

25 killed, 27 others missing, as irate youths attack commuter buses in Plateau

•Gov directs security agencies to fish out perpetrators •Akeredolu calls for calm •OPSH arrests 12

From Isaac Shobayo and Hakeem Gbadamosi

JOS, the capital of Plateau State, was thrown into mourning on Saturday following the gruesome killing of 25 travellers on Rukuba road in Jos North Local Government Area, with 27 others still missing.

Sunday Tribune learnt that the unfortunate incident occurred around 9.45 a.m. when passengers travelling in five vehicles from Bauchi to Ikalé in Ondo State ran into a procession conveying corpses of those killed in Irigwe, Bassa Local Government Area last week, for mass burial.

It is recalled that seven persons were allegedly killed last week in Bassa Local Government.

It was gathered that scores of sympathisers had assembled at Plateau State

Specialist Hospital by 7.00 a.m. on Saturday to convey the corpses to Miango for burial.

A source, who witnessed the incident, stated that the travellers, who were not privy to the happening, ran into the convoy and some irate youths who were among the sympathisers descended on the five buses, killed a number of them, majority of whom were Hausa/Fulani, based in Ondo State.

Sunday Tribune gathered that the travellers were returning from an Islamic new year prayer organised by a renowned cleric, Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi, in Bauchi State.

It was further learnt that about 27 passengers in the vehicles were still missing as of the time of filing this report, while those who sustained injuries were receiving treatment at Plateau

State Specialist Hospital.

When Sunday Tribune visited the Hospital, bodies of the 25 victims were being prepared for burial.

Governor Simon Bako Lalong, reacting to the development, warned people bent on fomenting trouble in Plateau State to desist, as the government will not allow any form of lawlessness to disrupt the peace of the state.

Governor Lalong condemned the act and immediately directed security agencies to identify and arrest the perpetrators, while cordoning off the area in order to restore calm.

He said attacks on innocent citizens, no matter their background, would never be tolerated in Plateau State and those found guilty would be decisively dealt with to serve as deterrence and restore public order.

The governor also commended security agencies for their immediate response, leading to the arrest of some suspects and the restoration of calmness to the area.

While commiserating with the families of those affected, the governor assured all law-abiding citizens that security had been beefed up around the area as well as the entire metropolis to forestall further breach of the peace.

In his reaction, the Ondo State governor, Mr Rotimi Akeredolu, has called for calm.

His Chief Press Secretary, Mr Richard Olatunde, described the attack as a case of mistaken identity.

In a press statement, the governor said he "received the unfortunate report of the Plateau State tragedy, where some people believed to be indigenes of

Ondo State were attacked.

"An unconfirmed number of deaths are believed to have been recorded while some are severely injured in the said attack. Their true identity will soon be unravelled."

Akeredolu stated that "the victims, according to preliminary reports, took a route where crisis between Muslims and Northern Christians had ensued for some time, and that they may have been possibly, mistaken for aggressors. Accordingly, either of the two feuding groups in the area could be responsible in this regard.

Akeredolu, however, called for calm among the people of the state, urging that nobody should take law into their hands, while he particularly, urged the people to refrain from any hasty colouration of the unfortunate incident.

The Plateau State police command while confirming the incident said 22 people died while 15 were injured.

The state Commissioner of Police, Edward Egbuka visited the scene and ordered an investigation into the incident.

Meanwhile, 'Operation Safe Haven' in charge of security in Plateau State has arrested five persons in connection with the incident.

According to the statement issued by the Command and signed by its spokesperson, Major Ishaku Gaji Takwa, the troop of 'Operation Safe Haven' on Saturday swiftly responded to distress calls that suspected hoodlums blocked Jos North junction on Rukuba road in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State and attacked some commuters.