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Soldiers on rampage over death of colleague

9

BY CHIOMA IGBOKWE, OLUWOLE FAROTIMI AND ANTHONY OBI ON JULY 5, 2014 ·

COVER

Parts of Lagos were virtually shut down yesterday morning by irate soldiers who were protesting the killing of one of their colleagues reportedly knocked down by a hit and run LAGBUS driver at Palm Grove, Lagos.

Saturday Sun learnt that the errant LAGBUS bus had strayed off its designated lane to knock down and kill a soldier who was riding a motorbike. His colleague who survived the crash was said to have alerted their colleagues in the nearby military barracks who stormed the area in their hundreds.

The rampaging soldiers consisting of men and women stormed the Awoyokun bus-stop, on the busy Ikorodu road, beating everyone in sight before descending on the drivers of the BRT buses plying the route. The residents and commuters in a bid to avert beating fled the BRT buses in droves as the soldiers went on a beating spree. They also set more than five buses on fire.

According to an eyewitness, who spoke in hush tone for fear of attracting soldiers, "the BRT driver was very reckless. The officer was coming from that angle (pointing at Onipanu) and was heading to Maryland when the BRT driver crushed him. I don't know why he did not follow the track lane designed for them. This has always been the case here. It is like this because it happened to a soldier; many civilians have died due to these reckless drivers."

Another version has it that as soon as the soldiers arrived the scene, they took big sticks from women cooking by the road side to smash the glasses of the buses while some took stones and threw repeatedly at the crowd.

Yet another eyewitness who claimed that two of his expensive phones were completely smashed by the rampaging soldiers lamented that it was through divine grace that he left the scene alive. "It was

terrible. They did not care whether you actually took the pictures or not, their concern was to beat up

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everybody at sight. I wanted to take a snap shot of the scene when one of them hit me with his gun and smashed my phones. Instead of going to Sambisa forest to rescue our girls they are here harassing innocent citizens."

It was learnt that the Police Area Commander of the affected area was slapped when he came to observe what happened and asked to leave the scene or risk being brutalized. LASTMA officials were chased out of their posts and ordered to raise their hands high while moving away slowly.

When Saturday Sun correspondents visited the scene at 10.30am, policemen who were deployed to the scene to restore law and order were chased out of the scene raising their hands for fear of being shot by the lawless soldiers. LASTMA officers who maintained their distance were later allowed to assist in controlling the traffic gridlock which has spread to some other parts of the metropolis.

Terrified commuters were seen jumping down from their buses stuck in traffic for fear that the onslaught will spread to where they were.

Others lamented and counted their loses as soldiers who positioned themselves in strategic areas destroyed phones and electronic gadgets at gun point. Others caught snapping photograph were asked to lie down on the road or frog jump while their bags are searched. As soon as their phones were destroyed, such persons will be allowed to leave the scene.

Saturday Sun correspondent who was busy taking snap shots, was roughly accosted by one of the soldiers, despite efforts to convince him that she was on duty. She was forced to present her phone but fortunately for her none of the snap shots was on the phone she presented.

One of the soldiers who was begging onlookers to keep their distance lamented that the army officer who died in the accident was planning to be engaged soon. "He was going to pick his wife to-be when this unfortunate incident happened," the female soldier said.

As at the time of filling this report, several OP MESA Hilux vans were seen in strategic points in the area. LASTMA officers were also at the scene controlling traffic while efforts were made to move what is left of the burnt buses.

Confirming the incident, Lagos State police command spokesperson, Ngozi Braide told Saturday Sun on phone that the command received information that there was a fatal accident involving an army lance corporal and a LAGBUS vehicle. "Officers were drafted to the scene and investigation has since commenced. Meanwhile normalcy has so far returned."

Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Lagos State, Aderemi Ibirogbu said it is sad that the soldiers invaded the expressway and unleashed mayhem on Ikorodu road, leading to traffic gridlock.

According to him, the state government was in touch with the military authority and had reported the matter and that the military had assured that the situation would soon be put under control.

"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," he stated

Meanwhile the Lagos APC Youth leader Mr. Omotayo Sanyaolu, has strongly condemned the Friday morning carnage perpetuated by men of the Nigerian Army on Ikorodu Road, Lagos.

A terse statement from the office of the APC's Youth Leader reads, "The destruction of state-owned property by men and women, who ought to be prepared to die while safeguarding our collective existence, is incomprehensible. This has again raised salient questions begging to be answered; who is the Nigerian's military serving?

"It's day 81 days today that our sisters have been kidnapped from Chibok, yet there is no hope of bringing them back alive. If men of the Nigerian Army feel the urge to unleash violence, their services are urgently needed in Sambisa forest where members of the Boko Haram terrorists are hiding.

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"As much as the youth in Lagos understand the angst of the soldiers whose colleague was alleged to have been knocked down by a BRT driver, we disagree that the incident excuses the mayhem that followed. The impunity with which those buses were burnt and others ruthlessly vandalized cannot be justified. There are procedures to be followed. In such a case as this, the rule of law requires that the driver be handed over to the civilian authority for prosecution in a civilian court.

"The Nigerian Army must understand that this is not military regime. They must remain in their barracks except a democratically elected authority requests their services in quelling unrest beyond the capacity of the civil law enforcement agencies," Sanyaolu said.

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