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Black Sunday: 40 burnt to death in multiple auto accident

...As trailer crushes 24 vehicles

•Occupants burnt beyond recognition

By CHRIS ANUCHA and OLUWOLE FAROTIMI

Monday, August 16, 2010

It was indeed a black Sunday yesterday, as over 40 persons perished in a multiple road accident, on the bridge opposite Otedola Estate, near Berger Bus-Stop, on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. The accident occurred between 10am and 11 am. Among the dead were a five-year-old child and his mother, whose charred bodies were still trapped in the wreckage when Daily Sun visited the scene.

Also, a little boy, who was in a Mercedes Benz car with his parents, was killed. His parents were said to have managed to come out of the vehicle but the unlucky boy did not, before fire engulfed the car.

The dead woman and his five-year-old child were among the 18 occupants of a Toyota Sienna bus. All the occupants, except the driver, died on the spot. They were said to be travelling to Ilorin, Kwara State, for an examination today. Daily Sun could not confirm if it was the mandatory exams being conducted by the Federal Government for workers in the ministries and parastatals. Daily Sun counted about 13 vehicles that were burnt beyond recognition and 11, that were seriously damaged.

However, there were some survivors, some of whom sustained various degrees of injuries. Many of them were rushed to various hospitals, while some received first aid treatment from officials of the Lagos State Emergency Ambulance Services. Among the survivors were a young lady, Nike Abidogun and another young girl, whose identity could not be ascertained.

According to a source, the young girl, who escaped from one of the burning bus, in a bid to run away from the confusion, jumped from the bridge and landed on hard objects. The girl, who is about 13 years of age sustained injuries and was taken to an undisclosed hospital by a man identified as Bolaji Bello.

When Daily Sun visited the scene, bodies of victims littered the area while the ones that were trapped in the vehicles were yet to be removed.

According to an eyewitness account, the accident was caused by policemen, attached to the Rapid Response Squad (RRS), who mounted checkpoint on the expressway checking vehicles particulars and extorting money from motorists. They were alleged to have flagged down some vehicles before the driver of a trailer, conveying industrial sugar lost control and rammed into vehicles in front, crushing them like egg shells.

The first vehicle hit by the trailer was said to have caught fire, which quickly spread to others. The driver of the trailer and other three occupants also died on the spot. All the vehicles involved in the accident were coming from Ojota axis of the expressway. Blaming the police for the tragedy, some of the sympathizers wondered why they mounted checkpoint in the area thereby causing the accident.



•Fire servicemen trying to put out the fire
Photo: Sun News Publishing



•Burnt victims in a fully-loaded 18-seater passenger bus
Photo: Sun News Publishing

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One of them, Solomon Michael, said immediately the accident occurred, the policemen fired some shots in the air which paved the way for their escape. Bello told Daily Sun how he pleaded with some policemen, after rescuing the girl that jumped down from the bridge, to help him take her to the hospital, but they ignored him and sped off in their patrol vehicle.

Some of the vehicles that were involved in the accidents included, Honda Accord with registration number FP 736 LSR, a Nissan SUV marked, GY 136 EKY, another vehicle marked, AG 326 FMT, a pick-up marked XN 68 EPE, Toyota Corolla marked, DY 666 KRD and another vehicle with registration number KR 194 KRD.

Still lamenting the role of the policemen in the carnage, another sympathiser, Kayode Olubunmi, said the accident would have been

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avoided, if there were no policemen stopping and searching vehicles on the bridge. He appealed to the police authorities to investigate the cause of the accident, with a view to punishing any policeman found culpable. A driver, who narrowly escaped death in the road mishap, told newsmen at the scene of the accident that the road accident was caused by some policemen who blocked one lane of the roads, while checking vehicles on the other lane.

The man, who identified himself as Rashed Adeniji, said he lost his younger brother who was a bus conductor in the accident. "We were again in a serious traffic here on this spot this morning where the police officers use to collect N20, from us and pursue people coming with second hand cars, also known as Tokunbo. All of a sudden we just heard a big bang at the back, before I knew it, fire had engulfed the whole place.

"I quickly managed to come out of the motor and ran to the other side where I saw a trailer that rammed into the long queue of vehicles waiting to be cleared by the police officers. People started running here and there. I looked around but I did not see my conductor, my own brother. I rushed back to the bus which at this time was in flames along with many other vehicles. I started shouting for help from people to rescue my passengers about 18 of them, including my brother. As I am talking to you now, they could not come out, they all burnt to ashes," he said.

Another eyewitness, who identified himself as Solomon Michael, corroborated the statement of Adeniji, adding that the trailer loaded with foams and some combustible materials lost control as a result of brake failure and rammed into other vehicles.

"It is a very sad development. Why would the police come and close one lane in this kind of place and mount roadblock? This kind of accident has happened so many times. The government does not want to address the issue. Maybe their own people are not involved yet," he lamented.

Meanwhile, irate youth who fingered the police as the cause of the accident were also seen looking for policemen in uniform to attack. Sensing danger, the police deployed to maintain law and order immediately retreated to a safe distance from where they threw canisters of tear gas to scare away the angry youth.

When Daily Sun contacted the Lagos State Police Command's spokesman, Mr. Frank Mba, over the alleged role of policemen in the tragedy, he described it as mere allegation.

According to him, "it is easy for people to make allegation and another thing is to sustain such allegation." He explained that it was the driver of the trailer who lost control and rammed into other vehicles.

Mba said: "I don't know the link between a trailer that failed brake and policemen. Our concern now is not who caused the accident or who should take the blame. Our concern is to ensure that those who are injured are taken to the hospitals and the bodies of the dead ones taken to the right place." He, however, assured that the police would investigate the allegation levelled against them. "We will investigate who caused the accident, who is to be blamed and punished," he said.



•A crowd of sympathisers at the scene
 Photo: Sun News Publishing

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