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Nnamdi Mbawike

28 July 2011

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No fewer than 10 people, including children, were feared dead yesterday when a tanker carrying petrol caught fire and exploded at a roundabout near Enugu Prisons.

An eyewitness said the petroleum tanker fell down at about 6am but exploded and caught fire a few minutes after.

LEADERSHIP gathered that the driver of the tanker made a loud noise and wept profusely immediately he noticed that the tanker was leaking.

The driver was also said to have swiftly run to a police station to seek help. But a source said there was no swift response from the police.

It was also gathered that the leaked fuel from the tanker flowed into the Enugu Central Police Station barracks and some parts of Ogbete Main Market through a gutter at the prison barracks.

LEADERSHIP gathered that most of the people who lost their lives to the fire died while

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The grandmother was said to have been later roasted alive by the fire.

A resident of the prison barracks also told our correspondent: "I was sleeping when I heard a loud noise and we started running. The driver was crying and shouting because he knew that the tanker would explode and catch fire. It started from the gutter inside this barracks before spreading to other places. It became worse when the tanker exploded."

As at the time of filing in this report, fire fighting men from the Enugu State Fire Service were still battling to extinguish the fire.

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Our correspondent also sighted stern-looking detectives from different security agencies at the Enugu prisons, just as a source at the prisons office told our correspondent that the move was to avert a jail break.

But a deputy commissioner of police in Enugu, Steven Ekpei, said only three people died in the fire incident.

The head of operations of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) in Enugu, Mr. Linus Ojukwu, attributed the fire outbreak to the recklessness of the driver. He, however, claimed that his men only deposited two dead bodies at the mortuary.

The incident, LEADERSHIP gathered, destroyed poles and cables of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), a development the principal manager, public affairs of the agency, Mr. Esemé Udo, said would prevent the Enugu prisons from having electricity for some time.

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attempting to escape from the windows of their apartments.

Another eyewitness said one of the deceased people had just completed his Higher National Diploma at one of the polytechnics in Enugu.

He reportedly died while he was attempting to rescue his grandmother from their apartment.

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