

Tanker tumbles, kills 5 Okada riders

By JOY EMEH

TRAGEDY struck yesterday in Lagos State when five people, including a lady applicant, were killed in a multiple auto crash in the Anthony area of the city, on the Gbagada-Oworonshoki expressway.

The two officials of the Lagos State Transport Management Authority (LASTMA), who sustained injuries in the accident, have been discharged from hospital.

The accident, which occurred at about 8.32am, involved a petrol tanker, which was said to have carried 30,000 litres of the Premium Motor Spirit (PMS); two trucks carrying some building materials; a LASTMA patrol van and three commercial motorcycles (also known as *Okada*).

An eye-witness, who pleaded anonymity but claimed to be a relation of the lady involved in the accident, narrated how the accident happened to *Sunday Champion*. The witness said:

"The first accident happened yesterday night (Friday night) when a truck carrying some building materials fell down, blocking the service lane, but no casualty was recorded.

"The LASTMA officials came this morning (yesterday) to control traffic when a fuel tanker taking the service lane, suddenly saw the LASTMA people. But in his bid to divert to the express way, the driver lost control because he had been shouting that the brake of the truck had failed.

"The truck eventually rammed into the waiting LASTMA van, carried it to under the already fallen truck carrying the building materials and finally fell on top of *Okada* riders with their passengers.

"While three were under the tanker the other two, including the lady you are looking at, fell by the way side. The lady was on her way for a job interview at Oceanic Bank, Gbagada."

But Special Adviser to the Lagos State governor on LASTMA matters, Mr. Shola Giwa, told *Sunday Champion* that the accident was one of the daily occurrences.

He confirmed that five people died and that the two officials of the LASTMA, who sustained minor injuries, have received treatment at Gbagada

General Hospital.

"Actually, what happened was not far fetched. There was truck breakdown in the middle of the night, that was the truck carrying some building materials. And our rescue team came there to remove the truck from the roads.

"They were there diverting the traffic and at about 8.32 am today, (Saturday) a truck loaded with PMS lost hold of its brake and rammed into LASTMA patrol vehicle and other *Okada* riders present at that moment.

"There was no casualty among the LASTMA officials but some minor injuries. They had received treatment from Gbagada General Hospital and have returned to me," Giwa stated.

He further said that on sighting the tragedy, the truck driver and the conductor, who escaped unhurt, took to their heels "and no one can ascertain their whereabouts."

As at the time of this report, three bodies were trapped under the truck while two bodies have been taken to the mortuary.

According to an official of fire service, who refused to mention his name, said since PMS is highly inflammable, the tanker could not be upturned without wetting the ground.

He said his men have been at the accident scene since 9 am to neutralise the strength of the PMS so as to evacuate the victims.

The incident caused heavy traffic jam which stretched to Apapa-Oshodi expressway. The commercial bus operators cashed in on this and hiked transport fares by more than 100 per cent, especially on Oshodi-Mile 2 route.



JTF kills 7 militants •'It's not true'

SEVEN militants reportedly lost their lives yesterday in a renewed clash between men of the joint Task Force (JTF) and members of the movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

According to Saharareporters, an online news agency, which quoted the spokesman of MEND, Jomo Gbomo, three army helicopter gun ships returned and began firing missiles indiscriminately into the mend camp "because of the excellent camouflage of our men and gunboats".

"We cannot tell the casualties from the army, who has suffered some losses from sniper rifles. This may be the beginning of a full-scale oil war", MEND was quoted as saying.

But reacting to this, the JTF said in Port Harcourt that it did not record any casualty, accusing MEND members of first opening fire on the soldiers deployed to the Niger Delta to ensure peace and security.

Its spokesman, Lt.-Col. Sagir Musa, told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) that the militant group launched an attack on troops patrolling Eleme-Tombia, a riverine community in the Degema council area of Rivers State and had to be made to face reprisals.

"Our men were patrolling the area when MEND opened fire on them. There was an exchange of fire, but we did not record any casualty. The militants fled from the incident", he said.

Spokesman for MEND, Gbomo, however, countered the claim of provocation made by Musa and said that it was the military that first opened fire on innocent citizens of the area.

He said that MEND repelled the attack of the troops using sophisticated weapons on the two military helicopters that were close enough to be attacked.

"We suspect that one of them may have been damaged. The helicopters were repelled and have not returned," he said.

He said that the JTF "began a full scale aerial and marine offensive on MEND positions and neighboring Ijaw communities in Rivers state with helicopter gunships, jet fighters and more than 20 gun boats and landing crafts filled with heavily armed soldiers.

MEND asked Oil companies in the region to move out their workers within the next 24 hours "because a hurricane is about to sweep through oil installations in the entire Niger Delta region".

Meanwhile, another statement issued by Jomo Gbomo yesterday, stated: "The 27 oil workers rescued yesterday by MEND from the pirates that kidnapped them from the MT Blue Ocean and taken to the camp under attack to be offered as a reward leverage for the release of Henry Okah are trapped in the fighting between our fighters and the Nigerian military forces. "The workers are made up of five expatriates from Britain, South Africa and Ukraine, while the remaining twenty two are Nigerians. "It was learnt that the military on faulty intelligence as usual embarked on what is now

