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|  Sade Oguntola, Kehinde Oyetimi, Adewale Oshodi, Saheed Salawu, Seyi Sokoya, Vera Onana And Wale Akinselure



PHOTOS - 1: Scene of the tanker explosion. 2: Saheed Adeyeye, one of the victims of the inferno. 3: Oyo State governor, Senator Abiola Ajimobi (third right) with the state Police Commissioner, Mr Kola Sodipo (third left), inspecting the scene of the accident at Molete, Ibadan, on Sunday. PHOTOS: TOMMY ADEGBITE AND SEYI SOKOYA.

The dead are still being mourned; those who seem to have survived are painfully hanging on with varying degrees of burns. The growing number of the bereaved is disturbing as no fewer than eleven people have been confirmed dead following, in Saturday night's petrol tanker explosion at Molete, Ibadan, while 16 others, including Mr Samson Oyewo, a staff of

the Nigerian Tribune, are currently under intensive care at the University College Hospital, Ibadan Central Hospital and Immaculate Hospital, Ibadan.

A visit to the morgue of the State Hospital, Ring Road, Adeoyo, by the Nigerian Tribune, revealed that 10 corpses had been deposited there. The morgue attendant, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, stated that "We got 10 corpses which included children and adults."

The raging inferno which spread from Molete round about to Bode area of Ibadan lasted from about 8 pm Saturday night till about 3am, on Sunday, breezed past Prolek filling station before concerted efforts of the Oyo State Fire Service and well-meaning individuals could quench the inferno.

Nigerian Tribune was informed that this incident would be the 5th occurrence in the Molete area having recorded same in August 1971, September 1975, April 1987 and the penultimate in 1994.

Mr Eze Emmanuel, whose chemist shop was burnt recounted, "I just went to park my car and all I heard was a loud sound and fire ensued. It spread to my shop and even one of my customers who came to purchase something was burnt. My younger brother escaped through the back door, while the customer he sold something to was burnt. As at September when I took stock, it amounted to N4.3million."

One of the affected traders, Mrs Alarape Sulaimon, expressed sadness at the loss of her wares running into thousands that she sold to make a living.

"My sister and her three children are dead"

A sad Olujimi Olusegun told the story of how he got the news of the death of his sister and her children. According to him, "What happened remains a sad occurrence to me. I got a call this morning from an old time friend. But I ignored the call. Later, my younger brother called me, telling me that my sister's husband was involved in an accident in Molete. After that, my father called and informed me that my elder sister was dead. She was 32 years old. She gave birth to

three children. All her children were burnt to death. Her husband who survived is being treated at the hospital.”

All my tools, car have been burnt—Panel beater

For Quadri Lawal, a panel beater, his means of livelihood perished in the inferno. “We were called in the morning that Molete was on fire. When we got here, we discovered that all our shops have been burnt. My tools have been destroyed. We could not recover anything. My car also got burnt. Some of the cars that were kept in our custody also got burnt. We cried like babies,” he said.

“I lost my entire shop”

I am Olawale Osokomaya. I am a battery charger. I was called this morning that my shop had been destroyed by fire. There is nothing left for us. The governor should please come to our aid. This is terrible. Where do we start from? Some houses were affected.

“My brother is unconscious; he was seriously burnt”

Oluwafemi Adesina told Nigerian Tribune of the pains his younger brother, Ayomipo Adesina, admitted at the Ibadan Central Hospital, is going through. “He was burnt and presently unconscious. I feel so sad. He is married. I was called from Ogun State after which I rushed down here. I was told that we will pay N30, 000 every week and purchase N15,000 worth of drugs each week. He will be here for another four weeks. We are looking for the money. We need all the support that we can get,” he said.

“My two daughters got burnt”

An obviously sad Mrs Godwin wept when she spoke of the precarious condition in which her two daughters were in. “I had gone out to purchase some tubers of yam at Molete. While I was waiting with my two daughters, we heard an explosion. We saw fire. People started running. I joined in the race. I had forgotten my children. I got injured. Before I realized what was happening, I could not find any of them. It was later I saw one of them who was already burnt. Some people took the other away. It was this morning that I was told that one of them, Happiness Godwin, had been admitted at Ibadan Central Hospital. The other one, Precious Godwin, is at the University College Hospital, (UCH),” she said.

