



Many injured, commuters stranded as transporters protest alleged extortion by task force, LASTMA



The arrested suspected hoodlums.



The bonfire.

By Onozure Dania & Mary Benson

LAGOS—Commercial activities were disrupted for the better part of yesterday at Cele, Iyana-Isolo and Toyota bus stops on the Oshodi/Apapa expressway and on the Mile-Two/Badagry expressway, following protest by transporters over alleged extortion and high handedness by officials of the Lagos State Environmental and Special Offences Unit (Task Force) and Lagos State Traffic Management Authority, LASTMA.

The protesters took over the busy expressways, displaying placards and set up bonfires on the expressway inward Oshodi, preventing commercial motorcyclists and bicycle operators from conveying passengers.

Their colleagues, who were oblivious of the protests, had their windscreens shattered, with passengers ordered to alight from the vehicles.

They chanted "No more task force," displaying placards with inscriptions such as "End LASTMA brutality," "End Task Force wahala," "End LASTMA blocking, blocking with Task Force," "End Task Force in Lagos State."

Their grievances

They alleged that Task Force officials routinely and indiscriminately seized their vehicles and were forced to pay huge amount before they would release them.

A bus driver, who gave his name as Sefiu, alleged that LASTMA officials impounded two of his vehicles without any justification.

He said: "I paid N55,000 to recover one of them. They are always harassing us. The road we ply to the airport has been blocked for repairs, yet when we take alternative routes they will claim it is one-way and they'll arrest us."

Another protester, who identified himself simply as Kingsley, said: "Their wahala is too much. We want Governor Babajide (Sanwo-Olu) to help us."

Chibuike, who identified himself as a bus driver and member of the National Union of Road Transport Workers, NURTW, also accused the officials of extortion. He urged the state government to intervene.

On his part, Mukaila, who claimed he recently paid N22,500 to get his bus back, said: "If we argue with them, they would beat us up and tear-gas us. We are tired. Do they want us to start stealing and be carrying guns? We are tired of their extortion, and constant harassment."

Another driver, Opeyemi, said he was also protesting because a vehicle he got on hire purchase barely two months ago was impounded by the Task Force officials.

He said: "I paid N250,000 to get the vehicle back on Monday

3 commercial drivers killed

Opeyemi also alleged that three commercial drivers were killed on Sunday at the Cele Bus stop.

At the Cele bus stop, a commercial bus driver and a commercial motorcyclist sustained deep cuts in the



The protesters.

process.

Hoodlums, who hijacked the situation, attacked anyone at sight. They dispossessed helpless commuters of cash, telephones, handbags and other valuables.

At the scene, shattered windscreens littered the ground while the stranded commuters were seen running away from the hoodlums.

A similar protest occurred last week at Iyana-Oba, Idimu, Igando, down to Iyana Ipaja.

16 suspects arrested

Meanwhile, the Lagos State Environmental and Special Offences Unit (Task Force), said it had arrested 16 miscreants suspected to have masterminded the violence and attack on commuters in Cele and Iyana Isolo bus stops.

The miscreants, according to a statement by the task force, capitalised on the peaceful no work protest embarked upon by drivers of commercial buses on Oshodi-Mile 12 Expressway to unleash mayhem on

commuters.

The statement signed by its Head, Public Affairs Unit, Mr Femi Molika, read: "The hoodlums were caught molesting passers-by and destroying public facilities. Machetes, chains, cudgels and other harmful weapons were recovered from them."

"The Chairman of the Lagos State Task Force, CSP Shola Jejele, who was in the area to maintain law and order as well as listen to some of the aggrieved protesters, called for calm that government would address their grievances."

"He added that no official of Lagos State Task Force operates between Toyota and Mile 2, adding that the agency is presently rejigging its operation to prevent reported incidences of illegal task force operatives in the metropolis."

"He said he had listened to all complaints against the officials of the agency, noting that genuine complaints would be addressed."

