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The tanker that caused the havoc

150 killed in Port Harcourt fuel tanker fire

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- 95 get mass burial
- 27 cars, 34 motorcycles destroyed
- Jonathan orders relief materials for victims

DENNIS NAKU, Port Harcourt

NO fewer than 150 persons were

roasted to death yesterday when a tanker, laden with fuel overturned, spilled its contents and went up in flames in Okogbe

community, on the Ahoada/Mbiama stretch of the East-West road in Rivers State. Okogbe is one of the

communities in the Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State. The incident occurred about 6:30 a.m when a bus

heading to Port Harcourt was involved in an accident with a new-model-black Toyota vehicle, just as the

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Senate accuses Governors of looting state funds

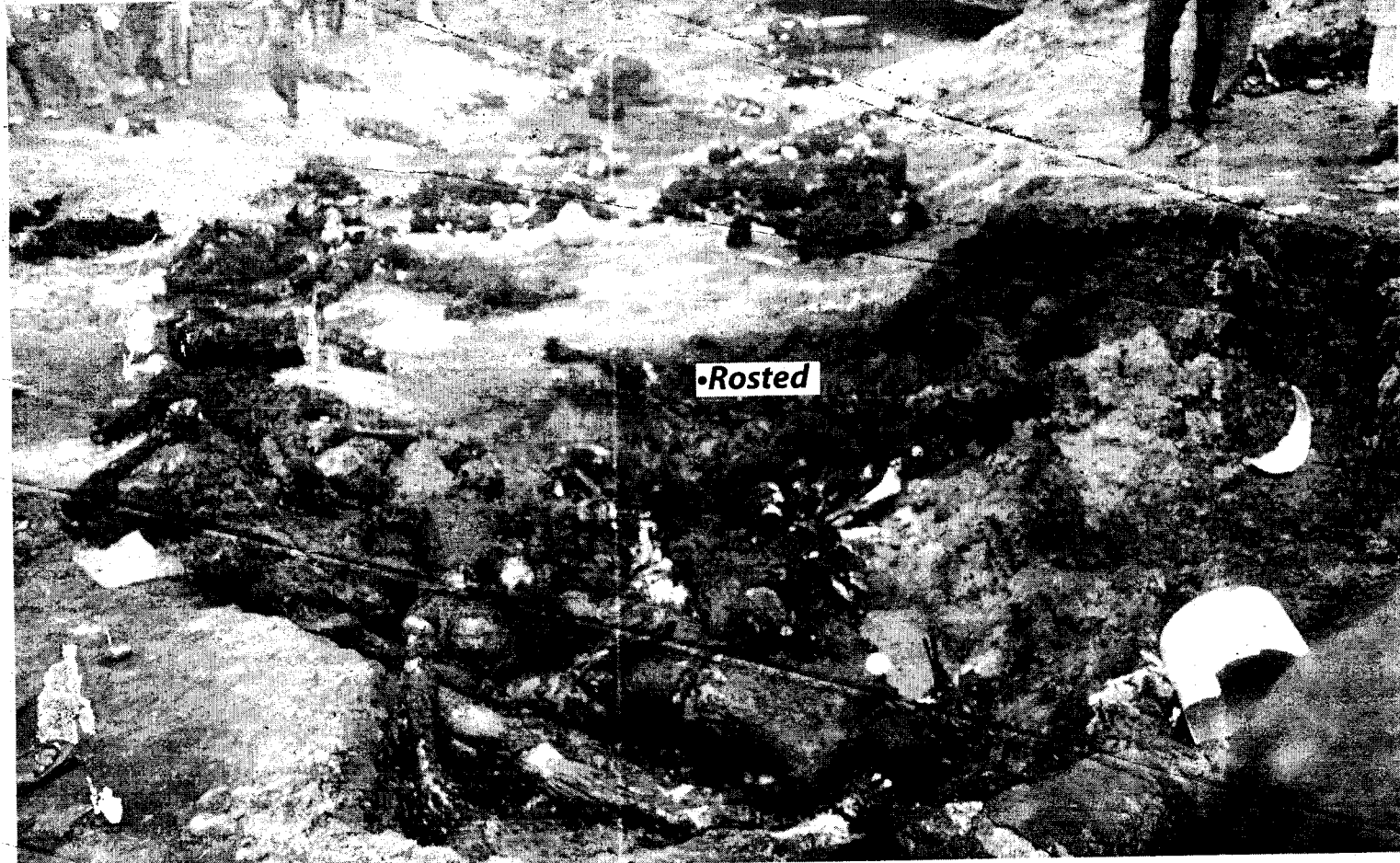
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\$3m subsidy bribe: Jagaba threatens to sue Farouk

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TANKER FIRE... Scores of charred bodies of Fuel Scoopers at the scene of Tanker loaded with Petrol which fell and later gutted fire in Ahoada Rivers State yesterday.



