

100 killed in pipeline blast

By Olumide Bajulaiye & Kayode Ekundayo, Lagos with agency reports

At least 100 people, many of them school children, were killed yesterday by an oil pipeline explosion in Ijegun in Alimoso local government area of Lagos state.

"About 100 people have so far been confirmed dead from the fire. We have so far rescued more than 20 people with injuries and taken them to hospital for treatment," a Red Cross official at the scene said.

School bags and sandals littered the compound of one school whose pupils had fled the explosion and blaze. More than 20 burned out vehicles caught in the fire were visible in the street, as fire-fighters and volunteers tried to douse the flames with sand and water.

"I was returning home when I suddenly saw sparks of fire from where the grader (earthmover) was working. It was like hell was raining down on us, then everybody started running in different directions," Mr. John Egbowon, who witnessed the blaze, said. The fireball engulfed homes and schools at Ijegun village in the Lagos district of Alimosho, and many of the dead, who included schoolchildren, were killed in the ensuing stampede as people fled the flames. Hundreds of local people rushed in with buckets of sand and water to help the fire service to put out the blaze.

Red Cross officials said the explosion was caused by an earth moving vehicle belonging to a road construction company that pierced a pipeline carrying refined fuel

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Aftermath of the pipeline blast at Ijegun in Lagos State, yesterday

MPs shut out of el-Rufai's house

By Abdul-Rahman Abubakar

Security men guarding the house controversially bought by the former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister Malam Nasir el-Rufai yesterday prevented the Chairman and members of the Senate Committee on Federal Capital Territory (FCT) probing activities of

past administrations in Abuja from inspecting the house.

The house is one of the three guest houses of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar located at No. 16 Mambila Street, which was bought by Malam Nasir el-Rufai for

N45 million.

The security men, who work for System Properties Development Company belonging to el-Rufai's friend, Alhaji Idris Othman told members of the Senate Committee that they have orders not to allow anybody into the property. System Properties is owned by the prop-

erty developer Alhaji Idris Othman, who was said at the committee's public hearings to have been contracted by 19 last-minute plot allottees to build 45 houses for them.

Chairman of the Senate FCT Committee Senator Abubakar

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through a village on the outskirts.

Sule Maicube, the Red Cross official, said the flames from the fire spread through nearby homes and a school. He said: "At least 20 people have now been taken to hospital."

"The fire occurred in a residential area, and it is still continuing. The [surrounding] buildings are in flames." The fire raged for at least seven hours. The blast area, which was near a primary school, was littered with shoes and bags belonging to pupils.

The pipeline links products supply from Atlas Cove Jetty to Ore, Mosimi, Ibadan and Ilorin. When contacted, the spokesman for the Pipeline and Products Marketing Company, (PPMC), a subsidiary of NNPC, Ralph Ugwu described the incident as very unfortunate. He said the contractor embarked on ille-

gal operation without permission from PPMC.

He said the incident occurred when the company was pumping fuel from its Atlas Cove Jetty in Lagos to Mosimi, Ogun state depot.

Ugwu said as a result of the incident, fuel pumping to Mosimi and other depots have been suspended indefinitely until repair work is completed on the damaged line.

He however allayed fear of imminent fuel scarcity, saying that the affected depots have enough fuel within the period the repair work will last. Meanwhile, as at the time of filling this report, fire was still raging while fire fighters and officials of NNPC are putting spirited efforts to put off the fire. Lagos state command Public Relation Officer, Frank Uba confirmed the incident. Yesterday's pipeline blast added to this

country's sorry record in this matter. More than 400 people died in two pipeline explosions in Lagos in 2006, and at least 40 died in December last year. Some fires are started when residents attempt to take oil from damaged or sabotaged pipelines.

Previous pipeline blasts in Nigeria have been caused by vandals who drilled holes in the feeder lines, used to distribute fuel, in order to steal petrol for sale on the black market.

At least 45 people were burnt to death last December in another village on the outskirts of Lagos when fuel they were stealing from a buried pipeline went up in flames. One year earlier, 250 people were killed in another pipeline fire in a different area of Lagos.

Meanwhile, the Lagos State Government yesterday

sympathized with victims of the pipeline fire incident. Addressing newsmen on the incident at the Bagauda Kaltho Press Centre, Alausa, Commissioner for Home Affairs, Mr. Tunde Balogun who spoke alongside the Special Adviser on Information, Mr. Segun Ayobolu said the entire state government emergency agencies were deployed to the scene immediately the incident was reported.

Mr. Balogun added the incident started from an oil pipeline that was damaged due to construction activities on the Isolo- Ijegan road and that fire trucks from the Isolo fire station and some from Alausa immediately responded to the fire which is petrochemical in nature.

He disclosed that the

state had also got in touch with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to stop the flow of the crude which passes through the pipeline. Mr. Balogun added that all hands are still on deck as the fire is still raging and may take some more hours before it is finally put out considering the fact that petrochemical fire may not be easy to put out.

Also speaking, the Special Adviser Information and Strategy, Mr. Segun Ayobolu said immediately the incident was reported, top officials of the State Government including the Commissioner for Special Duties, Dr. Tola Kasali and his Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation counterpart, Mrs. Joke Orelope Adefulire visited the scene and are coordinating rescue operations.

Mr. Ayobolu added that the state government emergency officials including the fire ser-

vice have formed protective foam against the spread of the fire while Lagos State Emergency Medical Agency (LASEMA) and the Lagos State Ambulance Services (LASAMBUS) mobile ambulances were treating those with minor injuries while those with major injuries were being transferred to the hospital.

He added that in the same vein, fire fighting trucks from the NNPC and the Julius Berger have also joined in efforts to put out the raging fire in order to minimize the level of destruction. In his contribution, the Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Media, Mr. Hakeem Bello appealed to the public to be calm and refrain from reacting to the unfortunate incident in any way that could lead to an escalation of casualty figures.