

Okada ban: Three feared killed, others injured as police, operators clash

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THREE persons were on Monday morning feared killed during a violent clash between commercial cyclists and policemen in Ijora, Apapa, Lagos.

Two of the victims were hit by stray bullets allegedly from the police team that attempted to disperse a riotous crowd of the operators. The third victim was a tri-cyclist alleged to be among those stoning commuters in commercial buses in protest of the ban on commercial motor and tricycles across six local government areas of the state which took effect on Saturday.

The operators engaged the policemen who moved early morning to enforce the ban placed by the state government.

They were said to have lit bonfires on the roads, pelted stones on commercial and private vehicles plying the road, including that of a policeman.

Many other people were said to have sustained injuries in the chaos while business activities were grounded for several hours.

Operators hundreds held a protest march at Ikeja and Ogba axis where they appealed to the government to reconsider the decision.

The protesters were led by members of the civil society and a pan-Yoruba youth group.

Shouting in Yoruba language, one of the protesters said: “Please help us beg Sanwo-Olu o! Does he want us to start stealing or snatching people’s bags? He did not give us any work as an alternative. Please help us beg him o!”

Although the march was peaceful, policemen were said to have fired gunshots and teargas into the air to disperse them to possibly avoid a recurrence of the Ijora incident.

According to a witness, Busayo Afolabi, people ran in different directions when the cops started shooting.

She said: “Ikeja is in shambles. These policemen are parading the streets with guns in their hand. They are shooting and throwing teargas in Ikeja. People are running.”

The ban also had its toll on commuters as many were forced to trek for long distances following their inability to afford the hike in fares introduced by commercial buses who saw a window for quick wealth.

Police spokesman Bala Elkana denied any death was recorded at the Ijora incident, adding that 24 persons were arrested.

“It is an ongoing situation. Reinforcement has been deployed and calm restored. But I do not have full details yet. Though, I do not think anyone died in the clash.

“The operators attacked innocent citizens and destroyed properties. The police cannot fold their arms in such a situation. They were dispersed. I cannot say for sure how many were arrested since it is still going on,” he said

Elkana said the police responded to a distress call that hoodlums armed with cutlasses and suspected to be commercial cyclists and thugs blocked major roads around Ijora Oloye, Amusu, Ijora 7Up, Underbridge, Sifa Junction and Gaskiya Road around 7:45am.

“The hoodlums caused major obstructions on the roads, burning tyres, looting and stealing from unsuspecting road users. Police Officers from Ijora Badia, Area B Command and Special Strike Force on Social Miscreants were promptly deployed to the scenes.

“The situation was brought under control. The obstructions were cleared for free flow of traffic. No life was lost. Twenty suspects were arrested. Investigation is ongoing. The suspects will be charged to court,” he said.

Elkana said he was not aware of the Ikeja protest, adding that the Commissioner Hakeem Odumosu has warned operatives to avoid harassment and extortion of courier riders.

According to him, policemen have been warned to ensure that the enforcement was only executed in areas announced by the state government and they must exhibit utmost professionalism in doing it.

Elkana said any cop caught harassing cyclists on courier service would be dealt with, as the directive exempted them.

“Operators of courier services must strictly obey traffic laws and ensure that they do not drive against traffic (one way). Dispatch riders must put on their crash helmets and should have the dispatch box fixed at the back of the motorcycle.

“The bike must strictly be used for courier purposes, no carrying of passengers. Power bikes are also not affected by the restrictions. The Commissioner of Police (CP) Hakeem Odumosu has issued circular to that effect to all the Area Commanders, DPOs and Police Officers across the state.

“The CP also warned police officers on enforcement to strictly abide by the rules of engagement as contained in the extant laws. The exercise must be free of harassment and extortion. Erring police officers will be dealt with in accordance with the law.

“Members of the Public with genuine grievances and complaints against police officers should call any of the following numbers: 08063025274, 08063104759, 08113615350, 08113615350,” he said.

Lagos deploys buses to ease pressure on roads

The Lagos State Bus Services Ltd. (LBSL) yesterday deployed additional 65 buses on Lagos roads.