150 killed in P/Harcourt fuel tanker fire

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tanker said to be carrying 33,000 litres of fuel was coming from the opposite direction on high speed.

Eyewitness said the tanker driver tried to dodge the two cars, when it veered off the road, overturned into a hollow space near the road and spilled the product it was carrying.

It was learnt the driver managed to squeeze himself out of the tanker, while it was still steaming and warned people around not to go near the tanker, noting that it was dangerous.

But, some ten minutes after the driver's warning, scores of villagers from Okogbe community, including commercial motorcycle riders, popularly known as Okada and passers-by started scooping the fuel with buckets and cans.

While they were having a field day siphoning the product that littered the ground, the tanker busted into flames and spread into the bush, consuming all those scooping the Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), just as news of the tragedy sparked of confusion in the various communities there.

The charred remains of the victims showed that some of them were caught while trying to run away from the fire, as some of the corpses had their tongues and intestines

protruding and scattered even in the bush, just near the Oando filling station.

Some of the villagers who were lucky to recognise their dead relatives threw themselves on the ground crying, while scores of travelers, motorists and sympathisers held their head in disbelief at the sight of the tragedy.

It was learnt that the fire was ignited by a youth who tried to put a call across to his friends to come and partake in the fuel scooping, even as most of the victims, including men, women and a boy of about eight years were burnt beyond recognition.

The incident caused a heavy traffic along the Ahoada/Mbiama axis of the East-West road leading to Bayelsa, Delta and Edo states as travellers and other motorists were in a gridlock for about three hours before the intervention of security operatives and officials of the FRSC.

Our reporter visited the scene of the incident about 11:35am, said the mangled bodies of the victims littered the ground, while about 18 corpses were spotted in one space, away from the tanker.

Also, over 34 motorcycles belonging to Okada riders who were scooping fuel, a Mitsubishi commercial bus as well as the tanker were completely burnt, even as smoke was still coming of the tanker about 12pm.

Most of those who commented on the tragic incident blamed it on poor state of the East-West road and the poverty in the area and Niger Delta as a whole as well as ignorance.

Others blamed the high casualty figure to the late arrival of the fire fighters, even as Daily Champion reported that a fighter vehicle belonging to the Rivers State Fire Service arrived the scene

exactly 12:05pm, over five hours after the inferno had died down.

The fire fighters immediately pumped water to put out the smoke billowing from the tanker to the dismay of on-lookers, most of who lamented their late arrival.

An eye witness and Traditional Ruler of Igbiguya Clan, Ekpeye Kingdom, Ahoada West, HRH, Eze Joshua Ibiya said as soon as the fire started, he went to a nearby filling station (Oando) and pleaded with them to bring water and soap with which the workers, himself and some volunteers used to pour on the inferno.

Eze Ibiya, while lamenting the loss of lives said: "If the roads were good, this incident would not have happened. We counted about 139 corpses at this place (pointing into the hollow space). Over 100 people were taken to the hospital.

Confirming the incident to newsmen, Rivers State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Sampson Parker over 200 lives were lost to the incident, discerning it as a national disaster.

"I don't think anything like this has happened, even in areas where there is bomb blast, Boko Haram and plane crashes. I think this is the worst single disaster that has ever happened in Nigeria, because I don't know where.

"The corpses I counted there alone, in fact 200 and they have not finished counting. It is cremation. Corpses were burn to ashes, so how many can you count? It is a sad situation," Parker said.

Commissioner who was close to tears when he visited the Ahoada General to see the victims receiving treatment said that none of the cases were below 70 per cent burnt.

He noted that the incident

should not be blamed on the late arrival of the fire fighters, saying the people need to be enlightened on the dangers of such disasters waiting to happen.

Parker was at the hospital with his counterpart in the Ministry of Special Duties, Hon. Emeka Wogu and the Local Government Chairman of Ahoada West, Hon. Awori Millea.

Meanwhile scores of villagers had stormed the General Hospital in Ahoada East to see if their relatives were among the survivors rushed there for treatment, just as two of the victims gave up the ghost there, while Doctors and other medical personnel were having a hectic time attending to burnt victims.

Chief Nursing Officer of the Hospital identified as Mrs Ebuku told newsmen in the emergency ward that the first batch of victims were sent to Port Harcourt for proper medical attention.

She said the second batch comprising eight victims were given first aid and sent to the Braithwaite Memorial Specialist Hospital in Port Harcourt, while they were attending to the third batch of 16 victims, saying all were critical cases.

Some of the victims spotted had already lost their eyes, even as the chances of survival of some of them are slim.

But the Rivers State Sector Commander, Federal Road Safety Commission, FRSC, Kayode Olagunju, confirmed that 93 persons died.

