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52 feared dead in Lagos tanker fire

Wednesday, 08 January 2014 22:13 Written by By Kenekwukwu Ezeonyejiaku

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Traffic controller, houses, others burnt

IT was a gloomy day in Lagos Wednesday following an accident in which a 33,000-litre capacity tanker fully loaded with Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) fell and started a fire.

About 52 lives and property worth billions of naira were reportedly lost to the fire.

The incident occurred in the late hours of Tuesday as a result of a break failure from the tanker, which was descending Berger Cement Bridge and heading to Boundary Road in Ajeromi Local Council Area.

In the process, it hit a parked bus which caught fire and spread to other vehicles around there, allegedly killing over 52 people including a policeman on traffic control duty, Inspector John Ahmadu. The fire destroyed more than 13 buildings including the multi-billion naira heavy-duty vehicles at Trinity Spare Parts Market and a new generation bank building.

An eyewitness and Chairperson, Trinity Community Development Association (CDA), Mrs. Fehintola Danmole, said at the scene of the incident that that the tragedy happened as a result of

indiscriminate and illegal activities of articulated vehicle drivers in the area, and the recklessness of the driver.

“I came here immediately the tanker caught fire and people who saw how it happened said that the tanker’s break failed and the driver lost control of it. The driver was then struggling to get control of it and landed on a bus parked by the road. As soon as it landed there with that speed, there was leakage and the bus caught fire, which spread from there to other vehicles and buildings around.

“So far, over 52 bodies have been evacuated from the area and it is unfortunate that a policeman, Inspector John Ahmadu, who was on ground and in the traffic box that night to control traffic which is ever present here as a result of the activities of these drivers was burnt but was rushed to the hospital. Thirteen buildings were affected, excluding the Sterling Bank building which was badly affected because when the leakage occurred, it went through the drainage to the buildings around and got them burnt.”

But the General Manager, Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA), Dr. Oke Osanyintolu, said only five people were killed.

The Director, Lagos State Fire Service, Razak Idowu Fadipe, blamed the fire on late information from the people around. He disclosed that the agency got information of the fire which started at about 10:00 p.m. and urged people to memorise the emergency numbers and alert his men immediately there was fire outbreak.

He said: “The information we gathered was that the fire started around 10:00 p.m. It was 22:53 p.m. that my men were informed and we got here by 22:53 p.m. because we have fire stations that were very close here. There are emergency numbers in the state, when there is an emergency of any sort, call the numbers 767 or 112. Let us memorise these numbers. If there is an emergency, you don’t need to call the governor or the commissioner, there are people that man these offices 24/7; they are there, just call the numbers and we will give a quick response to it.

“We are not happy that these losses were incurred as a result of fire incident in this very bad economic situation that we are now in. If the Lagos State Fire Service were not prompt when we got the information, the whole community would have been razed down. People should be very careful and know the kind of people that they give out their vehicles to drive. I was also told that a lot of trans-loading is being carried out here and people in the community should be concerned about these nefarious activities that are done here because anything that is done in your community concerns you.”

One of the affected traders, Edwin Eze who estimated his loss to be about N20, 600, 000 was seen downcast but was of high hopes that God would help him bounce back. According to him, “if only the government will not use this incident that happened here and eject us from here, I give myself three years to get back to where I was.”

Another trader, Nnamdi Obiakor, bemoaned his fate and wondered why this should happen to him. According to him: “I was settled last year June after learning trade from my Oga, Edwin Eze. The worst was that I just came back from the village on Tuesday and this happened that same day. I had paid a five-year rent with all the things done in the shop costing me up to N2 million. I just don’t know where to start.”

The unending loss of lives and property occasioned by the menace of articulated vehicle drivers in Lagos State and the nonchalant attitude of relevant authorities to permanently tackle the problem have for long brought untold hardship to the citizens.

One of the costly mistakes any private car or commercial bus going to Apapa can make is to ply through Mile Two/Tincan axis.

Most times, traffic congestion caused by the activities of container truck and fuel tanker drivers who have taken over the road and converted it to a park, stretches from Tincan Island port up to Second Rainbow bus stop, the bridges of Berger Cement bus stop going to Kirikiri container terminal and that of Sunrise bus stop.

At such periods, the stretch of road is almost totally blocked and has become a nightmare to motorists and residents of the area.

Two lanes of this road are permanently occupied by stationary trucks waiting to load petroleum products from the tank farms or returning freight containers to the wharf. This indiscriminate parking has caused unquantifiable loss of man-hours to the economy and needless bloodletting on the roads.

Motorists who dare make use of the road spend their day in the snarl and some who are unlucky even abandon their cars in the gridlock to find their ways home.

Fares along the axis have skyrocketed, most of the buses that ply the route now choose to terminate their journey at Mile Two while others now drive against the traffic, thereby causing more dangers to lives of both their passengers and passersby. Others now follow alternative routes of Orile and Western Avenue to get to their places of work and thereby putting more pressure on the already heavy traffic on the roads.

More worrisome now is the presence of commercial motorcyclists popularly known as “okada” who have now pounced on the ugly scenario at the Apapa-bound road to make fortunes but causing untold dangers on the other side of the road ranging from accidents and even death.