LBSL Managing Director Idowu Oguntona, who addressed reporters at the firm’s office in Yaba, said the deployment was in addition to already existing buses on the roads.

He said: “What we noticed from when we deployed the buses in the morning, it helped people to move around; we’ve been able to record about 10,000 in terms of ridership just within the morning period and from our projection, this 65 buses will be able to carry 35,000 people daily when the situation becomes fully stabilised”.

The 65 buses, the MD said, are deployed to seven roads which are: Oshodi to Ajah, Inner Marina to Ajah, Obalende to Ajah, CMS to Ajah, Ikeja to Ojota, Ikeja to Ogba, Berger to Ojota.

He also said there were plans to have mini buses to ply the inner/feeder roads.

“The plan is to inject smaller buses, medium capacity buses that can carry about 30 passengers to the feeder roads,” he said.

Lagos PDP ultimatum baseless, says APC

Lagos State All Progressives Congress (APC) yesterday described as baseless and thoughtless the ultimatums given to Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu to reverse the partial ban on commercial okada and Keke Marwa.

Its Publicity Secretary, Seye Oladejo, said in a statement that Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leaders were fond of talking before thinking, adding that their criticism of the ban was in bad faith.

The statement reads: “My attention has been drawn to the needless and inconsequential ultimatum issued to Gov Babajide Sanwoolu-Olu on the partial okada/Marwa ban.

“For starters, let me acknowledge this as a comic relief from the recent nationwide upheaval and the harmattan heat. It also speaks volumes about the lawlessness and mindlessness of the leadership of the party called PDP.

“It’s a known fact that law and order that will engender development has never been in their front burner of democratic governance. Just recently, their largely discredited leadership embarked on an unprecedented protest against the judgement of the highest court in the land over the Imo state governorship election. But it was convenient to praise the same court when the judgement was favorable to them.

“It was therefore no surprise that they issued their empty threats to a sitting governor who merely implemented an existing law.

“Lagosians in their best judgement since the advent of democracy have consistently voted the progressive party to keep at bay the hawks who have wasted our collective patrimony in the recent past.

“The desperation to seek relevance is not lost on us.

While it is within their right to protest, the resort to self-help or violence should also be addressed within the confines of the law.

“We commend the sensitivity of the Sanwoolu-Olu government to provide succour with the release of 65 buses and ordering additional 550 buses to ameliorate the challenge facing commuters.

“The recent massive rehabilitation of roads across the state is also an effort in the right direction.

“We call on all and sundry to go about their lawful duties, ignore needless threats and allow law enforcement agencies to handle sponsored protests if there are any. The good thing is that the sponsors are not faceless.

Primero rolls out 300 buses

Primero Transport Services Ltd., operator of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Lagos, has rolled out more than 300 buses to cushion the effect of the Lagos State government’s ban on commercial motorcycles (Okada) and tricycles (Keke) operation in some parts of the state.

The Managing Director of the firm, Mr Fola Tinubu, in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Lagos, said the company had repaired and refurbished some of its buses to further meet the demand of teeming commuters.

“We have rolled over 300 buses out today to cushion the effects and we plan to put out even more later in the week.

“We have been repairing the faulty ones and plan to put even more on the road this week,” Tinubu said.

FRSC cautions motorists, commuters against overloading

The Zone RS2 Command of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) comprising Ogun and Lagos states has advised motorists against overloading following the ban and restriction of commercial motorcycle (Okada) and Tricycle (Keke) in Lagos.

The Zonal Commanding Officer, Mr Samuel Obayemi, spoke with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Lagos yesterday.

The zone RS2 Command of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) comprised Ogun and Lagos States.

Obayemi said officers of the corps would not close their eyes and watch motorists overloading their vehicles, especially commercial vehicles, for any reason.

Gridlock persists on Lagos roads

The usual traffic congestion in the metropolis continued yesterday, the first work day after the ban on commercial okada and tricycle.

A correspondent of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Lagos reports that there was no significant difference in traffic situation in the metropolis, compared to when the operators were not banned.

NAN reports that the gridlock along Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway, Agege Motor Road, Oshodi-Isolo and some other parts of the state continued.