In a text message, Olagunju said: "There is a major fatal crash at Okogbe about 11 kilometers from Ahoada-Mbiama on the East-West Road in Rivers State. The accident happened around 06:30 hrs. A tanker laden with petrol crashed with three other vehicles.

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materials for victims

particularly distraught by the fact that once again, so many Nigerian lives have been lost in an avoidable fuel fire disaster.

"He conveys his sincerest condolences to the families of the victims, and the government and people of Rivers State",

Abati said.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that 95 persons were killed while many others were injured in the explosion which occurred while the victims were scooping fuel from a fallen tanker at Okogbe in Ahoada West

LGA.

Gov. Rotimi Amaechi was at the State House attending the Council of State meeting when news of the accident was reported.

The governor immediately left the meeting to attend to the incident.

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95 victims get mass burial

THE FRSC said 89 of the 95 persons who died in the petrol tanker explosion were given mass burial at Okobe village in the Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers.

Dr Kayode Olagunju, the Sector Commander in a text message to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) that the 89 bodies were burnt beyond recognition and were all given mass burial at the scene.

Olagunju added that six of the victims who died were identified and released to their respective families.

He said in all, 95 persons died in the incident with 18 others injured.

The commander said that the accident occurred around 6.30 am on Thursday and involved four vehicles, including the tanker which caught fire.

"Thirty-four motor-cycles were also burnt at the scene", Olagunju said.

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•The tanker that caused the havoc

150 killed in P/Harcourt fuel tanker fire

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"A Toyota Corolla, Hummer bus and a Mitsubishi bus, 34 motorcycles also got burnt. People were scooping fuel from the fell tanker, when the tanker exploded. FRSC, police, fire service, JTF are at the scene. Final casualty figures on the Okogbe tanker crash incident: 93 died on the spot (burnt), 2 died in hospital. 18 persons were injured.

He however disputed the figure given by the Health Commission, although that of the later corroborated the one given by most of the eye witnesses.

Ejike Ogbani, a witness who escaped the gory fire, gave a rough graphic of death persons to 100, including aged persons and some underage children.

Ogbani said the tanker ignited fire at about 7am as villagers trooped to the somersaulted tanker to fetch fuel before the fire sparked off.

He attributed his escaped to God and said, the entire community youths made up boys and girls including some none indigenes were also killed in the fire.

But one of the soldiers who spoke to Daily Champion put the death toll to 100 persons, just as he said the death victims were burnt beyond recognitions.

The soldiers also said some victims were recovered from a stream close to Oando filling stations were the some burnt person dive into seeking for refuge to cold their heated bodies.

The accident, our correspondent gathered sparked off reactions among the villagers as men, women and youths seized the deadly golden opportunity to fetch the product before its ignited fire, killing hundreds of villagers and injured scores.

The raging fire which spilled to the main road also burnt vehicles plying the road and motorcycles used in scooping the product even as hundreds of jerry cans liters the scene of the disaster.

Our correspondent also

reports that motorbikes were use as a makeshift ambulance in conveying burnt victims to Mbiama community near Bayelsa, a distance of about thirty minutes, searching for hospitals and clinics to treat victims.

Although an Oando mega filling station located near the explosion site were speared from the ravaging fire even as the heat emanating from the fire scares passersby.

The fire incident which caused confusion among the villagers including those from neighboring Ekpeye villages

saw volunteers combing bushes searching for injured persons along the Agip pipeline closed to the explosion area.

Following the close down of the East-West road to men of the Nigeria Army and Police force were deployed to the scene of the explosion to control traffics.

Narrating the sad incident, Miss Queen Okpara told Daily Champion that the tanker was involved in an accident and somersaulted with product before villagers rush to scoop the product.

One of the burnt victims at

the hospital, Victor Ezekial, 32, who managed to speak, cried in a subdued voice "Doctor please save me, my stomach is paining me, please save me."

report more victims, including believed to be an Octogenarian were still being brought to the hospital. She was been held by persons believed to be her children to the hospital ward.

State Governor, Chibuike Amaechi who was away in Abuja, the nation's capital was said to be on his way to visit the scene of the incident, according to a top government official who don't want his name in print.

Dana crash preliminary report out

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to raise the landing gear."

"At 1543:27 hours, the Captain informed the Flight officer "we just lost everything, we lost an engine. I lost both engines". During the next 25 seconds until the end of the CVR recording, the flight crew was attempting to restart the engines."

The report also stated that: "Fuelling records indicated the airplane was uplifted with 8000 lbs of fuel before departure from ABV. The flight crew reported to

ATC they had 26,000 lbs of total fuel. Preliminary analysis of fuel samples from the refuelling truck and the supply tank at ABV were negative for contamination."

