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Pregnant Woman, 9 Others Feared Dead In Port Harcourt Jetty Inferno

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FIEL PHOTO

A pregnant woman and two infants are among at least 10 persons who are feared dead in an early morning fire outbreak at the Bonny-Bille-Nembe jetty on Monday.

This as the Rivers State police command said it has commenced investigation into the cause of the fire.

The fire which was reported to have started at about 2am also destroyed about 60 wooden and passenger boats.

Nigerian Tribune learnt that some of the victims were burnt beyond recognition, even as the police said it has begun investigation.

A source close to the scene of the fire said that the fire started when some boats carrying illegally refined petroleum products, popularly known as 'kpofire' in the area, after transporting products across the water.

"They have warned these people not to be carrying diesel and fuel inside the boat. Now see what has happened", a witness lamented.

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"I am sure that many people died, even a pregnant woman and a baby. Around 2am, I and my friend came out after we heard a large sound like an explosion. Some people were sleeping," he stated.

A victim of the incident who lost her five-month-old baby told newsmen that they were surprised when they saw the large fire and people running helter-skelter.

"We were surprised when we saw a large fire and people started running. I started calling the manager to help me rescue the child I am carrying. He didn't answer me, so I carried one of them and jumped inside the river.

"Before I know one Hausa man throw a rope and ask me to hold the rope. That was how I came out. So they ask me if there were other children on the boat. I told them yes.

"So they entered the river and brought my other child. But I told them that my smallest child was still inside. But they didn't see that one," she stated.

Another eyewitness who gave her name as Ebi said the dead casualty figures could be more.

"Many people died because we have not seen some women. About 30 people may have died. But they have seen two children. For the boats that got burnt, we can't even count them".

Another eyewitness who gave his name simply as Boma said the fire started from a pumping machine used in removing water from a market boat when they heard an explosion.

Boma said most of the boats carried gas cylinders which may have fastened the spread of the fire at the jetty.

"They were using a pumping machine to remove water and there was gas cylinder inside. It was from there that we heard an explosion. From there it spread to other boats," she stated.

Reacting to the incident, the acting spokesman of the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko confirmed the incident.

"Yes, we are aware of the fire. But we are still trying to get the exact casualty figure, Iringe-Koko, the police image maker stated., pregnant woman, two infants, seven others perish in Rivers jetty fire."

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