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BREAKING NEWS

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Onitsha youths protest traffic official's killing

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...as traders kick over continued closure of Obosi market

BY VINCENT UJUMADU

AWKA — BUSINESS activities were disrupted, yesterday, in the commercial city of Onitsha following violent protests by hundreds of youths over the killing of a staff of the Anambra State Transport Agency, ASTA, by an articulated truck driver.

Also, angry traders blocked the road for hours over the closure of the multi-million naira spare parts market, Obosi along the Onitsha- Owerri expressway, since January 3, on the orders of their chairman.

Vanguard gathered that the driver of a truck, who is of northern extraction, was travelling from Owerri in Imo State to Onitsha. When he was stopped at Ihiala for a check, he refused to obey and an official of ASTA entered the truck, apparently to force the driver to stop.

However, the driver sped off towards Onitsha, forcing ASTA officials in Ihiala to contact their colleagues in Onitsha to intercept the vehicle.

According to the report, when the vehicle was stopped at Onitsha, a lifeless body of the ASTA official, still in his uniform, was seen in the vehicle.

An eye witness who spoke to Vanguard said: "The trailer driver was stopped by the ASTA officials at Ihiala and when he refused to stop, one of them jumped in to clear the truck off the road.

"When the driver noticed that the ASTA man had entered his vehicle, he zoomed off. At that point, other members of the team started making calls to their colleagues and this led to the interception of the driver as he headed towards the head bridge in Onitsha.

"When the vehicle was searched, the lifeless body of the ASTA man was discovered with his hands tied behind him and blood gushing out from his mouth and other parts of the body. There were also signs of injuries, indicating that there was a scuffle.

“When the news of the development filtered into town, youths at the Upper Iweka head bridge axis mobilised and attacked traders selling goats and onions at the head bridge area of Onitsha, who were from the truck driver’s part of the country.

“The youths set the trailer ablaze while the driver was lucky to escape as he ran towards soldiers in the area who whisked him away in their vehicle to avoid his being lynched.”

Non-natives flee Onitsha

When Vanguard visited the head bridge, yesterday, all the northern traders and other non natives had fled Onitsha to Asaba, while others rushed into the 302 Artillery Brigade in Onitsha and nearby police stations for safety.

Traders protest continued closure of Obosi market

Elsewhere at the Mgbuka, Obosi market along Onitsha-Owerri road, human and vehicular movements were delayed for hours when traders blocked the major road in protest against the alleged closure of the market since January 3, 2014 by its chairman, who is simply known as Ifeanyi.

According to some of the traders, the market was closed on the orders of the chairman of the market over alleged harassment by members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, who, it was learnt, had threatened to take over the market to collect revenue forcefully from the traders.

Worried by the continued closure of the market, some of the traders took to the streets and blocked the Onitsha-Owerri road for hours.

They made bonfire on the middle of the road, forcing travellers from other parts of the country and Onitsha to divert to Obosi.

Security operatives have, however, restored normalcy in the area and smooth traffic flow resumed.

MASSOB denies involvement

MASSOB Director of Information, Mr. Uchenna Madu, however, denied his group’s involvement in both the traders’ riot and the Upper Iweka protest.

Madu said the traders apparently reacted following their inability to attend to their customers after the new year celebration.

Madu also called on the state government to look into the cause of the riot and bring those behind it to book.

He also urged Ndigbo to remain calm over the alleged killing of the ASTA operative.

The Anambra State Police Public Relations Officer, PPRO, Mr. Emeka Chukwuemeka, confirmed the two incidents and said no life was lost during the riots.

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