

BY VINCENT KALU

# Terror on roads

■ Petrol tankers turn horror on highways

■ Kill over 100, destroy 200 shops, houses, 40 vehicles in two weeks

In a country with low life expectancy, petrol tanker fire, apart from the Boko Haram insurgency, has in recent time become arguably the nation's most potent killer.

From the calamity that has taken place in the last two weeks on our roads across the nation, at least from the reported ones, over 100 lives have been lost in tanker fire.

This, no doubt has created fears in road users.

Checks by Saturday Sun show that in the last two weeks, truck and petrol tanker accidents have claimed the lives of over 100 persons starting with the tragic incident at Onitsha in Anambra State. Not only the incalculable loss of human lives, many successful businessmen and women have been reduced to zero level, as the inferno from tank fires had razed over 50 houses, 150 shops and more than 40 vehicles. On May 31, some residents of Onitsha were already thanking God for seeing them through the month and were ready to be ushered in to new month, but unknown to them, danger lurked around that afternoon, waiting to destroy some of them.

Like a flash, at the busy Upper Iwaka area of Onitsha, Anambra State, a petrol tanker exploded at the Asaba park axis after a suspected brake failure. Fourteen L300 buses loading passengers inside the park and three motorcycles plying the area as at the time of the incident were burnt. Among those killed in the fire were a pregnant woman and little babies. The tragic incident, which occurred at about 2.30p.m. threw residents and travellers in the commercial city into panic. Many wailed uncontrollably at the sight of the charred remains of the victims. Victims of the accident were mostly drivers and passengers at the park, free readers who thronged the newspaper stands along the park, vendors and hawkers in the area. In all, the accident claimed the lives of over 90 persons and some of them were burnt beyond recognition.

According to reports, the driver of the petrol-laden tanker was descending the Upper Iwaka flyover from the Enugu-Nkpor end of the expressway when the vehicle lost its brakes and the driver diverted the vehicle into the busy NITEL lane, where different transport companies load their vehicles before finally hitting the Asaba park and ramming into the VIP toilet building, killing many people in the process. Report has it that the tanker caught fire about 10 minutes after ramming into the building but many casualties had been trapped in the rubble.

As if that was not enough for the country, three days after, at Iyana Ipaja, a sprawling community in Lagos, fuel tanker fire explosion wreaked havoc again, destroying over 20 vehicles and more than 80 shops.

The accident according reports happened on June 2, about 1am. The fire

spread quickly before any help came. The truck that caused the monumental loss was said to be descending the Ipaja road bridge, when it suddenly lost control and fell from the bridge.

However it didn't explode immediately. It was reported that when it fell, the fuel spilled into a gutter on Oremeji Street and flowed to a distance of about 500 metres, where it was ignited by a fire allegedly set by a vigilance group.

As if tankers had declared war on Nigerians, three days after, precisely on June 4, fuel tankers and trailer wreaked another havoc by crushing three to death in Onitsha, and killed 11 in Ondo and Osun states.

In Onitsha, four days after the tanker fire killed over 90 persons, three were again crushed to death at the same Upper Iwaka area of the town. Three vehicles, an

18-seater bus and two private cars were seriously damaged, when a trailer descending the Uper Iwaka flyover, rammed into one of the buses.

Also, tragedy hit Owena, Ondo State on June 4, when a tanker rammed into a market, and killed more than 10 residents. According to reports, the petrol tanker was coming from Ilesa end of the Akure/Ilesa road, when the accident happened.

In Osun, the same day, fuel tanker crushed a Federal Road Safety Corps marshal to death. The accident happened when the FRSC marshal was returning to Oshogbo from Owo in Ondo State with his wife and son when the fuel tanker lost control and rammed into his vehicle.

Last weekend was equally gory as about 34 houses and 70 shops were razed by fire after a tanker carrying 33,000 litres

of automotive gas oil (AGO), also known as diesel, crashed in Idimu area of Lagos State in the early hours of last Saturday.

According to reports, the charred remains of the maroon-painted tanker was unbranded and had no number plate. Ten of the 34 affected houses were completely destroyed, while the others were partially scorched. Also, 70 shops were burnt.

The havocs wreaked by fuel tankers on the road are legion. Before the last two weeks, trucks have been seen as terrors that should be given the way on the roads.

Saturday Sun finding reveals that most of these fuel trucks are not road worthy. Their tyres are worn out and the owners hardly go for new ones, because of the cost, instead they go for imported used ones.

Also, most of them are not purpose built trucks. What the owners do is to buy the body and construct a tank whose weight when loaded is more than the body. In this case, the truck tilts and falls to either side while meandering through bad portions of the road.

Except the major oil marketers whose trucks are purpose built and from factory, most others buy separately the engine head, the body and construct the tank and couple them together to become a fuel truck. The Federal Road Safety Commission has always attributed tanker accidents to break failures. This means the vehicles that are not properly maintained, are released on the roads to send Nigerians to their untimely graves.



The burning petrol tanker