



• Sympathisers at the scene of the disaster.

Katugal's Doomsday

In what is fast becoming a trend in the country, more than 120 people scooping fuel from a fallen tanker are consumed by the resulting fire

BEN ADAMI/Kaduna



• Governor Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi of Kaduna State.

Kakarko Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Detached from the head of the vehicle by the impact of the crash, the tanker fell to the side of the road, gushing petrol to the ground. This attracted women returning from the farm and students who had closed from school, who rushed to the village to spread the news of the boon.

"My son, we are finished, my people are finished... Just look around, there is no single man alive, they have left me with widows and children." These were the words of Chief Ishaku Barnabas Gado, the district head of Katugal, who was lamenting the loss of about 120 members of the community in a fire caused by an upturned tanker from which they were scooping fuel.

The tanker, which was from Jere junction, was on its way to offload fuel at Kafanchan on Monday, 26 March, when it rammed into a rock at a junction close to Katugal village, in

Soon, the scene of the accident was filled with villagers with containers of various sizes to scoop the petrol. Motorcyclists also rushed to the scene to fill their tanks. And for the next 30 minutes, virtually every able-bodied man and youth of the village was preoccupied with the thought of economic gain, oblivious of the looming danger. Even the repeated warnings by some individuals, including the driver of the tanker, went unheeded.



• Another view of the disaster scene.

Unfortunately, one of the metal containers used in scooping fuel scraped the ground, causing a spark that resulted in an explosion. Market women, students from Government Day Secondary School, Katugal and many other villagers were burnt alive in the consequent fire, which raged till the following day.

When Chief Gado and the few surviving villagers went to the scene of the incident very early the following morning, over 90 persons, including 39 students from Government Day Secondary School, Katugal and market women, were burnt beyond recognition, while over 40 others sustained serious burns.

The district head confirmed that those with serious burns were rushed to the Katugal General Hospital. He said two pay-loaders were brought in to dig the two graves in which victims were given mass burial close to the scene of the incident.

He said the first burial of over 90 corpses was conducted at about 4p.m. the following day while 11 others who died in hospitals in Kafanchan were buried on Wednesday. Gado said the bodies of four others were later found in the bush when the villages went in search of more victims.

Since the incident, hundreds of sympathisers from far and near have been trooping to the village to condole with the

families of the victims.

The Deputy Governor of Kaduna State, Mr. Patrick Yakowa, led the state government delegation to the village on Tuesday, 30 March. Mr. Yakowa was accompanied by the Minister of Finance, Mrs. Esther Nenadi Usman, who is an indigene of the area, the Secretary to the State Government, and the state police commissioner.

Conveying the condolence of the government and the people of the state to the families of the affected victims, Yakowa promised that the state government will settle the medical bills of those in the hospital. He directed that those in Kafanchan General Hospital be transferred to either

Jos University Teaching Hospital or Orthopedic Hospital Kano for proper attention.

Commending the state government for its prompt response, Chief Gado pleaded with NGOs, churches and individuals to render assistance to the widows who are left with so many children. "You see, our major problem now is how to feed and clothe these widows and their children," he lamented. When this magazine went round the small town on Friday, widows who are either pregnant or nursing mothers were seen mourning the loss of their breadwinners in the inferno. Mrs. Grace Gabriel, a mother of seven, broke down in tears every time she attempted to respond to questions.

For Mrs. Alice Gadak, she wishes she had died along with her husband. "What am I doing in this world again? How do I take care of my five children? Look at the one lying down there, it is his father that has been assisting... Now where is my husband?" she queried.

At the scene of the incident, the burnt frames of over 30 motorcycles, hitherto valuable property, and human parts littered the place during last Friday's visit. It will certainly take the people of Katugal many years to recover from the calamity that has befallen them.



• The charred victims being taken away for mass burial.

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which has resulted into loss of lives. In effect, the evolving drama has continued to make the contest unpredictable.

Jimi Agbaje, whose quiet revolution appears to have impressed the elites, Femi Pedro, Senator Afikuyomi, Adiukwu Bakare et al are likely to record a good showing.

EKITI

The contest in Ekiti is a three-horse race. The major gladiators are Dr. Kayode Fayemi of the AC, Yinka Akerle of the ANPP, and Olusegun Oni, PDP. Fayemi enjoys appreciable support and is easily the most visible of the lot. He is well educated, vastly travelled and possesses big activist credentials. He has promised to industrialise the state, revamp education and turn the state into the "Bangalore" of Africa. Despite these plusses, Fayemi will have to deal with the defection of some of those he defeated in the primaries, hardly an exclusive problem.

