

Four killed as crash locks down Lagos-Ibadan road

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•HELL: Safety officials at the scene of the tanker fire at Kara on Lagos/Ibadan Express road...yesterday. SEE ALSO PAGE 4 PHOTO: ISAAC JIMOH AYODELE

Four people died yesterday in a multiple accident on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.

Six vehicles were razed in the accident, which occurred around 3a.m. It was said to have been caused by a diesel-laden tanker, which went out of control and rammed into a truck carrying beer. A huge fire was ignited. The other vehicles rammed into them.

It all happened around Kara Bus Stop in Isheri Osun on the Ibadan-bound part of the ever-busy expressway.

The driver of the tanker and his “motor boys” were burnt.

A victim who dived into the lagoon in a bid to put out the fire on his body got drowned, eyewitnesses said.

Other burnt vehicles are two containerised trucks, two trailers, the tanker and a Toyota Corolla saloon.

As emergency workers battled to contain the Kara disaster, another petrol tanker fell at the Berger end of the Otedola Bridge. This compounded the traffic jam that had spread for as long as eyes could see —far beyond the old Lagos toll gate.

The gridlock extended to Ikorodu Road towards Maryland, forcing traffic diversion.

Although the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA) insisted that only three persons died, independent sources put the casualty figure at four.

^r A decomposed body was found floating in the lagoon.

LASEMA General Manager Adesina Tiamiyu said: "Recovery operations of burnt vehicles with LASEMA's heavy duty equipment ongoing to abate gridlock, which has built up on Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. Traffic has affected almost every part of the expressway and Ikorodu road up to Alapere and Ogudu.

"Road users, especially articulated truck drivers, are advised to avoid overspeeding and adhere to safety regulations while plying the road so as to forestall avoidable disasters.

"Investigation on the incident would be carried out by appropriate authorities at the scene."

NEMA Southwest Coordinator Alhaji Suleiman Yakubu said the intervention of firemen, operatives of the Rapid Response Squad (RRS), Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and Ogun State Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Corps minimised the casualty.

According to Yakubu, a driver of one of the vehicles sustained a minor injury. Others were unhurt.

NEMA Southwest spokesman Ibrahim Farinloye confirmed that six vehicles – a car, three containers and two tankers – were involved in the accident.

Scores of people were trekking long distances on the expressway because vehicular traffic was stuck for the greater part of the day. Many workers living on the outskirts of Lagos, who must travel on the expressway to get to work failed to make it.

Those trekking were people living in Ibafo, Mowe, Warewa, Magboro, Prayer City area and Arepo in Ogun State, working or going to Lagos.

Many travelers were stranded. Others who tried to return home got stuck in traffic.

As at yesterday afternoon, some of the vehicles were still burning on the bridge. It was around 4pm that NEMA said it had cleared the debris to allow movement of vehicles.

Officers of the FRSC cordoned off the area to prevent further losses and theft.

Also affected were those travelling to Lagos from other parts of Nigeria as well as those travelling outside Lagos.

The gridlock from the Kara Bridge, close to the popular Julius Berger Bus Stop, stretched to Asese, a few kilometers away from the Redemption Camp – as at 8 a.m.

Similarly, the queue formed by the Lagos outbound vehicles had stretched from the scene to Magodo, opposite the Lagos State Secretariat complex.

Many intending passengers who had wanted to travel to Lagos were stranded at their various bus stops because majority of the commercial buses that could have conveyed them were stuck in the traffic.

A witness, who identified himself as Suraju Fadele, said the accident was caused by a fast moving unmarked trailer loaded with petroleum product that ran into another articulated vehicle and immediately exploded.

"I was waiting by the road side for my friend with some others to display our beef for the early morning market sales.

"Suddenly, I saw a trailer on top speed moving toward our side. It passed us.

"A few metres away from us, we heard a loud explosion which made us run for dear lives, and afterwards, we saw huge billows of fire on the bridge.

"We realised that the trailer must have rammed into other articulated vehicles on the bridge because there were many of them there.

"The problem with the accident is that nobody could move near the scene because of the raging fire," he said.

Another witness, who simply identified himself as Bashir, lamented the reckless and dangerous manner articulated vehicles usually drive on the road.

“What caused the accident was simply speeding. The driver of the tanker was on top speed and I wonder why such speed.

“Before I could look ahead, he had smashed into another trailer ahead of it.

“When the trailer sped past us, we remarked that its driver was speeding and within the twinkle of an eye, we heard the bang, followed by a raging fire.

“There was another trailer under repair on the bridge, which I think was loaded with rice; the trailer must have rammed into it”, Bashir said.

Similar incidents in the past, led to loss of lives on the road. On January7, some passengers died in a fire. Another occurred on July21; some passengers also died.

Work is on on the expressway, which is arguably Nigeria's busiest. Julius Berger Plc is working on the expressway from Sagamu Interchange Bridge to the Lagos end of the old toll gate around 7-Up.

Reynolds Construction Company (RCC) is handling the stretch from Sagamu Interchange Bridge to the old Ibadan end toll gate.