

Colleagues protest as Rivers official beats driver to death

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• Stranded commuters trekking during the protest

By Dennis Naku

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Some commercial bus drivers on Monday staged a protest following the alleged killing of one of their colleagues by members of the state Task Force on Street Trading and Illegal Motor Parks set up by the state government.

PUNCH Metro gathered that during the protest which was done alongside taxi drivers, the protesters called for the scrapping of the task force in the state.

It was learnt that the deceased driver, whose identity could not be ascertained as of the time of filing this report, parked his bus for some passengers to disembark passengers on Sunday.

The task force officials were said to have swooped in on him and it led to an altercation that degenerated into a scuffle.

In the process, one of the task force officials allegedly beat him to a pulp.

In a bid to rescue the driver, people rushed him to hospital where he reportedly died as a result of the injuries he sustained during the incident.

When the news of the driver's death became public knowledge, it angered his friends and colleagues, who took to the streets in the Rumuokoro axis of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of the state to express their grievances over the tragic development.

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The protest affected vehicular movements in the area; while some passengers got stranded, some other passengers who could not cope with the traffic induced by the protest trekked to their destinations.

One of the protesters, who did not want his name in print, urged the government to ban task force officials from operating in the community.

“We don't need any task force again. From Rumuokoro, Igwuruta down to Rukpowu, we don't need any task force again. The annual tax in other states is not up to N5,000, but here in Rumuokoro, we pay more than N580,000 annually.

“Not only that, when you come to Port Harcourt, the state government approved only one ticket which is N300 for small vehicles and N400 for bigger vehicles. But all the local government areas in the state produced many tickets and stickers,” the protester said.

Speaking to newsmen, the state Secretary of the Drivers Welfare Association, Oloja Coleman, said, “Most of them are not even recognised in Rumuokoro, Igwuruta and Rukpowu. Somebody will just put on an apron, come out to the road and start harassing drivers.”

Contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer, Grace Iringe-Koko, who confirmed the incident, said the culprit had been arrested.

Iringe-Koko said,” They were having an argument, and one of the task force members beat the driver up. He was taken to the hospital but he died on Monday. The task force member has been arrested and is presently in police custody. Meanwhile, the investigation is ongoing.”