

Four feared killed after suspected smuggler dodging Customs operatives collides with oncoming vehicle

Mob sets two Customs vehicles ablaze · Only one person died – Customs

Olakunle Maruf | Sokoto

ABOUT four persons were feared killed in a road accident on Sunday morning when a suspected smuggler trying to avoid operatives of the Nigeria Customs Service on Illela road in Sokoto State collided with a commercial vehicle, while another one ran into the accident.

However, an official statement from the Customs revealed that only one person was killed in the accident.

The incident led angry youths of the area to set ablaze two vehicles belonging to the Customs.

An eyewitness at the scene said the affected vehicles, two Toyota Avensis cars and a Golf Salon car, collided while one was trying to evade a stop-and-search by the Customs officials at the checkpoint.

The eyewitness said: "One

of the drivers was conveying goods like rice and vegetable oil from the Illela border and he ran into the Customs checkpoint located at Asara village.

"They [Customs] obstructed the driver in a bid to stop the vehicle for a search and that caused the driver to lose control. The car ran into an oncoming vehicle, while the one coming from the back rammed the two.

"Four persons were confirmed dead on the spot in two of the vehicles, while no fewer than six persons sustained various degrees of injury.

"The injured persons were later taken to Gwandabawa General Hospital for medical attention."

The development, according to the eyewitness, angered residents of the nearby village, who set ablaze two vehicles belong-

ing to the Customs.

The source said it took the intervention of men of the Nigerian Army, who were drafted to the scene, to prevent further attacks on Customs' facilities in the area.

Meanwhile, the Sokoto/Zamfara states command of the Customs has confirmed that suspected hoodlums attacked its personnel and burnt one operational vehicle and one private car in the process.

A press statement signed by the spokesman for the command, Tahir Balarabe, and made available to newsmen on Tuesday, also confirmed that one person was killed in the accident.

Balarabe, in the statement, said the command learnt that some vehicles were in the process of smuggling contraband through the land border in Illela into the country.

He said: "On January 2, officers of the Nigeria Customs Service, Sokoto/Zamfara Command's Mobile Team 'A,' based on credible intelligence, mounted a stop-and-search operation at Asara village on the Sokoto-Illela road.

"At about 8:00 a.m., a Toyota Avensis car with tinted glass believed to be conveying smuggled items was flagged down for a search, but the driver, upon sighting officers, tried to escape and in the process almost knocked down one of the officers who quickly jumped out of his way.

"Unfortunately, the vehicle ran into an oncoming commercial vehicle, which led to a head-on collision that resulted in the death of one passenger, while others sustained injuries and were taken to a nearby hospital for treatment.