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Port Harcourt:Panic as bus explosion kills one

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AN object suspected to be dynamite exploded in a bus in Port Harcourt on Thursday, killing one person and injuring three others.

The explosive, concealed inside a broken down 18-seater Toyota Hiace bus, painted in the blue-white-blue Rivers State colours for commercial vehicles, went off as two occupants of the vehicle and a man giving a helping hand tried to push it.

The incident, which happened at the Rumuokoro Roundabout in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area on the way to the Port Harcourt International Airport, attracted a large crowd of bewildered residents.

The PUNCH gathered that the other passengers in the vehicle had disembarked in anger after it stopped abruptly.

Banks and other business concerns in the vicinity closed shops immediately after the blast, apparently to prevent hoodlums from cashing in on the situation to attack them.

Sympathisers at the scene wailed when they sighted bloodstains beside the shattered commercial bus that was guarded by security operatives.

An eyewitness said only the driver, the conductor and a young man identified as Edet Akpan were pushing the vehicle from a short distance before stopping at the roundabout where the blast occurred. The dead victim of the blast had been identified as Edet.

One of the eyewitnesses said he saw the deceased crossed over to assist the driver and conductor in pushing the vehicle, adding, “Edet did not know that there was an explosive in the vehicle until it exploded. He called for help and before people could come, he was already dead.”

Another eyewitness, Kyrian Promise told our correspondent that security agents recovered from the damaged vehicle four nozzles of rifles suspected to be AK-47.

Also, a roadside trader, who simply gave his name as Chinwendu, said the driver and the conductor disappeared before the explosion, maintaining that the person that died was not part of the vehicle.

He said, “The vehicle was being pushed from somewhere by two persons who appeared to be the conductor and driver of the commercial bus and the moment they got to the roundabout, we did not see them again.

“We later heard a big bang that scared many people away.”

Reacting to the incident, the state Police Commissioner, Mr. Mohammed Indabawa, insisted that it was neither a terrorist attack nor a bomb, explaining that all the buildings would have been affected if it were to be a bomb explosion.

Indabawa, who spoke with newsmen at the scene of the incident, said those behind the explosion could be armed

robbers going for an operation before ‘something went wrong’.

He explained, “It is not a terrorist attack; it is not a bomb, otherwise all the buildings would have been affected. Maybe there were other things like dynamites in the vehicle. They may be armed robbers going for an operation and something went wrong.

“You can see four nozzles of rifles at the scene. I don’t know where they were going or where they were coming from. A comprehensive investigation will indicate what happened,”

The state Governor, Mr. Rotimi Amaechi, who visited the scene, explained that the information at his disposal was that it was not a bomb blast.

The governor said, “There were three men; we don’t know where they were going to. They were in a vehicle, they had explosives believed to be dynamites. No building was affected.

“The commissioner of police even confirmed that a lady selling by the roadside was not even affected. There is no damage on the road to show that it was a bomb.

“From time to time, armed robbers, when they want to rob, carry dynamites because of this bullet-proof bus we have in banks. They carry dynamites when they want to rob. You can see that it was not a bomb, but dynamite,” he added.

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