

Free Prisoners in Benin, Lagos Locked down

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- **Three die in Abuja, cars set ablaze**
- **Obaseki declares 24-hour curfew, Sanwo-Olu closes schools**
- **Govs pledge to fulfill marchers' demands**

Chuks Okocha, Olawale Ajimotokan, Kingsley Nwezeh, Adedayo Akinwale in Abuja, Chiemelie Ezeobi, Segun James, Rebecca Ejifoma in Lagos and Adibe Emenyonu in Benin

EndSARS protesters yesterday grounded commercial activities in Lagos as they blocked major road outlets, hindering the movements of human and vehicular traffic.

The protesters, who had been on the streets for about 11 days to demonstrate over police brutality, demanded the full implementation of their requests, including police reforms and prosecution of police officers and men indicted for human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings.

The attendant insecurity arising from the protest forced the Lagos State government to close public and private schools, warning parents and guardians not to allow their children and wards to be used as tools by those who may want to hijack the protests and cause mayhem.

Similar protests turned violent in Benin City and Abuja, where marchers and troops, deployed to abort the blockade of major highways in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), clashed and thugs attacked protesters, killing three persons and burning several vehicles.

In Benin City, the Edo State capital, thugs, who infiltrated the protesters, attacked the Correctional Facility on Sapele Road, during which they allegedly freed about 120 inmates.

They also vandalised the second Correctional Facility at Oko, also in Benin City.

In addition, the hoodlums attacked three police stations in the state, sacked all the personnel attached to them, set detained suspects free and carted away arms and ammunition.

The incidents prompted the Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, to impose a 24-hour curfew on the state until further notice.

However, amid the violence, Minister of Youths and Sports, Mr. Sunday Dare, after a meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, yesterday, quoted the president as saying that the youths have the right to protest peacefully while making demands on their leaders.

The Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) has also pledged to fulfill the demands of the protesters just

as the Chairman of the National Caretaker Committee of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Yobe State Governor, Mai Mala Buni, has alleged that the protesters have a hidden agenda.

Reports from across Lagos State yesterday showed that while the protest was largely peaceful at Alausa and Lekki toll gate, which has been the venues where the protesters have been converging since the onset of the demonstration, hoodlums cashed in on the situation in other parts of the state such as Ajah, Ikorodu, Iyana Ipaja, to attack and rob motorists and pedestrians.

The protesters shut down virtually all parts of Lagos.

Among the affected areas were Airport Road, Alausa Secretariat, Allen, Opebi, Ago Palace Way, Isolo, Okota, Ikotun, Jakande, Ajegunle, Awolowo Road, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, LASU Road, and Idimu.

Others include Yaba, Alapere, Mushin, Ikorodu Road, Amuwo Odofin, Oshodi, Surulere and Egbe-Idimu.

In Alausa, the protesters locked all the entrances to the secretariat, thereby, denying workers access to the premises.

In Lekki, the protesters continued their day-nine of the demonstration at the Lekki Tollgate.

The lockdown not only triggered traffic across the state but has also increased transport fare by 100 per cent.

A trip from Oshodi to Ikorodu that ordinarily costs N150 was hiked to N1, 000 per passenger.

Currently, vehicles leaving the mainland for island ply Ikoyi Bridge through Jakande to get to Ajah while vehicles from Ajah get stuck at Chevron Tollgate for hours before successfully getting to Lekki.

At Lagos- Ibadan Expressway, there was a total shutdown of that corridor, with motorists and commuters trapped in the gridlock.

In each of these locations, hundreds were seen walking to their respective destinations as the protesters banned commercial motorcycles too.

The motorists that braved the odds to drive were stuck on the road for hours.

As the protests continued, no fewer than 20 policemen sustained varying degrees of injuries and four patrol vehicles destroyed in Lagos, as the hitherto peaceful protests turned violent as anti-police sentiment rose.

Hoodlums, armed with stones, attacked operatives in a Rapid Response Squad (RRS) truck.

The attack occurred at Adekunle area of Yaba while the operatives were being moved to relieve their colleagues who had been on duty since Sunday. Attempts by the driver of the police truck to reverse proved abortive as other cars behind him left no room to manoeuvre.

The policemen fled when the hoodlums approached their vehicles and hauled stones at them.

At least 14 operatives of the RRS were injured in the attack as the hoodlums brutalised the armed policemen, who had instruction from the Lagos

State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Hakeem Odumosu, not to engage the protesters in a fight.

Some of the injured policemen were moved to the Police Clinic Yaba, Pantlami and others were taken to the general hospital for medical attention.

In another incident, some hoodlums chased RRS pick-up van around Lagos-Ibadan expressway, at the Alausa Secretariat end, but the driver managed to escape being attacked.

