

June 19th, 2014



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60 killed in boat accident, pipeline fire

JUNE 19, 2014 BY JUDE OWUAMANAM, STANLEY OPARA AND SAMSON FOLARIN 0 COMMENTS

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No fewer than 40 people, including six members of the same family, drowned on Wednesday morning in the Ibi Local Government Area of Taraba State when a boat conveying them capsized.

The victims were said to be fleeing Dampa village following an attack by over 100 gunmen from the neighbouring Plateau State.

The incident happened as news filtered in that 20 people were feared dead in Tuesday night's pipeline explosion in Ilado, Takwa Bay area of Lagos State.

One of our correspondents gathered that the majority of those who died in the boat accident were children, women and the elderly.

An eyewitness told journalists that "when the boat they (residents) were trying to escape in capsized, the majority of those who could not swim, especially children, women and the elderly drowned. Six of them are members of the same family."

The LGA Chairman, Adamu Ishaka, who confirmed the incident said, "When the attackers stormed the village, people started running away."

Ishaka added that the gunmen caused the accident by shooting "several bullets at the boat conveying the people across the river."

He said that marine police had been drafted to the area, adding that he was awaiting police report.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Joseph Kwaji, said the command had drafted policemen to the area, stressing that efforts would be put in place to track the gunmen.

The latest incident came on the heels of last Sunday's ethno-religious clashes in Wukari and Ibi LGAs in which 15 people lost their lives.

In Lagos, eyewitnesses told *The PUNCH* that the bodies of the 20 victims of the Ilado explosion were blown apart.

It was gathered that many residents of the community had gone to scoop fuel from a vandalised Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation pipeline, thereby causing the blast.

A resident of the area, who pleaded anonymity, said he was about going to the scene to join others when he heard a loud explosion.

He said, "I was also tempted to go to that area that night. In fact, I was on my way to the area when the explosion occurred.

"When we visited the place, there were so many bodies blown apart. All we saw were the charred bodies of people on the ground. It was terrible. Those who died should be over 20. Their bodies have been buried in a shallow grave near the scene of the blast."



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He added that a man he identified simply as Peter, was the brains behind the vandalised pipeline.

The PUNCH however learnt from an official source that the vandals broke a pipeline and were tapping fuel when a disagreement ensued between them.

He said that in process, "something happened" that resulted in the pipeline exploding.

It was gathered that officials of the NNPC expended 30,000 litres of water on the inferno before it subsided around 10am on Wednesday.

Another resident of the area told one of our correspondents that nine of those who sustained injuries were taken to an undisclosed hospital.

A family member of one of the victims said one of those who died in the explosion had last December lost his wife and children to a fire accident.

He said, "That incident happened around December, last year. He kept gallons of petrol in his house. There was a fire in the night and his wife and children died.

"Instead of learning his lesson, he still continued the illegal business. And now, he's dead too."

The Spokesperson for the National Emergency Management Agency, South-West, Ibrahim Farinloye, said, "Vandals punctured a pipeline at Takwa Bay. It exploded around 12 midnight.

"Valves and supplies have been shut down to suffocate the fire. Safety officials from the NNPC Atlas Cove base put out the fire around 10am."

Meanwhile, two people were injured in the Bogoro LGA of Bauchi State by gunmen suspected to be cattle rearers.

The Public Relations Officer of the state Police Command, Haruna Mohammed, said, "The gunmen suspected to be cattle rearers trespassed on the farmlands in Bogoro and a disagreement ensued between them and the villagers.

"In the process, one Simon Laichau and Ahmadu Samaila were shot by the assailants in the legs and the gunmen escaped to an unknown destination," he said.

He also said that two suspected cult members were arrested by a vigilance group close to the hills of Salon Kaura in Yelwa while initiating new members of the Black Axe.

He gave the names of the two as Emmanuel Sunday(21) and Kingsley Osabere(23) of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi.

The Group General Manager, Group Public Affairs Division of the NNPC, Ohi Alegbe, told The PUNCH on the telephone that the explosion did not affect the Atlas Cove Jetty.

According to him, one of the pipelines connected to the facility was vandalised at Ilado, an act that resulted in the fire that was contained in the early hours of Wednesday.

"Immediately the fire occurred, supply through the pipeline was stopped and the fire put out. This currently has no effect on the supply of products," Alegbe said.

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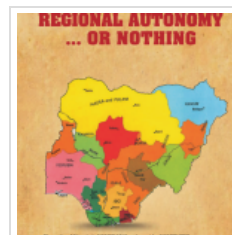


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