

Kafanchan: How 100 were roasted in petrol fire

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CHARRED bodies of victims of Monday's petrol fire in Katugal village of Kagarko local government area, Kaduna State still litter the accident scene during the week even as doctors at the Kafanchan General Hospital intensified effort to save the survivors.

The scene, which was a gory sight when *Saturday Champion* visited Thursday, will for long remain in the memory of the villagers as over 100 people lost their lives in the tragic incident.

The incident, reminiscent of 1998 Jesse Delta State and last December's Abule Egba, Lagos pipeline explosions, which claimed hundreds of lives, saw virtually every family in Katugal losing one or more of its members.

Saturday Champion gathered that the victims, mostly youths had rushed to the scene of the incident to scoop petrol on getting information of the accident.

Driver of the tanker, it was further gathered, warned the youths who scooped up the fuel to steer clear of the danger but they failed to heed his advice, until one of the buckets they were using allegedly caused a spark, which resulted to an explosion.

But the district head of the area, Mr. Ishaku Barnabas Gado refuted the claims, saying that majority of those who died did not go to scoop petrol.

Gado's position, however contradicted an eye witness account, which stated that efforts were really made to persuade people to leave the scene of the accident but the appeals fell on deaf ears.

The witness, chief of Angwan Dikko, Mr. Daniel Akosu said: "I was here at the scene of the accident and I was driving people away, I was telling them that it is dangerous to come close to the place and I was begging them to leave but nobody listened to me, so I left the place out of anger.

"The accident happened about 6 pm, people were just returning from the market and one hour later, the tanker burst into flames, killing both men, women and children who had trooped to the place," Akosu, who said he lost his

son and brother narrated.

The District Head, who spoke with *Saturday Champion*, while decrying reports that the victims went to scoop fuel said about 90 of the victims who died on the spot have been given mass burial, while another nine persons who died in the hospital were buried on Wednesday.

Describing the incident as an unfortunate calamity to his community, he lamented that most of the people affected were youths.

The royal father, who was going from house to house to condole with his people said virtually every family is affected by the accident.

"Many families were affected, some lost their husbands, some lost their wives, others lost their children, a lot of women lost their husbands. But most of those affected are secondary school students. From the list the principal of the school gave me yesterday, there are 39 students who died. But we are not sure of this figure yet, we are trying to go into bushes to search because some were confused when the fire caught them, they started running into bushes.

"In fact yesterday, some Fulani people discovered somebody who was still alive and they brought him, so we are thinking of going into the bushes to search. For now, we cannot tell the number of families that are affected, but I can tell you that many of them are affected," Gado stated.

He added that contrary to reports that those who died went to scoop petrol, he disclosed that the majority of them were passers-by.

"Well, I m not disputing the fact that some people went there to scoop petrol, but majority of the victims were passers-by. They were people returning from the market because it was a market day. You could see some head pans there, and that junction is a temporary motor park where passengers from old Katugal and other villages around go to enter buses.

"Those who were returning from the market were affected, some people were just spectators, and some people were at the motor park. That is why there is high rate of casualty," Mr. Gado explained