Segun Oni of the PDP is less visible, but has the backing of a party at the centre. Oni enjoys the support of some party chieftains, including Professor Babalola Borishade, Culture and Tourism Minister. An engineer, Oni, however, has the baggage of acrimonious primaries, after which some rivals left the party. He also has the yoke of the party's image, which is perceived to have been soiled by Ayo Fayose, the suspended governor of the state.

This situation, according to a source, is expected to be exploited by Akerle of the ANPP, who won the PDP ticket before it was handed to Oni. Now in the ANPP, Akerle partly enjoys the support of Fayose, who in a letter, has urged voters to dump the PDP and Oni for either the AC or ANPP.

ZAMFARA

The contest for the governorship ticket in Zamfara State is mainly between the outgoing Deputy Governor, Alhaji Mohammed Aliyu Shinkafi, who is flying the All Nigeria People's Party

flag, and Peoples Democratic Party flagbearer, Yahaya Abdul Karim. According to a recent poll conducted in the state, Shinkafi garnered 34 per cent, a slim margin over his PDP counterpart who polled 30 per cent. Shinkafi is the only Deputy Governor who enjoys the support of his boss in the 2007 race. Here in Zmfara, the other parties barely make up the list of contestants.

KEBBI

In Kebbi State the picture is still unclear with regards to who carries the day in the power game among the quartet of Malam Abubakar Garimallam of the DPP, Farouk Bello Bunza of ANPP, Inuwa Bawa of AC and the governor Adamu Aliero-backed Saidu Usman Nasamu Dakingari. Our verdict: Too close to call.

ONDO

Virtually a straight fight between the incumbent, Dr. Olusegun Agagu of the PDP and Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party (LP). The two candidates have been the most visible members of a crowded field of candidates.

TheNEWS' findings indicate that the firm grip of the PDP is being weakened by the popularity of Mimiko, who is better known as Iroko. Mimiko's strength is largely derived from his huge grassroots appeal, through which he has seduced many members of other parties.

But he will meet the force of incumbency represented by Agagu, who also has a hefty financial war chest.

The former minister's campaign is propped on a perceived demand for change and his appeal to members of other parties. But he could be undermined by lack of funds. A rank outsider is Ademola Adegoroye of the Action Congress.

DELTA

Here, indicators point to victory for Dr. Emmanuel Ewetan Uduaghan, the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP. However, Great Ovedje Ogboru of the Democratic Peoples Party, DPP is also a strong candidate. Peter Eloka Okocha, candidate of the Action Congress, AC, is believed to have a less than probable chance of taking over from the incumbent governor, James Ibori.

Head to head, Uduaghan and Ogboru parade intimidating credentials both outside and within the political space to back their governorship ambition. For eight years, the PDP candidate remained an integral part of the Executive Council of the outgoing Ibori administration, first serving as commissioner for Health before being appointed Secretary to the State Government. But Ogboru is no neophyte in the game. In 2003, the DPP candidate animated the Delta State governorship race, emerging as the only viable opposition capable of thwarting Ibori's re-election plan. Though the result of the election turned out an anti-climax, the Abraka-born fish merchant cum politician ostensibly picked up enough lessons to enable him fight another day.

From a distance, the DPP candidate seems to be on a rollercoaster to the Asaba Government House. But a close assessment would reveal that that his dream is not far from a mirage reminiscent of the 2003 experience.

First, Ogboru's decision to run on the platform of the DPP, which remains unknown in Delta State, places him at a great disadvantage. Ogboru's ambition is not helped by the fact that he is seeking to succeed a man largely viewed as his political enemy in a state where the incumbent governor holds all the political aces. Any doubt about Ibori's firm hold on Delta politics was banished during the December PDP governorship primaries in Ogwashi-Ukwu when Uduaghan, Ibori's anointed successor, dwarfed all opposition to

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emerge winner. Thus the reality on ground in Delta today is that Ogboru is not just up against Uduaghan but out for another political slugfest with Ibori, a man who had taken him to the cleaners several times both on the political field and in court.

Ogboru's governorship bid is further weakened by the fact that he hails from Delta Central Senatorial zone, an area that has produced all the elected civilian governors of the state. Thus his entry into the 2007 race which came about after any of the contenders from the Central had failed to clinch the PDP ticket, is largely viewed as a desperate attempt by the Urhobo ethnic stock to hold on to power at all cost.

Away from political arithmetic, the duo of Uduaghan and Ogboru have embarked on last minute campaigns to boost their chances. While Ogboru is taking his message of change and building a new Delta to the nooks and crannies of the state, Uduaghan is unrelenting in his Three-Point Agenda approach for rapid development.

Uduaghan hopes to achieve his vision of building a vibrant Delta by first, ensuring peace, security, law and order before pursuing human capital development which would in turn secure a sustainable infrastructure development.

Given the fact that he has constructed friendship across ethnic divides in the state, Uduaghan is in the opinion of pundits on his way to a resounding victory.

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