Another set of hoodlums attacked RRS operatives at LASU, forcing their vehicle to detour.

In Alapere, Ketu, some of the hoodlums chased back an RRS patrol vehicle that was responding to a distress call.

In Mushin, the protest was hijacked by hoodlums, who chased away the police before extorting motorists and passers-by.

Condemning the attacks on policemen, the state police spokesman, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, a Superintendent of Police (SP), said some of the protesters exhibited violent traits and disdain for the police, while urging them to desist from provoking the operatives.

He appealed to the protesters to get organised and have a structure so that they can easily communicate the reason(s) of the protests to supporters to avoid misrepresentation and anarchy.

Following the worsening protests, the Lagos State Government has directed all pupils and students in public and private schools to stay at home as the anti-SARS protest in the state became violent.

The state Commissioner for Education, Mrs. Folasade Adefisayo, said in a statement yesterday that the safety of the students, parents and all staff working in schools was paramount at this critical period.

She advised parents to keep an eye on their children and not allow them to be used as tools to foment trouble.

Adefisayo encouraged schools to utilise other means of distance teaching and learning like radio, television and online media as they were doing during the recent COVID-19 lockdown.

According to her, a new date of resumption for all classes will be announced as soon as possible.

Speaking yesterday on ARISE NEWS Channel, a sister broadcast arm of THISDAY, one of the champions of the #EndSARS campaign, Mr. Folarin Falana, popularly known as Falz, said their quest for justice and transparency must be met before they leave the streets.

Falz described their demands as reasonable and wondered why the Inspector-General of Police (IG), Mr. Mohammed Adamu, was yet to resign.

Speaking on their five-point demand, he said: "Which of these parts need time if we are being sincere with ourselves? You really need time to release all arrested peaceful protesters? You really need time to make sure that justice is done and appropriate compensations?

"What real actions have you taken to show you are really serious about this? Look at the time they dragged their feet before they set up panels in different states.

"They are not showing any real intent to make things right. For instance, nobody has been sacked. In any sane society, the Inspector General of Police would have resigned. Is he waiting to be sacked? All these violations of human rights happened under him."

On when the protests would stop he said: "We need to make sure that justice is done. It is unfair to the lives that have been lost that you tell us to get off the streets. It is extremely unfair. I completely disagree with that. If you want people to get off the streets make sure justice is done and transparent too."

Reiterating their initial five-point demand, spokespersons for the protesters called for the immediate release of all arrested protesters.

Their other demands include "justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and appropriate compensation for their families; setting up an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct (within 10 days).

"In line with the new Police Act, psychological evaluation and retraining (to be confirmed by an independent body) of all disbanded SARS officers before they can be redeployed; as well as increase police salary."

Although the government has fulfilled at least two of the five-point demand, the protesters insisted on the implementation of all before they could quit the street.

But the five-point demand, at the weekend, evolved to seven-point demand.

In the revised demands, the protesters moved from just championing police reform and ending police brutality to a holistic overhaul of governance in Nigeria.

They also called for constitutional, education, health, youth affairs, public office and institutional reforms, as well as a reduction in the cost of governance.

One of the leading voices of the protest, Mr. Debo Macaroni, an actor and content creator, reprimanded the government for not even adhering to their initial five demands.

He said: "Nigerian government, show workings! Where are the officers responsible for all these atrocities? How many top officers have resigned or lost their jobs for incompetence?

"How many victims have you identified and compensated? Are the Nigerian youths safe?

"How difficult can it be for the government to meet the demands of the Nigerian youths and create a better and enabling nation for prosperity?

"This tactic of creating chaos to cause distraction and confusion is shameless."

Hoodlums Attack Prisons in Benin, Govt Imposes Curfew

In Edo State, hoodlums who hijacked the protests attacked two correctional facilities in Benin City and three police posts. The attacked police stations were Ugbekun Police Station, Oba Market Police Station and Idogbo Police Station.

The situation made the state government impose a 24-hour curfew on the state.

In a statement signed by the Secretary to the Edo State Government (SSG), Mr. Osarodion Ogie, the state government said the curfew took effect from 4 pm yesterday.

"This decision has become necessary because of the very disturbing incidents of vandalism and attacks on private individuals and institutions by hoodlums in the guise of #ENDSARS protesters.

"While the government of Edo State respects the rights of its citizens to undertake legitimate protests, it cannot sit idle when hoodlums have taken laws into their hands to cause mayhem on innocent citizens and the state.

"By this directive, schools and businesses are to shut down activities accordingly. Those who cannot move safely are to stay put between now and 4 pm till calmness is restored.