God! I’m in pain—Severely burnt victim

Adeyeye Saheed, who was severely burnt, could not hold back his tears as he cried, begging God for relief. “God! I’m in pain. It happened so suddenly. I wanted to buy something at the market. Before I knew what was happening, I had an explosion. Things happened so fast. I got burnt. I lost consciousness. When I wake up, I was in pain. It is terrible. My body is on fire,” he cried.



The spot where the tanker fell and exploded at Molete roundabout, Ibadan. PHOTOS: TOMMY ADEGBITE AND SEYI SOKOYA

We have lost so much--

Market leader

One of the market leaders, Alhaja Isuat Abiola

Oyinlola, counted the losses, saying that "About 45 shops, 15 cars, 12 motorcycles and 6 tricycles got burnt. We cannot even account for the number of lives that were lost in the inferno.

This has never happened before. We called the

firefighters but you know

the intensity at which petroleum burns; they tried their best. The fire spread all the way to Bode and engulfed a petrol nozzle close to the road at a station."

"I lost all my goods"

Morunfat Azeez, a trader, told Nigerian Tribune that she lost all her goods but was grateful to be alive. "We suddenly heard explosion and people started saying a petrol tanker had fallen. Next thing we saw was flames. I thank God that my life and that of my daughter were not lost. Although I lost all my goods, I am grateful to God for sparing my life. A pregnant woman was burnt up with her pregnancy and one nursing mother also and her baby. We lost goods but people lost their lives which is irreplaceable," she said.

"I jumped into the river in order to escape"

Sodiq Ajibola who sold phones at Molete told Nigerian Tribune that he had to jump into a nearby river in order to save his life.

According to him, "I was still here yesterday night because I don't close early. I heard a very loud sound. I thought it was an accident but on rushing out, I saw the fire burning fiercely and coming down the road. All I thought of was saving myself so I dashed out from the back. I lost everything but I am grateful that I did not lose my life. Such an incident has never occurred in Molete. The fire chased me to Bode and it was engulfing cars but the Ibode River was my saving grace. A lot of people have lost their lives."

Molete inferno devastating —Ajimobi

The Oyo State governor, Senator Abiola Ajimobi, has described the incident as devastating.

Ajimobi who visited the scene of the incident in the early hours yesterday, also commiserated with the families of the victims and those who lost their properties to the inferno, just as he reiterated that the development was one of the

main reasons he always advised people, especially traders beside the road to leave.

"I have always been preaching and pleading that people should not be selling by the roadside; you can imagine if there was nobody here, lives could have been saved. Personally, I have been here severally to ensure people comply with the fact that they don't have to be selling by the roadside. Those who are mainly affected are those that are by the roadside. I do hope that this would not happen again. I use this opportunity to commiserate with the families that have been affected and I pray that their souls be reposed," he said.



He stated further that the government would in no time come up with efforts to educate people more on the need to adhere to the advice of the government, adding that, "this is because our people tend to forget things easily. We will plead with them again as well as ensure we enforce no trading by the roadside."

In addition, State Commissioner of Works,

Mr Bimbo Kolade who supervised the evacuation of the burnt tanker and clearance of the scene of the incident, also decried the development and noted that government would take care of the affected victims in the hospital.

In his words the Oyo State Commissioner of Police, Kola Sodipo who arrived the scene of the incident joined his officers from the Felele and Challenge divisions who made efforts to control the situation.

According to him, "A loaded petrol tanker suspected to have had a break failure while trying to maneuver the Molete roundabout suddenly fell on three cars and exploded immediately, leaving many people dead and injured."

He also lamented the burns sustained by one of his men, Inspector Fatai Oyelami of Idi-Ayunre police division who was caught up in the fire while trying to rescue victims.

According to an eyewitness, Mr Morufu Mumini who praised the efforts of the Oyo State Police, he lamented that the firefighters came only about one hour after they were informed.

"We tried to quench the fire ourselves before they came. In fact, a police officer was almost burnt but we rescued him. While on the one hand the iron barricade at the roundabout is good, it hindered people from running away from the fire scene," Mumini said.

Another resident of the area, Alhaji Jelili Jogunosinmi noted that indiscriminate parking of vehicles at the roundabout

should be looked into by the government.

Furthermore, another resident of the area for about 35 years called for the elimination of the touts in the habit of collecting money and for the enforcement of this by law enforcement agents without any form of sentiment.

He added, "the government should shift the current central bus stop at Molete to the original place which is Arapaja junction to allow free flow of traffic. All motorcycle, including Eyin grammar drivers should be asked to leave."



