

• 24 protesters arrested for blocking roads • Govt rolls out 65 buses as palliative

SHARES VIEWS

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Three persons were feared dead while several others were injured as police and tricycle operators clashed in Ijora, Lagos, yesterday. Tricycle operator and commercial motorcycle riders (Okada), had taken to the streets of Lagos protesting the ban handed by the state government on some routes and local government areas.

The police were alleged to have accosted the protesters, who made bonfires on the streets, and engaged them in a fight that left three persons dead and many others injured.

The victims included a student, a woman in an Ilorin-bound vehicle, and a tricycle operator.

However, police public relations officer, DSP Bala Elkana, denied the alleged killing, saying no casualty was recorded.

This is in spite of witness accounts claiming that police bullets hit the victims, as officers attached to the Badia division shot randomly to scare off the protesters.

Some tricycle operators and Okada riders had reportedly gathered at the Ijora causeway axis of Apapa road, lighting bonfires, to protest the restriction order by the state government. The protesters were alleged to have vandalised some vehicles, including that of a policeman.

Having been dispersed from their earlier spot, it was learnt that the protesters regrouped in front of the secretariat of Apapa Iganmu LCDA, along Gaskiya Road, but they were again chased away by cops.

However, the protest escalated and spread to Ajegunle, as Keke and Okada riders prevented commercial vehicles from carrying out their duties

Meanwhile, it was a harrowing experience for workers, traders, students, artisans and other commuters across several councils and LCDAs who had to trek kilometres to get to their various destinations as the ban on Okada and Keke took its toll.

On February 1, the state government began enforcement of the extant Transport Sector Reform Law 2018, which banned commercial motorcycles and tricycles in some local governments and local council development areas. While announcing the restriction of Okada and Keke to certain areas of the state, government lamented that the operations of unregulated transporters had claimed 600 lives in three years in the state.

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who described Okada and Keke as a menace, also disclosed that available data for three years (2016 to 2019) on accidents and deaths arising from the system of transportation was scarce.

The restriction was fully implemented in the 15 local council areas of the state, with some residents lamenting the order.

Following their sad experiences, tricycle and motorcycle operators and commuters have appealed to government to reconsider the ban on Keke and Okada on major highways and bridges.

“As much as I appreciate the good intention of the state government, the hardship on resident, particularly commuters, is unbearable,” said Sola Omitogun, a Lagos resident, as he trekked from Ikeja-Along to Haco Bus Stop, Ikeja.

Another commuter, Ebenezer Aramide, along with his children, who admitted that Okada and Keke have been a way of life for them in the recent past, wondered why government would make such an order without providing alternatives.

“It is only in Nigeria that a government would place a ban on such a critical sector without making alternative arrangements for the teeming masses. The pain is too much for us to bear, since it became effective last Saturday,” he said.

Mrs. Ijiola Akande and Benedict Ariwoola, who said they trekked from their respective residences to their workplaces in Ikeja, appealed to government to rescind the order.

“This order must not be allowed to stay too long in the state because it will affect productivity in the state. Imagine the negative effects that trekking a distance of about two kilometres before getting to work would have on my employers,” she said.

While tricycle owners and riders’ associations held peaceful marches in Surulere and Ikeja over the ban, there were also sporadic protests and bonfires in several areas, including Ijora and Ikeja.

Meanwhile, the state government has rolled out 65 high-capacity buses, in addition to the number of buses already in service, as part of palliative measures to the restriction of commercial motorcycles and tricycles in parts of the state.

Managing director of Lagos Bus Services Limited, Idowu Oguntona, announced this deployment at a press conference on Monday.

Oguntona disclosed that the buses, which started work yesterday, have recorded about 10,000 customers in the early hours of Monday alone, adding that the 65 buses would convey a total of 35,000 people daily.

He also disclosed that the buses would ply seven routes across the affected areas.

According to the police spokesman, 24 suspects were arrested for blocking major roads in Ijora, following the recent ban of Okada and Keke.

Elkana said in a statement that suspected hoodlums caused major obstructions on the roads, burnt tyres, looted and snatched valuables from road users.

He said that hoodlums, suspected to be Okada riders, came out in large numbers armed with cutlasses around Ijora Oloye, Amusu, Ijora 7-Up, Ijora under bridge, Sifa Junction and Gaskiya Gangare area ,all within Ijora Badia Division.

“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; 24 suspects were arrested. Investigation is ongoing and the suspects will be charged to court,” Elkana said.

Tricycle operators in Lagos Mainland, Yaba and Oyingbo also staged a peaceful protest in Maryland against the ban. The operators urged the government to rescind its order restricting commercial motorcycle and tricycle operators in 15 LGAs.

Mr. Tayo Oshidele, vice chairman of the association, claimed over 2,000 members of the association would be affected as a result of the development.

Oshidele said that the majority of the operators acquired the tricycles on hire-purchase where the money was being remitted on a weekly basis.

In a related development, commercial tricycle and motorcycle operators in areas not listed on the ban on Monday alleged that policemen were extorting money from them under the guise that they were plying restricted routes.

Theo Uchechukwu, an operator, claimed policemen were harassing operators in some parts of Igando, Ikotun and Alimosho, not listed as restricted areas.

“I didn’t see Alimosho on that list, but you know with this new law the policemen just have another opportunity to feed on.

“If we are caught we don’t have any choice than to pay, we like to benefit from other peoples pain in this country,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Hakeem Odumosu, has warned police officers not to arrest motorcycles used for courier services, as they were not part of the restrictions.

In a statement by Elkana, he stated that: “Lagos State Police Command wishes to reiterate that motorcycles used for courier services are not included in the restrictions placed on motorcycles in Lagos State. 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.”