

How 16 perished in Lagos-Ibadan expressway auto crash

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RESIDENTS watched helplessly amidst flow of tears in Omi-Adio, Ido Local Government Area of Oyo State on Sunday, January 9, as 16 people were roasted in a motor accident that occurred along Ibadan-Abeokuta expressway. Bodies were burnt beyond recognition.

Saturday Independent learnt the accident involving two commercial buses was caused by bush burning by some hunters searching for wild animals at Omi-Adio village.

Eyewitness accounts told Saturday Independent that the bush burning caused flame that blocked the bus drivers' vision thereby preventing them from seeing other vehicles driving towards them.

Victims of the accident included some students of the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (UNAAB), women and children. Four persons including a three-year-old boy were, however, rescued in the accident.

Charred bodies of the victims littered the ground while sympathisers were seen wailing when Saturday Independent visited the scene on Sunday evening. Some of the sympathisers wept profusely while condemning those who set the bush on fire and, therefore, called on the Federal Government to enact a law against bush burning on expressway and provide stiffer penalty for offenders.

Saturday Independent gathered that while one of the two affected buses was going from Ibadan to Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital, the other one was coming to Ibadan from Abeokuta.

The accident occurred few minutes after the bus going to Abeokuta stopped and picked some passengers at the Omi-Adio garage, few metres away from the scene of the accident.

An eyewitness told Saturday Independent that the two buses skidded off the road

after head-on collision and landed on the other side of the expressway, which had already been set on fire, and went up in flames with their occupants.

Saturday Independent learnt that those who rushed to the scene of the accident immediately were prevented from going near the buses by the burning fire.

Men of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) and State Fire Service were seen on the spot of the accident battling to retrieve the burnt bodies from the wrecked buses.

Officials of the FRSC rushed the survivors to the University College Hospital (UCH) while corpses were collected into a long container made of wood before they were conveyed, by a pick-up van belonging to the FRSC, to the morgue.

Men of the fire service who arrived late to the scene of the accident had a hectic time putting off the fire from both sides of the expressway, while long queue of vehicles were formed due to the traffic jam that resulted from the site of the incident. A Police Inspector, Sesan Kayode, from the Apata, Ibadan Police Division led a team of policemen to the accident spot 30 minutes after it occurred.

"We received a distress call from some of the commercial motor drivers plying the route who witnessed the accident, informing us that some persons were trapped in the vehicles, which went up in flames after the accident, while we were at a road block at Bakatari area of Ido Local Government area of the state.

"Two of us hurriedly went to inform the officials of FRSC when we got to the scene while others went to the Fire Service Station at Aleshinloye Market because of the intensity of the fire.

Their arrival actually helped to rescue four of the trapped victims, though they were severely burnt by the fire, there is still hope that they would survive," one of the policemen who

pleaded anonymity told Saturday Independent. For two hours, the fire fighters along with other people who volunteered engaged in rescue operation, while the raging fire could not be quenched hours after the accident.

Senior Fire Superintendent, Adeleke Abiodun, who led men of the fire service to the accident scene, was busy with the evacuation of the bodies of the deceased. He explained why only four could be rescued, saying "as soon as the two police officers who came to inform us arrived, we took off immediately but due to the distance and traffic on the Apata, Ibadan axis we were only able to rescue four people trapped in the buses."

Speaking on the accident, L.A. Lawal who led men of the FRSC team to the spot described the accident as very horrible, but added that it would have been avoided if people had not put fire by the sides of the expressway.

The FRSC team leader therefore appealed to people to desist from bush burning especially when it is close to expressway.

"You can see the number of innocent lives lost.

The drivers of the buses could not be able to see their front because of the thick smoke that covered the road. And you can see that it happened at a sharp bend, the one coming from here could not see the other one coming from the other end which resulted in head on collision that claimed the lives of these people.

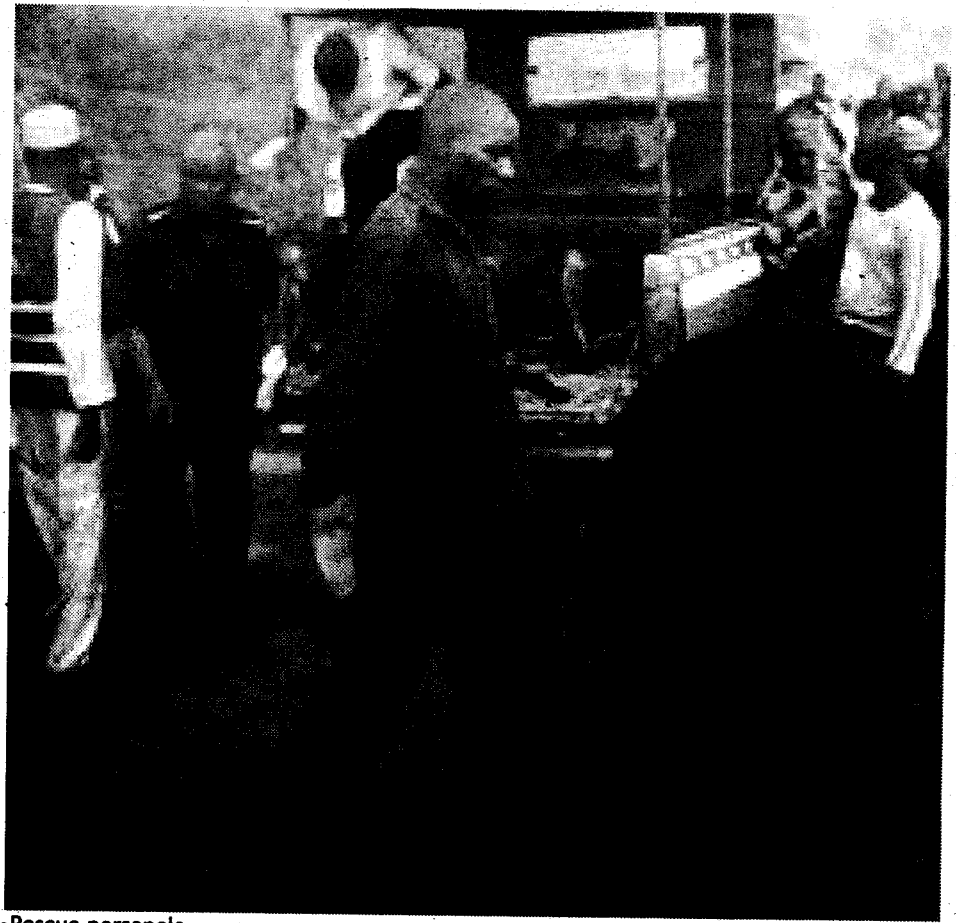
Tell the people who were fond of this habit to stop it forthwith," the FRSC boss said.

Also speaking to Saturday Independent on the accident, Chairman of the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in Ido Local Government Area, Muritala Adekola Ifawale, said the congress always appeal to the god of iron to prevent motor-accidents on the Omi-Adio axis of the Ibadan-Abeokuta expressway.

The OPC leader lamented that it was



•Wreckage of the two buses



•Rescue personels

unfortunate that such an accident that claimed lives of innocent Nigerians happened in the area when people were still celebrating the New Year. Muri Omi, as the OPC leader is popularly known added that members of the OPC in the area were not in the habit of burning bushes in search of bush meat.

He stressed the need for government, especially the authorities of the Ido Local Government area, to educate hunters in the area on the dangers of bush burning.



•Muri-Omi