



THE WORLD IN BRIEF

Pressure on Assad as envoy defects, West eyes sanctions

Pressure mounted on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Thursday after a first senior diplomat defected and Western powers drew up a 10-day sanctions ultimatum.

Syria's ambassador to Iraq, Nawaf Fares, announced he was joining a small but growing list of officials who have defected to the opposition, as the regime battles a near 16-month-old uprising.

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Gearing for the soul of Edo

By the time Chief Anthony Anenih, former Chairman, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Board of Trustees

News

100 killed, dozens injured in Rivers fuel tanker fire

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busy East-West express road at about 8.00 a.m., was aggravated when some commercial motorcycle (okada) riders got to the scene and fell upon themselves, as they battled to scoop free fuel from a hole near an Oando filling station.

Just while they scrambled, the tanker burst into flames, sending a thick smoke billowing into the sky.

According to eyewitnesses, the driver of the fateful tanker had warned the fuel scavengers to desist from scooping the product, as he could not guarantee what would happen in the process.

He reportedly reminded them that the content was highly inflammable and could be dangerous.

"The villagers apparently ignored the driver's warning to

leave the scene of the accident.

"But the okada riders started calling their colleagues with their mobile phones and before you knew it, they were everywhere at the scene collecting fuel," an eyewitness who was crying profusely, explained.

Another eyewitness, a passenger who simply gave his name as Wozi, said "the tanker driver was trying to avoid the smaller car but incidentally it hit the side of the Corolla car before it fell on the other side of the road and burst into flames."

Wozi explained that over 70 charred corpses, burnt beyond recognition, were counted on the spot, while more than 30 others who sustained burns were rushed to the nearby clinic for treatment.

Agnes Udeh, who was able to recognise a charred motor bike as belonging to her husband, said she could not see her man

but was very sure that the bike she saw was his own.

"He left this morning for work. This is his bike, but I cannot find him anywhere. Since I came here I have looked for him everywhere but I can't see him," she fell down crying.

Zonal Coordinator of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Emenike Umesi, said "rescue workers from the security agencies, including the police, road safety, fire service and civil defence, were at the scene of the accident to evacuate victims and control the traffic."

Umesi, who gave the official casualty figure as 95 dead and 18 injured, blamed the disaster on the greed of the residents who trooped to the scene to fetch free fuel.

Reacting to the incident at the Ahoada General Hospital in Ahoada East Local Government

area of the state, Commissioner for Health, Sampson Parker, who was in the company of two of his colleagues, including Special Duties Commissioner, Emeka Nwogu, said he counted 200 corpses.

"I will describe this as the single worst incident that has happened in Rivers State since the civil war; it is even worse than the Sosoliso crash we experienced before now. It is quite a pity.

"The situation would have been saved if they didn't go there, because when the accident happened there was no fire; the fire, as I heard, started when they started scooping fuel.

"So the situation would have been saved if people didn't go there to scoop fuel," the commissioner said.

Earlier, Rivers State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Ben Ugwuogbulam, had confirmed the incident, but

could not give an official casualty figure.

President Goodluck Jonathan reacted to the disaster later on Thursday, expressing "deep sadness" over the loss of many lives caused by the explosion.

A statement by Presidential spokesman, Reuben Abati, said Jonathan was particularly distraught by the fact that once again, so many Nigerian lives had been lost in an avoidable fuel fire disaster.

The President has, therefore, directed federal relief and health agencies to do everything possible to ensure that all those who survived the explosion with burns and injuries receive prompt and effective medical attention.

He conveyed his condolences to the families of the victims, and the government and people of Rivers State, the statement added.