

Pipeline explosion kills 20, injure many in Rivers

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Two Die At Police Roadblock

Again, pipeline explosion from illegal refining of petroleum products in Rumuekpe community in Emohua local council of Rivers State has reportedly killed 20 persons.

This is even as two persons have died while several others sustained serious injuries in a ghastly motor accident that occurred in the early hours of yesterday at the Rumuji axis of East-West road in Emohua local council of the state.

Last month, some persons were also reportedly killed following activities of illegal bunkering in Rivers State.

It was learnt that the latest incident occurred last Thursday when youths of the community were siphoning petroleum products from several pipelines located on the stretch of the adjoining villages.

A resident of the community, Mike Ndele, said the area was prone to oil bunkering activities, disclosing that the pipeline exploded when the bunkerers attempted to cut off one of the pipeline

heads. He said that about 20 persons died in the incident.

He said: "I can confirm to you that more than 20 persons died in that very incident. The particular place where this incident occurred is very notorious for bunkering activities. Youths from various communities gathered there to carry out criminal activities of cutting oil pipes. The place is the centre of oil bunkering activities. There are so many petrol and gas pipelines that crisscross the community. Some multinational oil companies own the pipelines.

"NLNG also has their gas pipeline along the stretch of the community. Those involved in this criminal activity may have ruptured a petrol pipeline, which ignited fire and burnt to death so many persons. This incident may have affected many families from the neighbouring communities as many youths involved in this nefarious activity comes from different communities."

Another resident of Rumuekpe, who simply gave his name as Amadi, said that he saw five corpses burnt beyond recognition.

When contacted, the Rivers State Police Command Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Nnamdi Omoni, confirmed the incident.

He, however, said he was yet to ascertain the number of deaths, adding that a detachment from the State Police Command had been deployed to the area to ensure there was no breakdown of law and order.

An eyewitness at the scene of the accident on East-West road, Kachy Robinson, told The Guardian that two commercial buses coming from opposite sides had a head-on collision, which resulted in the loss of two lives while several others sustained different degrees of injuries.

"There is an accident along this East-West road at Rumuji after the police stations. So far, two people have been confirmed dead and many others persons wounded," he said.

Robinson claimed that accidents had been a recurring at that axis of the road. He blamed the 'permanent' roadblock mounted by the police in the area for the unfortunate development, noting that since men of Rumuji Police Division blocked one side of the road as a measure to curb crime in the state, commuters have been forced to use only one lane.

The state PPRO could not confirm the incident as he had not replied to calls and text messages sent to him at the time of filing this report.