

Three children, others feared dead, boats burnt in Rivers jetty fire

Dennis Naku 23 November 2021

Kindly share this story: [!\[\]\(919a2cb85b99741a73c0c31a427236a8_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(c9cd5a1c35167a83f09a35036fe5dcbd_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(ae1936640fabdea8c18f922ca69733fe_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(e81307241bb070bc7c1be4e4328b2244_img.jpg\)](#)

Scene of the incident

Three children of the same parents and two others were feared dead when a wildfire destroyed eight passenger boats at the Bonny/Nembe/Bille Jetty in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on Monday.

The fire came about 24 hours after an explosion rocked a large compound allegedly used for illegal oil bunkering, consuming several goods and property.

Also on Saturday, a fire ignited by inflammable substances believed to be adulterated diesel destroyed heavy duty equipment such as generators, chillers and trucks at a private property on Isiokpo Street, in the D/line axis of Port Harcourt.

In the Monday incident, goods and property worth billions of naira were reportedly lost to the inferno.

Eyewitnesses said loading and offloading of goods were ongoing as some of the boats arrived from Nembe in Bayelsa State and Bille in Rivers State, when the fire erupted around 10am.

An unidentified woman, who had alighted from one of the boats while backing a child, was said to have rushed to a nearby market to pick some items.

She reportedly left three of her children in the boat, which later caught fire.

An eyewitness, who did not identify himself, said, "One woman left her three children inside the boat to buy something at the market. She carried a little child on her back.

“Before we knew it, we saw fire on the jetty. After some time, the fire got to the boats that were close by; the children and some people were in a boat when the fire started. I really felt for the woman. She was seen crying and rolling on the ground; people held her.”

PUNCH Metro learnt that the fire caused a commotion in the area, as traders and residents trooped out, while youths in the area resorted to self-help, mixing sand, water and detergent to put out the fire.

As of past 1pm when our correspondent left the scene, thick black smoke was still billowing into the sky, as the remains of the boats were in flames.

Another eyewitness at the jetty said a man suspected to be a loader (menial worker) in one of the boats was spotted smoking a cigarette, which ignited the fire.

Read Also

- ▶ Rivers jetty collapse: Residents berate govt, man's two daughters missing
- ▶ Mourners returning from burial feared killed as Rivers jetty collapses
- ▶ Wike threatens to shut Rivers jetty over criminal activities

The man, who did not identify himself, said the affected boats were laden with inflammable substances, including diesel, which aided the spread of the fire from the water to the jetty.

“One woman watched helplessly as her four children were trapped in one of the boats. Then another woman and her three children were burnt. One young man was rushed to the hospital,” he added.

The Chairman of the Flying Boat Unit, Nembe Waterfront, Mr David Teke, said boat workers in his unit had been warned against smoking or drinking at the jetty.

He said, “My unit is different from where the fire occurred this morning. I have warned those working under me not to smoke or drink when on duty. That is the law here. As a safety precaution, we have enough fire extinguishers and buckets of sand to forestall this sort of occurrence.”

Meanwhile, the Rivers State Government has threatened to confiscate any property used for illegal bunkering in the state, as well as prosecute the owner.

The state Commissioner for Special Duties, Emeke Onowu, handed down the threat while speaking to journalists after an on-the-spot assessment of the damage done by the Saturday night fire on Isiokpo Street in D-Line and the Sunday morning fire at Rumuokoro in the Obio/Akpor LGA of the state.

Onowu said preliminary investigation revealed that secret petroleum tanks seen in both areas suggested illegal bunkering operations.

He accused community leaders and security agencies of sabotage due to their failure to report the illegal activities.