"The investigative activities have included, in part, visual examination of the aircraft wreckage, review of maintenance records and other historical information of the aircraft, documentation of the training and experience of the flight crew, determination the chronology of the flight, review of recorded data, reconstructing the aircraft refuelling, and

collection of related fuel samples, and interviews of relevant personnel."

He affirmed that investigations were not over as future investigative activities will include detailed examination of the engines, further testing of fuel samples, continued factual gathering of relevant historical, operational, maintenance and performance information of the accident airplane, further analysis of the CVR audio recording and review of pertinent issues associated with regulatory oversight.

Falana, 24 others made SANs

MEBRIM UCHECHUKWU, Abuja

THE Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee (LPPC) has approved the appointment of a renowned human rights activist, Mr Femi Falana and 24 other lawyers as Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN).

Falana was expected to have become an SAN several years before now having been adjudged a vibrant and brilliant lawyer by his admirers.

The decision to confer the prestigious award to the deserving lawyers was taken in LPPC meeting held yesterday in Abuja.

A statement signed by the Chief Registrar/Secretary of

LPPC, Mr. Sunday Olorundahunsi noted that the newly appointed SANs would be sworn in on a date to be announced later.

Those who made the list are Prof. Yemi Akinseye-George (Academics), Prof. Dakas Clement James Dakas (Academics), Joy Okungbowa Adesina (Mrs), Chief (Mrs) Connie-Jean Aremu, Mahmud Abubakar Magaji, Ogbu James Onoja, Garuba Usman Tetengi, Henry Gghogho Ogbodu, Selekewei Larry, Abenry O. Mobammed, Charles Nwanne Obishai, Luke Chukwudi Ilogu, Francis Chuka Agbu, Paul C. Ananaba and Akinlaja Dayo Moses.

Others are Ahmed Raji,

Adekunle Theophilus Oyesanya, Rotimi Oluseye Samuel Opasanya, Aduroja Claudius Olumuyiwa, Aliyu Umar, Illo Katune Sanusi, Rotimi Jacobs and Ndukwe A. Nnnawuchi.

It would be recalled that LPPC had on July 2 short listed 71 lawyers to attend this year's interview to select those who would be awarded the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria.

The committee had also called on members of the public to possibly comment on the integrity and competence of any of the candidates.

Such comments, the statement noted if any, should reach the Chief Registrar on or before July.

Senate accuses state govs of looting states fund

•External borrowing for 36 states hits \$2.1 billion
COSMAS EKPUNOBI (Assist. Pol. Editor) and ADEKUNLE ADESUJI

GOVERNORS of the 36 states of the federation came under fire yesterday on the floor of the Senate as Senators accused the state chief executives of reckless spending and mismanagement of states resources.

States Assemblies were not as spared yesterday as senate insisted that the failure of the state lawmakers to effectively oversight the state governors have continued to cause the state more harm.

Senators at a stormy session yesterday warned that most states may soon become bankrupt unless the state governors reduce their penchant for external borrowing, foreign trips, and huge security votes.

The total borrowing profile for the states was put at \$2.1 billion yesterday by a senate committee on national planning which in its report indicted the state chief executives of misappropriation of states fund.

But the attack on the governors followed the adoption of the report of the senate committee on National planning on the looming bankruptcy in the state.

Senators at the consideration of the report of the senator Barnabas Gemade led committee blamed the state governors for the slow development of the states. The state governors were however tasked to diversify the revenue base of the state rather over dependence on oil revenue and foreign loans.

According to the committee report "there is high rate of corruption and corrupt practices through misappropriation and misapplication of public funds, abuse of immunity clause by some state governors and the incapacitation of the various anti-graft agencies through political subterfuges.

"There is a fundamental issue of non-viability of the 36 states structure. The fragmentation of the original three region structure at independence to one of four regions, twelve states, then 19 and now 36 states- with the multiplication of governors, states House of Assembly, Ministries, Commissioners, Secretariat etc, their requisites staffing and concomitant perquisites and cost has been one of the major difficult facing the states- these huge recurrent cost leave little or nothing for the development needs of the new states.

"Much of the revenue accruing to the states and local governments ends up being misappropriated. States fail to remit the LGAs share because the states control joint state/LGA account and the little does get to the LGA is pocketed by the LGA chairmen and cronies."

But Senators who spoke yesterday argued that the states have no reason to be poor, warning that many states may be doomed unless they cut down the cost of governance as matter urgency. The over dependency on oil revenue at the expense of Internally Generated Review (IGR) by states is responsible for their continued call on the federal government to share the proceeds of the excess crude account to meet the growing cost of governance in states.

"For instance, the sum of \$1.5 billion was shared in three equal installments from the excess crude account in 2011 alone out of which the states received the sum of \$400.800 million. The final payment amounts to \$500 million," the committee said.