A victim, Mr Ojo Akinola who lost his Datsun bus with the number plate: APP-85BX, to the inferno lamented that he was helpless when the fire caught up with his bus at the Molete, adding that, "I saw the tanker driver shouting but there was nothing anyone could do because there was traffic

at that axis. A crowd watched in amazement as a man gave a sordid account of how he and others narrowly escaped being killed after they were trapped by the fire.

According to him, "all of us that went in the same direction were terrified and running as fast as we could but we could not outrun the fire. It was chasing us but at the same time, we could also see it in front of us. At a point, I felt the fire crawling up my back, but I kept running. All I know is that, eventually, I got to a place where I didn't see the fire again. I feel so lucky to be alive."

A victim, Mr Segun Abayomi, a shoe maker who also dealt in the sale of fairly used imported bags, was found searching through his burnt merchandise.

He said he was on his way from Abeokuta, Ogun State, when he heard about the incident.

"I heard the news in Challenge. I was on my way from Abeokuta where I had gone to visit my relations. I became worried for my daughter who was manning the shop for me. But when I got to the shop, I was told my daughter was safe.

"She later told me that she was waiting for me to arrive before closing the shop when she slept off. She was woken up by fellow traders who told her to run like they did when they saw the fire coming.

"I am sad. I have lost all my investments. My merchandise was worth about N750, 000. I appeal to the government to come to our aid. As you can see, our shops are not by the road. We have not flouted any rule; we steered clear of the road, yet we suffered this fate. Many of us are distressed. The government should assist us," Abayomi told Nigerian Tribune.

Another victim, Mrs Oluwatoyin Nafiu, was seen being consoled by sympathisers where she was standing - by the rubble of what used to be her shop where she sold beverages and other items - looking withdrawn and pensive.

In an interview with Nigerian Tribune, the distraught woman put her loss at about N500, 000, but expressed gratitude to God for sparing her life.

"I had locked up the shop. I was at home when the news came that there had been a tanker accident and my shop had been burnt in the process. When I came, nothing remained; everything was gone, burnt to the ground.

"In fact, only yesterday, I bought merchandise worth about N100, 000 but everything is lost now," Mrs Nafiu lamented.

University College Hospital's head of public relations unit, Mr Ayodeji Bobade, confirmed that 11 patients were brought into the hospital with different grades of burns.

Mr Bobade who said an 8-year-old boy was among the group, said the five women and six men were in the burns unit of the hospital.

While declaring that one of them died yesterday, he, however, declined that people would not have access to see them as they need to be kept in a sterile environment.



He assured that the hospital was on top of the care, adding that the policy of the hospital was to start treatment of all emergency cases even if they had no money.

"We will continue treating them. As they are getting well, the hospital will then pass on their bills to their relatives, when they show up," he declared.

APC sympathises with

victims

The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Oyo State has described Saturday's tanker explosion at the Molete area of Ibadan, which resulted in the death of unspecified number of persons, as another sad chapter in the history of the state despite efforts of the present administration to forestall the occurrence of such incidents in any part of the state.

The APC, in a statement by its Director of Publicity and Strategy, Olawale Sadare, said that the tragedy was not only unfortunate but also devastating in view of the fact that Oyo State "at the moment has a government which prioritizes every pro-active measures required to guarantee the safety and well-being of the people, irrespective of their status or

background.

“It is most unfortunate that a disaster of this magnitude can befall our dear state again after the administration of Senator Abiola Ajimobi has left no one in doubt of its passion for a disaster-free, violence-free and crime-free society.

“We take this as an act of God even as we share in the agony of the victims and members of their family. The Akin Oke-led executive team joins members and supporters of the ruling APC in the state to pray for the repose of the souls of those who lost their lives and also wish those injured quickest recovery,” the statement said.

Meanwhile, the party has called on relevant authorities to encourage concerned agencies in creating or fortifying special units or departments that would be dedicated to the control of activities of owners and drivers of fuel tankers and other heavy-duty vehicles with a view to reducing loss of lives and properties which they cause the society.

“In view of the avoidable carnages on our roads often caused by these tankers, trucks and other heavy duty-vehicles, we call on governments at all levels to mandate agencies such as the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Vehicle Inspection Office (VIO) and the Nigeria Police to either create or fortify existing units and departments needed to checkmate the activities of owners and operators of these mobile lethal vehicles on our roads in order to reduce the incessant cases of avoidable accidents and attendant gnashing of teeth which they cause the public,” the party said.

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