The usual gridlock at Iyana-Ipaja, Iyana-Dopemu, Cement, Ile Zik, Ikeja Along, Bolade Oshodi, Under Bridge and other places persisted in spite of the ban and restriction of `Okada' and `Keke'.

The corridors, which had been known for unrestrained operations of motorcycles and tricycles, were devoid of such operations from Iyana-Ipaja to Oshodi.

The security operatives comprising the Police, Anti-Robbery Squad, Lagos State Neighborhood Safety Corps (LNSC) and officers of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) were on ground arresting the dissidents.

Some of the officers chased commercial vehicles flouting traffic laws and regulations along the corridors.

Some of the operatives were armed while others held tear gas and sticks to clampdown on recalcitrant motorcycle and tricycle operators and motorists.

A large number of commuters were stranded at Kola, Ile-Epo, Iyana-Ipaja, Iyana-Dopemu bus stops, seeking vehicles to convey them to their offices on the first working day after the ban and restriction.

While many were grumbling and complaining over the ban of `Okada' and `Keke' in most bus stops, some others resorted to trekking from Iyana-Ipaja to Ikeja and Oshodi.

Mrs Tosin Adebayo, a trader at Oshodi, said that the pain created by the ban was huge, urging the government to do more in reducing the plight of commuters.

At Onipanu, Mr Sayo Ogunsakin, a retired civil servant, described the ban as good in reducing `Okada-related accidents'.

Ogunsakin said: "We were not born with Okada. These deaths were too many with Okada.

"We will all adjust to this new development."

However, the ban in Surulere, Lagos Mainland and Apapa Local Government Areas (LGAs) ended the usual crowding, loitering and lawlessness of motorcycle and tricycle riders at Costain Roundabout, Ijora, Apapa road and Ojuelegba.

Meanwhile, some commuters were also seen trekking from Costain to Bode Thomas, Ijora and Oyingbo because of non-availability of motorcycles and tricycles.

At Oshodi-Isole Local Council Development Area (LCDA), the ban and restriction had little or no effect on traffic situation between Oke-Afa and Iyana-Isole as the usual gridlock persisted and many commuters resorted to trekking.

Tricycle operators protest

Tricycle operators from Lagos Mainland, Yaba and Oyingbo yesterday staged a peaceful protest at Maryland against the ban on their operations in some parts of the state by the Lagos State government.

The tricycle operators, commonly referred to as “Keke Maruwa”, urged the government to rescind its ban on commercial motorcycle and tricycle operators in 15 local government and council development areas which began on Saturday.

Hundreds of protesters carried placards with inscriptions such as “Create Jobs, Don’t Take Jobs”, “Sanwo-Olu, My Job is My Life” and Maruwa Operators are not Criminals”.

Mr Seun Adeleke, Chairman, National Union of Tricycle Operators, Yaba/Mainland told NAN that the government’s decision was unfair as it would plunge many able-bodied young men into unemployment.

He said: “We are the ones that voted for this government and we need government to support us. Look at everybody here now, they want to work. In Yaba/Mainland, we have over 500 tricycle operators and we pay N200 daily to the council.

“So we contribute to the economy and we want to continue to do that. Government should please look into this decision.”

A civil rights activist, Mr Wale Balogun, who mobilised the protest, said commercial motorcycle and tricycle operators were not responsible for the security challenges in Lagos.

‘Ogun ready for influx’

Ogun State government on Monday said the state would absorb the shock that its proximity to Lagos would bring with the influx of commercial motorcycle (Okada) operators to Ogun border towns with Lagos.

Speaking to reporters in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital, through the state’s Transport Committee Chairman, Femi Adeniyi, the government added that as a “responsible and responsive government,” it has

observed that Okada riders have started pouring into Akute, Alagbole, Ajunwon, Sagamu, Ijebu – Ode, Ifo, Ibafo and Mowe areas of the state following the ban on their operations in some designated areas of Lagos State.

He stressed that should the “agents of darkness” among the genuine Okada operators dare try to practice what caused their eviction from Lagos, a similar fate would befall such person or individuals.