduction of Standing Lending Facility (SLF) and Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) as major elements of the MPR. These facilities, it pointed out, would checkmate liquidity volatility in the financial sector.

The Association added that the new rate, which has an upper limit of 13% and lower limit of 10%, would place banks on a stronger pedestal to drive the economy to the desired direction.

It also solicited the support of the public, including the stakeholders, to ensure a success of this policy, which is meant to further promote economic growth and development of the country.

While commending the CBN for introducing the MPR, the Association assured of the commitment of banks to the ongoing efforts of the government at building a more robust Nigerian economy.



Presiding Bishop, The Redeemed Evangelical Christian Mission, Bishop Mike Okonkwo (right), and his Special Assistant on media, Pastor (Mrs.) Yomi Uteh during a press briefing in Lagos ... on Thursday. Photo: Dele Onatade

Fayemi Moves To Reconcile Aggrieved AC Members

By Gbenga Sodeinde
REPORTER, Ado Ekiti

Action Congress (AC) governorship candidate in Ekiti State, Kayode Fayemi, has begun reconciliation moves aimed at bringing back into the party, its aggrieved members.

Fayemi, who spoke in a chat with *Daily Independent* in Ado Ekiti, said the move became necessary so as to ensure that power is wrestled from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) come 2007.

Already his reconciliatory moves have started yielding result as no fewer than eight of the aggrieved members who had earlier defected

to another party have agreed to come back and work with him to ensure the victory of the party come 2007 election.

His word: "My main priority now is to try and bring everyone on board so as to prosecute the main challenge ahead of us. I have visited most of the aspirants and extended my hand of cooperation to them and the response has been positive.

"At least eight of them have dissociated themselves from the so-called G14 that claimed to have decamped from the Party. It is my objective to ensure that the remaining aspirants also see reason to remain loyal members of our

Party.

"I have also assured them that there is enough room in government for all to actualise our dreams. But we must first win the election and not flitter away the goodwill that the Ekiti people are extending to the party."

He however noted for the purpose of clarity that security reports have been carried out on the last party primaries, which was responsible for the cancellation of election in 39 wards meant to come from people associated with two aspirants.

The AC candidate described his victory at the poll as a result

of hardwork and the love people for him and also declared it is a victory for all members of the party. "If you commit anything into my care trust me, I shall not sleep but work day and night to ensure that I delivered more than the peoples' expectation.

Meanwhile, a chieftain of the AC in the state, Akin Fasae has described the emergence of Fayemi as the choice of the majority calling on the defected members to come back. Nobody would wish to pull his house down because of a tenant whose face he doesn't like. In situation like this, extreme caution is needed.

Robbers Kill Seven Policemen In Ibadan

By Sola Shittu
REPORTER, Ibadan

Seven policemen were killed in a robbery operation involving two banks, in Agbowo, Ibadan, Oyo State, in the early hours of Thursday.

Residents of the area were terrified by the gunshots from the robbers said to be about 30.

Also, property worth millions of naira were destroyed when some shops got burnt after the robbers shot the tank of a police Toyota Hilux van which burst into flames.

An ALGON jeep marked PF874HQ was also shattered by bullets from the robbers.

At the scene of the incident, blood of victims of the mayhem were seen on the ground, which was littered with slippers and other effects.

Sympathisers were seen at the scene of the incident expressing disbelief at the way the area was turned upside down, while the affected shop owners wept over their loss.

A night guard who narrowly escaped said the robbers came into the area around midnight with sophisticated weapons and gas cylinders and did not leave till four in the morning.

The guard who said he watched the events from a hideout told *Daily Independent* that as soon as they arrived, they dispossessed the banks' guards of their arms and ordered them to open the gate for them while some of them jumped the fence into the bank premises.

He said he escaped narrowly as the robbers noticed his presence and shot in his direction but he was lucky to have laid

in a nearby ditch.

"I heard their footsteps around 12 (midnight). Then I heard a shot, I thought it was banger, but on a closer look, I saw about thirty people. They moved towards the banks and ordered the guards to open the gate. By then some of them have scaled the fence into the banks premises. I also noticed a vehicle that carried gas cylinders", he said.

The amount were carted away was unknown, but a guard confirmed that the strong room of one of the banks was broken into, while N30,000 was also stolen from the suit of one of the workers. However the people of the area were not as lucky as their houses were perforated by bullets from the robbers. Traders in the area who said they have just

stocked their shops for the end of the year sales were most affected.

Two of the shop owners, Taiwo Adebayo and Felicia Osunde said they lost about N1.5 million to the attack and called on the government to help them.

Meanwhile the state police command said two policemen and not seven were killed in the robbery attack.

Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Olu Akinmoladun, who addressed journalists in his office, said the robbers' firepower was strong so the police had to call for an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) to chase them away.

He however said that four police officers were critically injured in the incident and are already in the hospital.

He said though no arrest was made, the police however succeeded in using the APC to drive them away.

The PPRO also confirmed that the robbers succeeded in raiding one of the banks, but could not say how much was lost to them.

"We received a distress call around 1.00 am that a armed robbery attack was going on at Agbowo. We thought it was another bank in the area that they were attacking so we mobilised our men all over the city to go there. It was while they were going to the supposed bank that they ran into an ambush and two of our men were killed, a driver and patrol officer. Akinmoladun however assured the people of the state of their safety.

MOSOP Boss Lauds Jonathan's Choice

By Fabian Ozor
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT, Lagos.

President of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Rivers, Ledum Mitee, has praised the choice of Governor Goodluck Jonathan of Bayelsa State as the Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) vice-presidential candidate.

Mitee said this in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on Thursday that the choice of Jonathan was a welcome development to the people of the Niger Delta region.

He urged the Federal Government to use the nomination of Jonathan as an opportunity "to address the problems of the region".

On whether the choice would curb youth restiveness in the region, Mitee said the will of the government in power to address the problems would determine the mood of the people.

"No matter where the leader comes from, the will of the government in power to deal with the problems of the region would determine the restiveness or otherwise", he said.

"Even if you put me as the president and I do not have the political will to deal with the problem, it will still remain".

The Ogoni leader urged the PDP led government to use the choice of Jonathan as an avenue to deal with the Niger Delta problems.

"I think that the most important thing for us in the Niger Delta is to have our problems solved no matter where the leader comes from.

"We will also be happy if Niger Delta people are given more positions of responsibility," He said.