

Edo poll: CBN delivers election materials under heavy security

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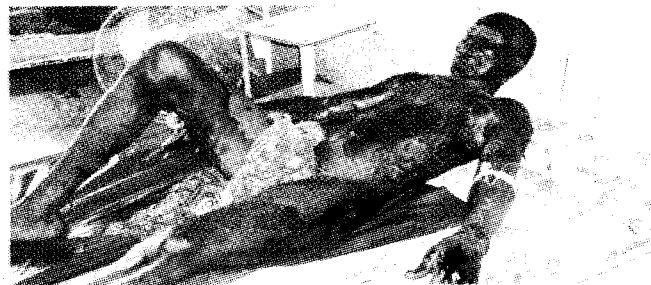
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Tanker fire kills 200

- Adults, children die scooping petrol from fallen tanker
- I counted over 200 corpses – Health commissioner^{P. 2}



• Victims and sympathisers at the scene of the fuel tanker fire at Okogbe, Rivers State ... on Thursday. Photos: Mike Odiegwu, AFP.



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news

Tanker fire kills 200

Chukwudi Akasike and
Mike Odiegwu

"THE tanker exploded. The explosion sounded like an earthquake. Many of them could not come out alive," a panic-stricken survivor of a petrol tanker fire that killed over 200 at the outskirts of Okogbe community, Rivers State, on Thursday narrated to *The PUNCH*.

The survivor, whose car was one of the vehicles involved in the accident that led to the falling of the tanker, only lived to tell the story by abandoning his car and running for dear life shortly before the tanker exploded.

Most of the dead victims were reported to be part of the crowd that gathered to scoop fuel at the spot of the fallen fuel-laden tanker on the East-West Road.

The Rivers State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Sampson Parker, who was at the scene of the incident, said, "The corpses that I counted alone were over 200 and they have not finished

counting. It is cremation; some were burnt to ashes.

"So how many can you count? It is a sad situation. We heard that about 50 injured victims had been taken to the hospital, but it is too early to say the exact figure."

The commissioner, who also visited Ahoada General Hospital to see the injured victims, lamented that those admitted at the hospital suffered 75 per cent degrees of burns upwards.

The Rivers State Sector Commander of the FRSC, Dr. Kayode Olagunju, however told one of our correspondents on the phone that only 95 persons died in the incident.

Olagunju said, "There is a major fatal crash at Okogbe about 11 kilometres from Ahaoda-Mbiama on the East-West Road in Rivers State.

"The accident occurred around 6.30am. A tanker laden with petrol crashed with three other vehicles; a Toyota Corolla, Hummer bus and a Mitsubishi bus were involved. Thirty-four motorcycles also got burnt.

"People were scooping fuel from the fallen tanker when it (tanker) exploded. Ninety-three persons died on the spot, two died in the hospital while 18 persons were injured."

Residents of the area however put the figure at well above 200, made up mainly of women and children.

"They came in five, 20, 50, and in their hundreds, they flooded the place. I tried to stop them but they did not listen to me. At that time the drivers of the tanker and the bus were quarrelling with each other. But the bus driver later ran away," the lucky survivor narrated further. He refused to give his name.

A member of the community who identified himself as Sunday said over 200 persons were burnt to death while about 100 were rushed to various hospitals.

He said he narrowly escaped death as the tanker exploded while he was rushing to the scene with jerrycans to scoop the fuel.

"They were more than 100 that died. I was rushing to the place to fetch my own fuel when

the thing exploded. The dead people were not just from our community alone, people from nearby communities such as Ayakama, Obolobo were involved. They all came to fetch fuel", he said.

One of our correspondents reports that the incident created confusion in Okogbe, a neighbouring community to Bayelsa State, and caused gridlock along the busy East-West Road that leads to Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State.

The site of the explosion was not too far from an Agip Oil pipeline and filling station.

The charred remains of the victims littered the point where the incident took place, even as some victims, who ran into the bush with fire all over their bodies, eventually died.

It was gathered that the petrol tanker, which had skidded off the road while trying to avoid running over an oncoming Toyota Camry vehicle, fell into a ditch with a side of the body resting on the ground.

Another eyewitness, Mr. Segun Oluwatuyi, told *The PUNCH* that the driver of the Toyota Camry had lost control of the car after being hit by a Mitsubishi bus from the rear.

Oluwatuyi said a tanker loaded with petrol was coming on the opposite side of the road before it swerved in an attempt to avoid running over the Toyota Camry.

