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Gunmen kill travellers, abduct two on Benin-Ore Road



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By **Babatope Okeowo, Lanre Odukoya, Taiwo Jimoh and Cajetan Mmuta**



Several people were reportedly shot dead yesterday while two persons were kidnapped by gunmen suspected to be herdsmen who attacked passengers on Ore-Benin Road in Odigbo Government Area of Ondo State.

Several others were critically injured.

The incident, according to survivors, occurred about 4p.m. when buses either coming Benin and heading to Lagos or coming from Lagos and heading to Benin or Akure were attacked.

According to a female student, who survived the attack, the armed men shot sporadically the buses and forced the passengers to flee, leaving their buses and belongings on the Ore-Benin-Lagos Expressway. The terrified lady told our correspondent that the incident caused gridlock for hours.

The female student, who spoke with our correspondent on the phone, said she was returning from school when they ran into the herdsmen on the road.

She said: "I'm schooling at Igbinedion University, Okada. I had planned to return to Ibadan on Sunday but when my friend told me her parents were coming to pick her, I decided to return home and save my money."

"We set out early. We got to Ore about 2:30p.m. But immediately we got to a village about 30 minutes later, we saw three commercial buses parked on the highway in between them were two cars. We all thought it was traffic."

The student added that the traffic had built up. But before she knew what was happening, some people who dressed in Fulani regalia came out of the buses and started aiming at the tyres of vehicles in the traffic.

She said: "Before we knew what was happening, they started shooting those who tried to escape into the bush and a lot of people were killed in the process."

"They operated unchallenged, there was serious commotion on the expressway; even the villagers also run for their lives. It was a driver of a sport utility vehicle who came from the bush and chased the herdsmen away from the road."

Another survivor said the armed men used one of the vehicles snatched to block the road and robbed passengers.

He said one of the buses on sighting the robbers ran into the ditch and left the passenger seriously wounded.

The source said many of the passengers ran into the bush while two 18-seater buses, a commercial car and a private car were robbed.

Others buses belong to Young Shall Grow and Iyare Motors.

For 30 minutes, the source said, vehicles could not move on the major road linking the two states as policemen who were at various roadblocks on the road ran for cover. He said the situation was brought under control after the military men moved in to dislodge the gunmen. However, he said no one died but many of them were seriously injured while running for safety.

Confirming the incident, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Femi Jc

said the Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) and the policemen attached to Ore Division moved in and dislodged the gunmen.

While saying the robbers had been repelled by policemen, Joseph said two persons whose identities could not be ascertained were kidnapped by the hoodlums during the operation. He, however, said he could not ascertain if the armed robbers were of Fulani's extraction. He added that policemen were combing the bush in order to arrest the suspects.

The Edo State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Chidi Chibuzor and the state Commissioner of Police, Babatunde Kokumo, did not pick their calls.

But the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations), Mr. Ayodele Olatunji, said there was nothing like robbery along the road.

He said the command had deployed its Anti-Robbery squad and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) to checkmate activities of suspected hoodlums on the Ore-Benin Road.

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