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Pandemonium as soldiers burn BRT buses over death of colleague

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By **Ekene Okoro, Emmanuel Udom** and **Chinyere Abiaziem** (Lagos)

Irate soldiers' unleashed terror on **Friday** morning at **Palmgroove area of Ikorodu Road**, burning at least five BRT buses and others in **protest over the alleged killing of one of their colleagues by a BRT driver**.



The incident, which occurred around 9am left motorists and commuters stranded for several hours in traffic as some abandoned their vehicles and fled for fear of being attacked.

Commercial bus drivers, popularly known as *danfo* used it as opportunity to hike their fares.

A commuter said he boarded a bus from Anthony to Ojuelegba for N400 against N150.

An eyewitness told *Saturday Independent* that trouble started when a BRT bus hit a soldier who was riding a motorcycle popularly called *okada* with his colleague on the back seat and crushed him to death.

Shocked by the incident, his colleague mobilised other soldiers from nearby barracks to the scene and started vandalising BRT buses.

Some of the touched BRT buses were marked KJA 612 XA, FKJ 732 XL, KSF 976 XL, KSF 64 XL and KSF 106 XL and others

Fear gripped commuters in the area as not less than 50 soldiers suddenly stormed the scene and barricaded the busy Ikorodu Road.

As they arrived the scene, they vented their anger on passers-by sending many scampering for cover.

They blocked the expressway on both sides, causing traffic gridlock, forcing motorists to abandon their cars.

The soldiers then got hold of BRT buses within their reach, vandalised them and set them ablaze.

There was nothing policemen could do as the irate soldiers were armed and ready to deal with anyone that dared to confront them.

Officials of the Lagos State Traffic Management, LASTMA, for fear of becoming victims, removed their uniforms to disguise themselves.

Drivers and passengers on BRT fled as the rampaging soldiers attacked them.

Passengers of smaller buses also fled in different directions.

The entire road was deserted and traffic was at a standstill while commercial buses coming from Ojota refused to pick passengers to Yaba area as they all avoided Ikorodu Road.

The soldiers were said to have beaten up anybody on sight. They beat drivers and passengers or anyone who moved closer to take their photographs.

An eyewitness, who craved anonymity, said two civilians were beaten up while a man who was taking pictures was beaten and his phone smashed on the express road.

A LASTMA official, who craved anonymity, however, told a different version of the story, saying: “There was a broken down vehicle on BRT lane at Anthony. Two soldiers were on a motorcycle. They sped and rammed into the broken down bus and the soldier riding the bike fell died instantly. The passenger went and mobilised other soldiers and they took to the street and pounce on people.”

Another eye witness, who identified herself simply as Mrs. Okwo, said she saw five BRT buses being burnt by soldiers.

As at press time, BRT buses have been withdrawn from Ikorodu Road route to avoid being torched by the soldiers.

Reacting to the incident, Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Lagos State, Mr. Lateed Ibirogba, said the government was displeased with the action of the soldiers.

Ibirogba said government was in touch with the military authority.

“I can only advise the public to avoid Ikorodu Road for now. The military authority has assured us that in no time, everything will be under control. The public should bear with us as we did not plan for this,” the commissioner said.

Meanwhile, Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola, has decried the soldiers’ action assuring that the state government will take action, after investigations.

“I have been in touch with the Brigade commander, who assured that he was managing the situation. Nothing I have here is verified, I am waiting for formal report before we can take a position,” the governor told journalists.

Fashola, however, described the incident as condemnable and irresponsible, if the reports he has

received so far were anything to go by.

He decried the attack on BRT buses and said that it was disappointing that the soldiers who are funded by the tax payers' money could descend on buses that Lagosians are already complaining are inadequate to cater for their transportation need.

“There is allegation that someone who was not supposed to be on the BRT route was on it. As far as I know, if something happens to you while you are conducting an unlawful act, it is criminal offence in its own sense.

“But it is really disappointing that public servants, and that is what soldiers are, paid with tax payer's money, will act in a manner that is being suggested because I am waiting for official report to let me know who played what role and what happened. And whether the brigade commander has been able to identify the people who committed the offence. If it turns out to be true, it will be very irresponsible conduct to put it very mildly.”

“I remember in 2006 when soldiers stormed barracks and set the place ablaze the Area C Police Command. We just managed to reconstruct the command. If buses that citizens are complaining that were not enough are set ablaze, I do not know how setting ablaze buses recompense any injury that one may have suffered. I do not know how damaging public property is the restitution for the any injury that may have come. For now, the only thing that I can say to you is that when I get the full fact, I will address residents, to let them know what happened and what the state's action will be,” he said.

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