"Parents are advised to rein in their children, youths and wards, to forestall further breakdown of law and order.

"The responsibility of government is to protect lives and property and maintain law and order; therefore, anyone found outside in violation of the curfew would be dealt with according to the law," the statement said.

Three Protesters Killed in Abuja

Three protesters were reported killed in Abuja as protesters engaged thugs in running battles in different locations in the Federal Capital City (FCT).

The protesters, however, faced a difficult time as pro-SARS supporters and thugs attacked them with dangerous weapons in Apo and Gwarinpa districts

even as police fired teargas at both protesters in Area 11.

The FCT Police Command has condemned the killing of the protester, Mr. Anthony Onome Unuode, who was attacked and injured by hoodlums last weekend during the protest along Kubwa/Zuba Highway and later died of injuries sustained during the attack.

"The command wishes to condemn the violent attack on a protester by unknown hoodlums along Kubwa axis on Saturday, October 17, 2020.

"The hoodlums, who infiltrated the ranks of the ENDSARS protest attacked one Anthony Onome Unuode 'm' and left him with various degrees of injury which eventually resulted in death," it said.

The command also called for calm among what it described as "#EndSARS and pro-SARS" protesters, who clashed at the Central Business District yesterday.

The police command said it had commenced an investigation into the matter.

The FCT Commissioner of Police, Mr. Bala Ciroma, also called for calm among protesters, following a clash between the ENDSARS and pro-SARS protesters in the early hours of yesterday.

The command said "preliminary investigation revealed that no life was lost, however, one vehicle was set ablaze during the clash. In view of this, the Commissioner of Police has ordered a discreet investigation into the incident".

He urged protesters to be law-abiding, remain peaceful in their conduct and shun all forms of

violence.

The #EndSARS protesters moved from AP Plaza in Wuse II towards Banex Plaza while the Nyanya group moved to Central to join the Banex group.

It was on their way to Banex that thugs attacked them.

"The pro-SARS protesters in Abuja are attacking our #EndSARS protesters in Apo.

They're shooting locally made guns and throwing teargas and have just caught up with one of us and macheted him. Please we need help," one of the protesters said.

#EndSARS protesters also barricaded the bridge linking Kuje Area Council on Airport Road early on Monday.

The protest partially slowed down economic activities while many workers living in places affected could not get to their places of work except for those who left early.

However, military police personnel mounted roadblocks along Nyanya-Mararaba entry point to Abuja.

Govs Pledge to Fulfill Protesters' Demands

Governors have said they will act on all the demands of the protesters against harassment and police brutality.

In a communiqué signed by the NGF Chairman and Ekiti State Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, after an emergency meeting on Sunday, the governors,

however, raised concerns about the “shifting nature of the demands which creates uncertainty.”

The governors agreed to set up a judicial panel of enquiry in their respective states to receive complaints of brutality by officers of the now-disbanded SARS.

They also called on protesters to discontinue their demonstrations “as a continuation grossly exposes the fragile economic fundamentals of the country; particularly as criminal elements and hoodlums have hijacked the protests by maiming innocent citizens, looting and destroying properties.”

“Governors thereafter resolved to; Condemn the attack on Governor Adegboyega Oyetola of Osun State by armed persons while he was addressing anti-police brutality protesters in the state capital Osogbo; protesters are encouraged to engage with the government appropriately at both the national and state level to ensure that the protests are not taken over by hoodlums who are instigating a breakdown in law and order in many parts of the country.

“Endorse the call by demonstrators for improved governance predicated on an enforcement regime that takes into cognizance the fundamental human rights and liberties of all citizens in the country;

“Act on all the demands made by the EndSARS protesters raising some concerns with the shifting nature of the demands which creates uncertainty on the exact expectations and ultimate goal,” the communiqué read.

APC Alleges Hidden agenda in Protests

The Chairman of the National Caretaker Committee of the APC and Yobe State Governor, Mai Mala Buni, has said there is a hidden agenda in the protests.

In an interview with the BBC Hausa Service yesterday, Buni said the protests may result in anarchy if not properly handled.

“Hoodlums can utilise the gathering to cause confusion and terrorise other innocent citizens. The ongoing protests show that there is a hidden agenda after the government has responded to the protesters’ demand.

“Nigeria is a country accommodating people with several motives and demands which include restructuring and disintegration, thus, we should be careful.

“There are criminals who see the disbanded police unit as a threat to their criminal activities.

“All leaders should know that it is only when the country exists in peace that one can achieve their goals, you cannot be a leader through chaos, it will not be well.”

The governor also said the challenges facing Nigeria are enormous and cannot be solved in five years of the Buhari administration.

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