

Metro

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BRT buses in flames as *okada* riders protest colleague's death

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ENRAGED by the way one of their members was alleged to have been crushed to death on the ever busy Ikorodu Road at the Mile 12 section, commercial motorcycle operators, otherwise called *okada* riders on Wednesday took laws into their hands and set ablaze two buses in the fleet of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme.

The deceased according to eyewitness carried two passengers on the Mile 12 Express way against official regulation forcing officials of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) to intercept him in motion.

Daily Independent gathered that in an attempt to evade arrest, the *okada* rider ran into an oncoming BRT bus after dropping off the two passengers in a hurry.

The incident drew the ire of his colleagues, who chased away all LASTMA officials in the area; invaded BRT buses within reach, and injured many passengers before setting two of them (a red and a blue bus) on fire.

The confrontation engendered commotion in the area, with people scampering for safety as policemen drafted to the area shot sporadically into the air to scare the irate riders and many others away from the scene.

The uproar paralysed commercial activities in the early hours of Wednesday as buses operating under the BRT scheme withdrew their services, leaving many commuters stranded at the various bus stops.

According to an Assistant Commissioner of Police, Godwin Nwobodo, who spoke to Daily Independent at the scene of the incident, the protesters burnt the vehicles when a police team that was trying to maintain orderliness took the motorcycle rider away for prompt medical attention. He however stated that there was no casualty from the burning incident as passengers, apprehensive of public unrest, had quickly fled from the two buses, immediately the motorcycle driver was hit.

"After the police team took the man to hospital, the miscreants and hoodlums took advantage of their absence to set the buses on fire. I was even

going on another assignment when I saw this and I had to stop to forestall further outburst," he said.

Nwobodo said the motorcycle rider was receiving medical attention as against the rumour that he died on the spot.

"As I am talking to you now, as of this moment, the man is still alive," said Mr. Nwodo, who however, could not disclose if any arrest has been made in connection with the crisis.

At the Presidential Lounge of the Murtala Muhammed Airport (MMA), Lagos on arrival from Abuja on Wednesday, Governor Babatunde Fashola who confirmed that he had preliminary report on the incident, appealed to residents to control their anger.

"This is why I have consistently advocated peaceful co-existence, tolerance. Incidence will happen that will provoke our temper, I am human too and at every time I have find it in me to control temper and this is what all of us must do as a people. I think it is important here to stress that violence and anger are not options for a people who want development. Violence and anger is not a

strategy, it is sign of weakness," he quoted as saying.

He added; "I want to appeal to people; anger management is something that we must develop. The burning of two LAG buses if that is true; it means that those who participated in it have just also contributed in burning the assets that we acquired with their money."

His Special Adviser on Transport, Comrade Kayode Opeifa while briefing newsmen at the Bagauda Kalitho Press Centre, Alausa Secretariat, said no live was lost in the incident which he said was sparked off by a bullion van that violated the BRT lane.

"We got the information about 9:30 am that trouble was about to start. The incident started with the arrest and the attempt to refuse arrest by a bullion driver van that violated the BRT regulation. When the bullion van was arrested by the LASTMA personnel who escorted the bullion van, the enforcement officers enquired that the bullion van with registration number, PF 269 XQY was arrested and it was at the point of arrest, that the owners of the vehicle mobilised some people to come and assist to refuse the

arrest, he stated.

According to him, the riders do not belong to any motorcycle group in Lagos, saying that they were not members of MOALS or ANOCOWA, but members of one group said to be prominent in Agboyi Ketu area. "But nobody died, if someone died, we would have been able to locate corpse and the relatives would have spoken out but we have confirmed that nobody died", Opeifa said.

Also speaking, Managing Director of LAGBUS, operators of the red buses confirmed that two buses, one red and one blue were set ablaze by the *okada* riders just as he decried the choice of the mob to vent their anger on the BRT buses.

Disu said: "The continued destruction of properties is very unfortunate, in destroying properties without regard for the value it brings, it destroys the deep feeling within a lot of people wanting to get on the buses, today we saw a situation where two buses were burnt, these buses are public properties, it is to help the masses. We appeal to the general public, if they see people wanting to destroy public property, they should prevent it"