He explained that the tanker then fell near the bush while the driver was able to escape without injury.

Oluwatuyi said the tanker driver, who noticed that some villagers, including commercial motorcycle riders, were approaching the tanker laden with 33,000 litres of petrol to scoop fuel, warned them against their action.

He explained that the tanker did not go up in flames immediately it fell about 6.30am, noting that the vehicle exploded 30 minutes after the accident.

"The driver warned some of the villagers before leaving the scene of the accident, he told them not to go near the petrol tanker, which still had its engine on as at the time it fell on the ground, but they never listened to him.

"About 30 minutes after the driver had left the scene of the accident, the tanker caught fire and many people died. Those who died were over 150 while about 65 other that were seriously injured were rushed to different hospitals," he said.

An official of the National Security and Civil Defence Corps, who preferred anonymity, said one of the victims that were fetching fuel from the petrol tanker had used his (victim's) mobile phone to call a friend, inviting him to come and scoop fuel.

The official explained that the call made by one of the victims had triggered the explosion.

Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Mr. David Iyofor, said Governor Rotimi Amaechi was devastated when he learnt about the incident.

Iyofor told one of our correspondents in Port Harcourt that the governor had cut short his trip to Abuja and was on his way back to the state in order to address the issue.

"The governor is completely devastated over the incident. He went for a meeting in Abuja and has decided to cut short his trip. He is currently on his way to the scene of the incident," he said.

At Ahoada General Hospital, where two of the victims died, the Chief Nursing Officer, Mrs Ebeku, said the first batch of victims, who were 11 in number, were given first aid and referred to a hospital in Port Harcourt.

Ebeku also said that similar treatment was given to the second batch of eight victims while the third batch of 16 victims was being treated about 1.30pm when one of our correspondents visited the hospital.



• L-R: Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Police Affairs, Dr. Tukur Ingawa; Governor of Kaduna State, Patrick Yakowa; Minister of Police Affairs, Capt. Galeb Olubolade (retd); and Inspector-General of Police, Mohammed Abubakar, at the Police Council Meeting in Abuja where Abubakar's appointment was confirmed ... on Thursday. Photo: NAN.

Edo poll: CBN delivers election materials under heavy security

Emmanuel Addeh with
agency reports

FORTY-eight hours to the Edo State governorship election, the Central Bank of Nigeria, on Thursday, delivered election materials in its safekeeping to the Independent National Electoral Commission.

The election materials, including result sheets and other forms, were moved under heavy security.

The election materials were moved in a blue bullion van and offloaded by INEC officials and security personnel under the watch of party representatives as of 4pm.

During the delivery, gun-toting security men comprising the police, army and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps took charge at the INEC office located on the Benin-Auchi Road.

The heavy security around the INEC office caused a gridlock as the security personnel frisked visitors to the INEC headquarters.

While receiving the materials, the Resident Electoral Commissioner in the state, Kassim Gaidam, noted that by giving the accredited

party agents, security personnel and the media a chance to observe the exercise, INEC was determined to conduct a free and fair election.

Only the agents of the Action Congress of Nigeria, the Peoples Democratic Party, the All Nigeria Peoples Party and the Congress for Progressive Change and a few other party representatives were present at the event. Most of the other party representatives were absent from the occasion.

Meanwhile, the Chairman, Election Monitoring and Observation Committee, Dr. Ishmael Igbani, has said that no fewer than 1.65 million voters registered for the Edo governorship election.

Igbani spoke to the News Agency of Nigeria on Thursday. He added each of the polling units would be manned by three ad hoc staff drafted from the National Youth Service Corps and students of Federal Government institutions in the state.

He said collation centres had also been created in the 18 local government areas and that the election materials had been delivered to the Edo State office of INEC. He added

that sensitive election materials had also been transferred to the state branch of the CBN for safe custody.

Igbani said, "The commission has worked out logistics to ensure that electoral materials get to various locations early on Saturday.

"It is the duty of the commission to secure the polling arena for the safety of all and we are bent on ensuring adequate security."

Ahead of the governorship election, the state government has declared Friday (today) as a half working day.

A statement by the Chief Press Secretary to Oshiomhole, Peter Okhiria, quoted the government as saying that it was to allow workers prepare for the election.

The statement reads, "The state government has declared a half working day for all workers in state civil service on Friday, July 13.

"All workers in the state civil service are expected to resume work at 8am and close at 12pm.

"This is to enable the workers to take the advantage to prepare for the governorship election on Saturday, July 14."

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