

Pregnant woman, four others killed, 120 vehicles burnt in Rivers tanker explosion

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River State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, his Deputy, Prof. Ngozi Odu, the State Commissioner of Police, Olatunji Disu, during a visit to the scene of the tanker explosion on Saturday morning. Photo Credit: Dennis Naku

By Dennis Naku

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Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, has described as very unfortunate the fire incident caused by a tanker conveying premium motor spirit otherwise known as petrol which burnt motorists and commuters beyond recognition and destroyed several vehicles on Friday night.

The incident occurred between the Indorama Petro-Chemical Company Gate and the Aleto Bridge on the popular and ever busy Eleme section of the East-West Road now undergoing major reconstruction by the Federal Government.

The governor expressed sadness at the gory sights that he saw when he visited the scene of the incident, accompanied by the State Commissioner of Police, Olatunji Disu, and the State Commissioner for Energy and Natural Resources, Uchechukwu Nwafor, on Saturday morning.

This was contained in a statement issued by the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Nelson Chukwudi, and sent to newsmen.

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The governor also spoke about the tanker inferno that had become a sad episode in the State with over 120 vehicles razed and about five lives lost, describing it as “great tragedy”.

“It is a very sad day in our dear State. Something happened in Eleme, along the route of Indorama Petrochemical and Fertiliser Company Limited. A tanker had an issue with a tipper, and there was an unfortunate situation that caused the State a very devastating loss.

“I went there this morning to see for myself what happened, and I can tell you, I’ve not been happy since then. With all the dramas in our State, it is not even proper for us to add that to it.

“But it wasn’t our fault. It was just what impatience caused. The tanker driver, knowing the state of that road, was not patient, and it resulted in that colossal loss. Over 120 vehicles were completely burnt, and five lives were lost. It was very unfortunate.”

Governor Fubara spoke at the country home of Sir Celestine Omehia in Ubima community, Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State on Saturday.

Earlier, Fubara explained that he got a call from the Managing Director of Indorama Petrochemical and Fertilizer Company Limited in Eleme Local Government Area, informing him of the incident.

At the news of the incident, the governor said he immediately routed a call to the security agencies and instructed that they visit the scene to take charge of the security of the area to avoid escalation of the situation.

Governor Fubara stated, “We are here to see for ourselves and get first-hand information of the incident of what happened yesterday night.

“About 7.30 – 8pm, we got information of the gravity of the incident. I was told that it was caused by a tanker vehicle that was conveying Premium Motor Spirit.

“In fact, I got the information through the MD of Indorama, and I immediately alerted the security agencies to make sure they take control of the security situation in the area.

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“And from what we are seeing this morning, it was not a pleasant case. We recorded a huge number of vehicles destroyed and lives lost.”

The governor explained that he had already requested the relevant government agencies to provide him a detailed account of their findings to enable the State Government to take appropriate decisions and actions to significantly remedy the situation and reduce the negative effects on the affected people.

“I have already asked the relevant agencies to give us a full brief so that we can come into the situation fully by seeing to how much we can support the families that are bereaved, and also cushion the effect of the losses, which I believe, is no fault of a good number of them.

“We all know the situation of this road. It is really unfortunate. Most of our people, when plying this road, should ply it with caution.

“I believe very strongly that this situation would have been avoidable, if the motorists had behaved properly. But it is late already. The damage has happened. This is the situation we have found ourselves in. We will see how we can control the aftermath,” he added.

Confirming the incident, the spokesperson for the State Police Command, Grace Iringe-Koko, in a statement said four bodies, including that of a pregnant woman were seen at the scene of the inferno.

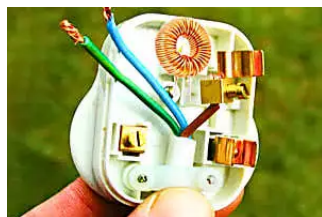
The statement read, “At approximately 8:30 p.m. on Friday, April 26, 2024, the Rivers State Police Command received a distress call regarding a fire incident along East-West Road near Indorama Gate, Eleme, caused by a tanker explosion. Immediate action was taken by contacting the fire department and mobilizing operatives to the scene.

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“Upon arrival, a joint operation of the Police and Firefighters successfully extinguished the fire by 10:30pm. However, over 70 cars were engulfed, and several individuals were trapped. Efforts led to the rescue of many, though the total casualties are yet to be determined.

“Regrettably, four individuals, including a pregnant woman, have been confirmed dead, and those injured are receiving treatment at nearby hospitals.”

When contacted, the Sector Commander, Federal Road Safety Corps, Rivers State Command, Christopher Kuje. Corroborated the casualty figure by the police, saying the charred remains were bagged and taken to the Military Hospital in Port Harcourt.

Kuje added, “We counted four bodies that were burnt beyond recognition. So, we use body bags to carry them to the Military Hospital. The vehicles we counted that got burnt were 60.”

An eyewitness who gave his name as Precious, said, “Some people were running when the fire caught them and they died,” he explained, even as he blamed the tragedy on the reconstruction of the road which, according to him, had worsened the gridlock.

“Yes, they are working the road, which is good, but they should also create access. Not the way they are doing it. One they should be fast about it and secondly the contractor should know that vehicles are using the road. Otherwise, this would not have happened. It is unfortunate,” he added.