

Bus driver arrested as 16 killed in gas cylinder explosion

5th March 2025

| By Johnson Idowu

The driver of an 18-seater bus that caught fire and claimed the lives of 16 travellers on Tuesday due to the explosion of a gas cylinder has been detained by the police.

PUNCH Metro reports that the vehicle caught fire after somersaulting at the Buhari Estate along the Abeokuta-Sagamu Expressway.

An eyewitness who identified himself simply as Akin told our correspondent on Tuesday that several vehicles that some sympathisers stopped did not have fire extinguishers that could have been used to prevent the damage.

He also faulted the delayed response of the Ogun State Fire Service in salvaging the situation.

Akin said, “An accident occurred at Kobape not long ago. An 18-seater bus caught fire while in motion. All the vehicles we stopped to get a fire extinguisher did not have one.

“We also called the fire service and they said they were coming but they did not arrive until the vehicle and the passengers got burnt.”

Confirming the incident in a telephone conversation with our correspondent, the Public Education Officer of the Ogun Sector Command of the Federal Road Safety Corps, Florence Okpe, disclosed that 16 persons were burnt to death.

She added that the vehicle was overloaded with passengers and was conveying a gas cylinder that exploded and caused it to burn.

Okpe noted that three other passengers were also injured while two passengers escaped unhurt.

She said, “A total of 21 people were involved in the crash. Sixteen victims were burnt beyond recognition, making it impossible to ascertain their genders at the scene, while three others sustained injuries and were rushed to the Federal Medical Centre, Idi-Aba, Abeokuta.”

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According to Okpe, the Sector Commander, Akinwunmi Fasakin, who led the rescue operation, expressed displeasure over what he described as the “carelessness of the driver.”

“Fasakin criticised the decision to transport a filled gas cylinder in a passenger vehicle, stressing that highly flammable substances should only be conveyed in designated vehicles operated by trained professionals. He also joined efforts to clear the wreckage and restore traffic flow along the busy route.”

The FRSC boss urged motorists and passengers to prioritise safety while extending his condolences to the families of the deceased.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson for the Ogun State Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Agency, Babatunde Akinbiyi, in a telephone conversation with our correspondent, noted that 15 people died in the crash contrary to reports of 16 deaths.

He claimed that the 16th person who was assumed dead was the driver of the vehicle who had been detained at the Traffic Police Division before the arrival of other emergency responders.

Akinbiyi said, “According to an eyewitness account, the bus was outbound Abeokuta fully loaded with 21 passengers.

“However, due to excessive speed, the driver of the bus lost control, hit the culvert and somersaulted into the bush before it caught fire due to the two cylinders in the bus which were filled with gas.

“15 passengers were burnt beyond recognition while five were critically injured. However, the driver of the bus was not hurt but he is being detained at the State Motor Traffic Division, Ibara Abeokuta.”

He commiserated with the families of the deceased.

“While TRACE, FRSC and the police commiserate with the families of the deceased, drivers are again warned against excessive driving given its attendant consequences,” Akinbiyi concluded.