

Pandemonium as hoodlums unleash mayhem on Lagos communities

•Armed gangs burn police stations, rob commuters, loot shops, destroy vehicles

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The expansive bus stop teemed with fierce-looking young men, each wielding a cudgel, an empty bottle or a machete. Some clutched bottles of beer or some cheap gin from which they constantly sipped. Intermittent gunshots boomed from the distance. The stretch of Lagos Road between the popular Agric Bus Stop and Majidun was virtually empty, totally abandoned by motorists.



Some commuters, imbued with considerable courage, dared the young men. Some succeeded and escaped into some adjoining streets. But some others were not as lucky. Some of those that sought to make it to the other end became victims of the armed youths waging a war against one another. Some unfortunate persons had their phones seized, and were made to pay some money before the phones could be retrieved.



From Agric through Idiroko to Ogolonto and Majidun, lorryloads of shards of glass and broken bottles occupied the entire road.

In the past few days, several parts of Lagos have been overrun by a regime of anarchy. With policemen withdrawing to their stations in the aftermath of the ongoing nationwide protests against the illegal, brutal activities of the now disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), criminal elements have taken over many parts of the metropolis, killing, maiming, burning government and private buildings destroying vehicles and dispossessing people of their belongings.

At the weekend, deep-seated rivalries between the young men of Majidun and those of the neighbouring Ogolonto community in Ikorodu boiled over. The feud, it was gathered, was triggered by some controversy over land. Since Saturday, armed militias in the two communities have engaged in a supremacy battle. Axes, machetes, bottles and other weapons were openly deployed in the battle. Several shops in the area were broken into and looted. Gunshots rent the air from time to time. It was gathered that at least three people lost their lives in the melee.

“Many people thought that the gridlock in the axis was caused by the #EndSARS protesters, but it was discovered that the protesters were not the cause. These guys are armed local gangs engaged in a supremacy battle with one another. They use the opportunity to rob and inflict harm on innocent people. And the police are nowhere to be found,” Abdul, who lives around Ogolonto, said.

But these areas are not the only places where armed hoodlums seemed to have hijacked an obviously peaceful protest by many young Nigerian men and women seeking reforms in the police and government.

The protests, which started in the last two weeks, saw thousands of Nigerians mounting stands at Lekki, Alausa, Ikeja, Abuja and several other states in the country. They

demanded an end to the killings and other acts of savagery unleashed on Nigerians, young and old, by operatives of SARS and other police special units. The protesters have been mostly well controlled, disciplined and organised.

But in the past few days, hoodlums have been inflicting mayhem on innocent Nigerians under the guise of the protests.

On Monday, commuters had a rough time accessing other parts of Lagos from Ikorodu. The Lagos Road, the only artery to Lagos from Ikorodu, was totally blocked at Irawo, Ajegunle, where the #EndSARS protesters mounted their stand, creating a major gridlock. Those commuting on foot could, however, cross the barricade to the other side, where they could get a motorbike, tricycle or commercial bus to Mile 12.

But after Mile 12, vehicular movement became impossible. At virtually every bus stop, carnivals and parties were being held right on the major carriageway. Music blared forth from loud speakers mounted at strategic places. Many of the people were openly cursing Nigeria's political leaders from the two major political parties.

On Monday, in Ketu, the carnival was quite vigorous. A large banner displayed on the pedestrian bridge at Ketu Bus Stop read: "No APC/PDP. No Election." Hundreds of young men in the crowd were having fun. Many clutched cans of a popular beer brand.

"We will do this #EndSARS thing till 2023, walahi," one of the excited young men told the reporter in Yoruba. He puffed on a cigarette, and smoke swirled from his mouth. "No more election. Olohun" he added.

But in the evening of Monday, the situation had witnessed a dramatic change. The protesters were gone, and with policemen still cocooned in their homes and stations, hoodlums were effectively in charge. It was sheer bedlam as young men armed with assorted weapons – axes, machetes, bottles, knives – paraded the streets.

It was gathered that two men were killed in the area on Monday night, as two groups of cultists engaged each other. Vehicles coming in from Ojota could not proceed beyond the Ojota/Ketu interchange. Commuters scattered in all directions, as pandemonium held sway in the area.

By Tuesday morning, the hoodlums had driven away the genuine protesters. They took over the road, and made bonfires everywhere, preventing vehicles from moving. About four mini-buses had been razed.

“See what Buhari has caused,” an exasperated commuter intoned. “Why is it so difficult for the President to address the country and put an end to all these violence? The police have been warned not to use force, so they have abandoned their duties. Yesterday night, there were reports of gunshots in Ketu here. Now, everywhere is blocked. It’s like there is no government in place. This is sheer anarchy.”

Several cases of violence have been reported across the country in the past few days. There has been a jailbreak in Benin, Edo State, with many prisoners on the loose. Police stations have been looted and razed, with firearms carted away by hoodlums in Lagos, Ibadan, Benin and others.

Also, yesterday, a video circulating on social media showed a Lagos hospital in flames. The hospital was allegedly set on fire by some protesters after a demonstrator with gunshot injuries was prevented from accessing health care by security men at the gate of the hospital. But the arson was prevented, it was later learnt.

In Benin, a 24-hour curfew imposed on the state has not been effective in ridding the streets of protesters and hoodlums.

On Tuesday, the Lagos State governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, imposed a 24-hour curfew on the state effective 4pm.

In a post on his Twitter handle, the governor said: “I have watched with shock how what began as a peaceful #EndSARS protest has degenerated into a monster that is threatening the well-being of our society. Lives and limbs have been lost as criminals and miscreants are now hiding under the umbrella of these protests to unleash mayhem on our state.

“As a government that is alive to its responsibility and has shown a commitment to the #EndSARS movement, we will not watch and allow anarchy in our dear state.

“I, therefore, hereby impose a 24-hour curfew on all parts of the state as from 4pm today, 20th October, 2020. Nobody, except essential service providers and first responders must be found on the streets.”

The police have also announced the immediate ban on all protests from Tuesday. A statement by the police spokesman in Lagos, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, said security men were determined to put an end to the regime of criminality in the state.

His words: “Due to the new development of violent attacks on police officers and men and formations, including innocent Nigerians in Lagos State, and the 24-hour curfew imposed by the Lagos State Government, with effect from 4pm today, October 20, the Lagos State Police Command wishes to inform the public that, henceforth, no protest or gathering or procession, under whatever guise, is permitted within Lagos State.

“In the light of the above, all security agencies have deployed adequate personnel to take charge and enforce the curfew across the state.

“The command regrets to confirm the setting ablaze of Orile Police State today at about 10am, where some of our policemen were critically injured and unconfirmed reports state that one of them is dead.

“It’s crystal clear that the #EndSARS protest has been hijacked by hoodlums who want to run down the state and the police command will resist such state of anarchy, unrest, and brouhaha with all powers within the ambit of the law.”

Some activists have accused government officials of financing thugs to infiltrate the ranks of genuine protesters to cause mayhem, an allegation that has been vigorously denied by the accused functionaries.

Following agitations on the brutality by operatives of SARS, the Inspector-General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, on October 11, announced the disbandment of the police unit. But protesters have been angered by the immediate establishment of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team to replace the disbanded squad. They have vowed to continue with the protests.



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