

Nine die in pipeline fire, collapsed building

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TWO disasters in Lagos and Ogun States have claimed nine persons. Five people died in the Ogun State caused by a pipeline explosion while a collapsed building in Lagos killed four residents.

Only two weeks ago, a pipeline fire in Ijegan area of Alimosho Local Council of Lagos led to the death of several people while property worth millions of naira was destroyed.

A trapped victim in the collapsed building, who earlier called his relations on his mobile phone was no longer responding to inquiries about his condition yesterday.

The latest explosion

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occurred in Gbaga Village near Mosimi Loading Depot in Ogun State.

The fire outbreak, which started yesterday morning, was allegedly caused by vandals who damaged the Mosimi-Ibadan pipeline axis of the Nigerian National Petroleum

Corporation (NNPC). Nine people were reported to have sustained various degrees of injury from the incident.

Among the casualties were members of the Petroleum Tanker Drivers (PTD) and mobile policemen on duty at the facility.

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Meanwhile, a fuel spillage has been discovered in Mosun community along NNPC pipeline in Ipaja area on the outskirts of Lagos.

The *Guardian* learnt that the Gbaga explosion allegedly started about 3.30 a.m. yesterday when vandals tampered with the line from Mosimi depot. In the process of fixing their

valve for scooping fuel, they encountered serious spillage, which later became uncontrollable.

Immediately they were sighted by the vigilance group of PTD, the vandals allegedly attempted to escape, but the group in an attempt to get the police informed with their vehicle collided with a substance which later exploded.

As at 5 p.m. yesterday, fire-fighters were still at the spot battling to stop the fire. But the General Manager of Petroleum Product Marketing Company (PPMC), Mr. Ralph Ugwu, has assured that repairs would start immediately the fire is put out.

PTD Secretary-General, Mr. Tokunbo Korodo, said

that worried by the spate of pipeline vandalism and with less intervention of the NNPC on the security issues, the association took it upon itself to monitor the pipeline in the area.

He said the vandals do not hesitate to attack the security operatives, citing a recent case where a driver of the vigilance group was matched to death.

"When we discovered the increasing rate of vandalism in the area, we formed a security outfit, but the operatives were attacked last week and the driver killed. One of the vandals was also killed in the process of reinforcement by the police. On discovering the tight security in the bush path, the vandals decided to move

closer to the NNPC depot where the fire occurred," he said.

Minister of State for Energy (Petroleum), Mr. Odein Ajumogobia, has expressed dissatisfaction with the situation and urged the culprits to desist from the act. Ajumogobia said it was unfortunate that this was happening again in the downstream, adding that vandalism was not acceptable and anybody caught in the act would be prosecuted.

The Lagos building tragedy occurred on Sunday night when a residential two-storey house collapsed in New Iba area of Lagos, killing four people and injuring many.

The building, located at 7, Alade Street, was said to

have collapsed at about 9.00 p.m. just as some residents ended a social party in the area.

Rescue workers were seen yesterday searching for trapped occupants who sent distressed calls from the rubble to their relations.

A witness told *The Guardian* that "the building has been under construction for seven years but it was only two years ago that the tenants started moving into it. The house has been showing sign and it finally came down last night.

"In fact, only one woman with her four children ran out when the first and the second floors collapsed and another three persons were rescued today by the Lagos State aid workers," he said.

According to him, nobody could say how many people were dead, as only four bodies have so far been retrieved, adding that one of the trapped residents who called from the rubble with his mobile phone yesterday morning was no longer responding to further communication.

When *The Guardian* visited the scene yesterday, the rescue team was combing the ruins for more victims. The rescue officials were said to have retrieved one dead body on Sunday night and a man with his two children yesterday.

A senior police officer at the scene, who preferred anonymity, confirmed that some victims had been found in the rubble.

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