

Grandma, granddaughter die, hoodlums scoop fuel, attack firemen, others in Ogun tanker explosion

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- Scenes of the explosion

Tragedy struck on Sunday at Lafenwa Market when a fuel-laden tanker exploded, killing a woman and her grandchild.

The explosion occurred at a failed portion of the railway on the Lafenwa-Ojurin-Ayetoro Road in the Abeokuta-North Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The tanker, loaded with Premium Motor Spirit (petrol), overturned when its axle broke, as it started spilling its content on the road.

Our correspondent gathered that the accident occurred around 4.45am on Sunday while the tanker driver was inbound Rounder from Oju-Irin, Lafenwa.

Pandemonium, however, broke out a few hours after the incident when some traders and hoodlums in the market began scooping fuel from the fallen tanker.

Attempts by the police to stop the action reportedly angered the hoodlums, who allegedly ignited a fire that triggered the explosion.

PUNCH Metro gathered that the police shot two people while controlling the situation.

Aside from the two people killed in the explosion, scores of shops in the market were also burnt.

A few other shops were reportedly looted by the hoodlums.

Five men of the state fire service were allegedly beaten to a pulp for not arriving early to save lives and property.

The Public Relations Officer, Ogun State Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Corps, Babatunde Akinbiyi, while confirming the incident, lamented that some residents went to the scene, scooped fuel and engaged in "other unwholesome act which regrettably sparked off the fire that engulfed the whole area."

"Two lives were lost in the unfortunate inferno, a grandmother and grandchild, while property worth millions of naira was also destroyed," Akinbiyi added.

He explained that the corpses were deposited in the morgue of the General Hospital, Ijaiye, Abeokuta.

Akinbiyi said the mob vandalised two patrol vans belonging to the TRACE Divisional Command, Abeokuta, and two heavy-duty vehicles belonging to the federal and state fire services.

The TRACE spokesman noted that some personnel were also assaulted during the rescue operation.

When our correspondent visited the scene of the incident, he saw the remains of the two victims.

The Operational Commander of the Fire Service, Ogun State, who simply identified himself as Ilesanmi, said the agency received a call around 8am that a tanker fell.

Ilesanmi said he immediately deployed his men in the scene.

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"Unfortunately, the hoodlums didn't allow us to perform our duty. They attacked our vehicle; the vehicle was damaged and all my men brutalised.

"As I'm talking to you, they are nowhere to be found because they have to look for an alternative road to escape for their lives.

"I was at the scene; it is not that someone told me. I came in my private vehicle. It was because I didn't wear the uniform. If not, they would have attacked me also," he added.

Asked if the attack was due to the late arrival of his men, Ilesanmi said, "The fire service did not get there late. The reason is this: anytime there are issues like this, they will like to vandalise shops. That's their target. Their target is not to complement our effort.

"Five of my officers, including the driver, and all vehicle windscreens, were vandalised."

The Director, Ogun State Emergency Management Agency, Ige Olufolarin, also confirmed the attack, lamenting that the officials were hindered by hoodlums.

He said, "Their target was to actually loot the stores around the area and that was why we were there to guard against such."

An eyewitness, Saburi Agbabiaka, said the incident happened while he was taking a passenger to Rounder.

He said, "But around 6am when I got here, I saw that the security personnel had taken over everywhere. In just a few minutes, I observed that the fire became uncontrollable and expanded and it even killed a mother and her child.

"What I observed was that those boys got angry because a lot of things were damaged."

The Police Public Relations Officer in the state, DSP Abimbola Oyeyemi, said five suspects were arrested.

Oyeyemi said the police had cordoned off the area to avoid loss of lives, but the hoodlums sabotaged the effort.

While denying that the police shot two people during the incident, he accused the hoodlums of igniting fire from the market, which engulfed the area.

"Five suspects have been arrested and they will be charged to court," he added.

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