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COVER STORIES

Last Updated: Friday, December 28, 2007

Pipeline fire tragedy: 4 Jeeps, 1,500 jerry cans of fuel recovered

From Raymond Tedunjaye, Lagos /

THE Police have recovered four sophisticated and expensive Jeeps and 1,500 jerry cans filled with fuel at the scene of the Christmas day pipeline fire tragedy at Aba Agbo, near Tarkwa Bay, an area off the Atlantic coast in Lagos State.

Also, the number of the casualties burnt beyond recognition has increased to about 65 in the pipeline fire disaster on Tuesday while they were scooping fuel illegally from a Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) pipeline in the area.

The incident which occurred exactly one year after a similar incident during which over 260 people were burnt to death from a pipeline they had deliberately damaged for that purpose in Abule Egba area of the state on December 26, 2006 was also illegally scooping of petrol.

The expensive vehicles were believed to have been parked there by some of the pipeline vandals who had gone to scoop fuel. It is believed that they had all been consumed by the raging inferno, as they never returned for their vehicles.

The said vehicles and filled jerry cans were however said to have been taken away by members of the Petroleum Task Force Committee to identify some of the deceased and call the attention of their families.

New Nigerian reliably gathered that the fuel was being scooped simultaneously in two areas: the Tarkwa Bay section and the Aba Agbo village section.

The inferno, as gathered started at the Tarkwa Bay section around 2.30 am on Tuesday but did not spread to the Aba Agbo section.

It was learnt that when the fire started at Tarkwa Bay, those scooping fuel at Aba Agbo abandoned their fuel-filled jerry cans and scampered off. The abandoned jerry cans are about 1,500.

Wives and relatives of the victims were seen weeping profusely at the disaster scene on Tuesday. The victims of the disaster were buried in a mass grave on the same day.

Investigation also revealed that security operatives guarding the NNPC pipelines are stationed at about 100 metres from the scene of the disaster, raising speculations that they may have connived with the vandals to scoop fuel from the pipeline.

The vandals were said to have used speedboats to transfer the jerry cans of fuel they had illegally scooped to the mainland, where they sell a 25-litre keg for 3,000 Naira despite the fact that men of the Nigerian Navy manned the waterways.

An NNPC source who craved anonymity disclosed that the vandals would continue their illegal activities because securitymen manning NNPC installations are being owed arrears of salaries by the people who employed them and as such they engage in illegal sale of petroleum products to augment their income.

“If the security operatives manning the area are not paid, there is no way they will not connive with the people to illegally siphon fuel,” he said.

Another source disclosed that one of the key personalities in Aba Agbo village is a notorious

pipeline vandal who cannot be arrested, adding that the man has channelled the path of the water close to his house.

He said pipeline fires had burned his house thrice, but the man has refused to abandon the illegal business.

The source added that all the men in a particular village in the area were burnt to death sometime ago in a pipeline fire disaster, adding “oil bunkering in Tarkwa Bay area is a big business, as the people cannot stop it because of its lucrative nature”.

It would be recalled that on December 26, 2006, 260 people were roasted in a pipeline fire disaster at Abule Egba area of the Lagos State while scooping fuel. Several others were seriously injured, another 150 in May 2006, were killed in a pipeline explosion in Lagos’

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