"It was learned that the drivers decided to protest the installation of signage on roads that used to serve as bi-directional ways as One-way."

3 policemen, 13 others killed in Rivers, Kogi, Plateau

By Boluwaji Obahopo & Marie-Therese Nanlong

SIX persons, including a commercial motorcycle operator, were yesterday, killed by gunmen suspected to be cultists in Gwara and Kono-Boue communities, Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State.

It was gathered from a resident that the gunmen, numbering about seven, invaded the Gwara community, shooting indiscriminately, leaving three persons dead.

The resident disclosed that later in the day, the gunmen stormed neighbouring Kono-Boue where a motorcycle rider and the two persons he was carrying ran into them and were shot dead.

The Public Relations Officer, Community Development Community of Kono-Boue, Nwibakpo Golden, while narrating the incident, said some villagers ran into the bush and to safer areas to avoid being hit by bullets.

He said: "This afternoon, unknown gunmen invaded Gwara community, killing about three persons. They later went to Kono-Boue, killing a motorcycle rider and the persons that were with him."

Asked if the security agencies were notified of the incident, Golden said he put a call across to the Divisional Police Officer in charge of Bori Division, saying he responded but the hoodlums had taken flight.

He said the absence of a functional police station and the bad road in the area had worsened the security situation there, saying villagers who fled were

yet to return.

He said: "The governor of Rivers State once promised that there will be a police station there. Kono-Boue is a very large community. We are still hoping that he will fulfil his promise."

"Second, the road there is bad. If they fix the road, the police can easily access the area anytime we call them. The DPO came with his team, but the gunmen did not waste time. He (DPO) was able to restore normalcy."

When contacted, a spokesman of the state Police Command, Nnamdi Omoni, said he would get in touch with the DPO, Bori division and get back to our correspondent.

Robbers kill 2 policemen at Kogi checkpoint

In a related development, two policemen were, Monday evening, killed by armed robbers at Koga checkpoint along Kabba-Iyara road in Kabba, headquarters of Kabba/Bunu council area of Kogi State.

It was gathered that the policemen were shot when they lagged down the robbers' SUV coming from Ekiti axis and were probably heading towards Abuja en-route Kabba for a routine check.

Vanguard also gathered that three other policemen, who managed to escape, sustained injuries as the fleeing robbers shot sporadically to pave way for their escape.

It was learned that the affected policemen were from the newly created Kabba Police 'B' divisional headquarters.

The remains of the two policemen were said to have been deposited at the morgue of the general Hospital Kabba while the injured are said to be undergoing treatment at a private hospital.

The Assistant Inspector-General of

Police, Zone 8, Ede Ayuba, who confirmed the incident, said the police have since after the incident mobilised and are on the trail of the hoodlums.

8 killed as security agents battle suspected gunrunners, kidnappers in Plateau

Also on Monday, a Police Inspector, one local vigilante and six suspected gun-runners lost their lives when the gunmen engaged security agents in a gun battle at Bwai village, Prem Chiefdom, Gindin district, Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State.

The Police spokesman, ASP Gabriel Uba, who confirmed the incident said: "On 23/08/2021 at about 1400hrs, the command received credible information about the activity of a notorious syndicate of gunrunners at Kwai village, in Mangu LGA of the state."

"On receipt of the information, the IGP's Intelligence Response Team (IRT) based in Mangu, Police operatives attached to Mangu Division, STF and local vigilante were mobilised and swiftly raced to the area."

"On sighting the team, the hoodlums engaged them in a gun battle. But because of the tactical operational capability and superior gunfire of the operatives, six of the hoodlums were neutralised while others fled with bullet wounds. Exhibits recovered from them include three AK-47 rifles with Breach Nos 868, 106076 and 123487."

"Regrettably, one Insp. Abdulrahman Isah, who is the Commander IGP's Intelligence Response Team based in Mangu and one Hassan Mohammed, a local vigilante gallantly paid the supreme price."