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40 killed in Kogi tanker inferno

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•Frequent explosions national scandal –Buhari

Emmanuel Adeyemi, Lokoja and Juliana Taiwo-Obalonye, Abuja

Tears flowed freely yesterday morning in Felele, a community on the outskirts of Lokoja along Abuja-Lokoja highway, as a tanker truck laden with fuel caught fire and roasted no fewer than 40 people to death.

Most of the victims were said to be school children and their parents who were said to be going to school.

Also five students of Kogi State Polytechnic living in the area were reported to have been killed as they were heading to school along the highway

Several passersby, Okada riders and taxi cabs were also said to be trapped in the inferno which caused serious traffic gridlock on the highway.

A witness who spoke to Daily Sun said no fewer than 40 corpses were counted on the scene, including those who were roasted beyond recognition.



But the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), confirmed 23 deaths, including seven school children. Its Sector Commander for Kogi, Idris Ali, said the seven school children comprised 10 male adults and six female adults.

The commander said 10 vehicles, including five cars, three tricycles and two motorcycles were burnt in the inferno.

He said bodies of victims had been deposited at the Kogi State Specialist Hospital, Lokoja, where the only survivor was also receiving treatment.

He said 11 corpses had been claimed for burial by their relations.

The incident threw some schools that lost their students in the accident into mourning forcing them to hurriedly shut down.

One of them, the Baptist Group of Schools at Ganaja, lost three pupils and their parents to the accident, and its management immediately closed the school till September 28 in honour of the deceased.

The accident occurred when an Abuja-bound fuel tanker had a brake failure and in the process fell down at a spot close to GT Plaza and spilled its content on the road, which immediately caught fire.

The fire engulfed the entire spot and extended to other parts of the area, including a major bus stop where school children, workers and other people were waiting to board vehicles to their various destinations.

Meanwhile, Governor Yahaya Bello has expressed shock and sorrow over the accident.

The governor in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr Mohammed Onogu, lamented the loss of lives and property in the accident which he described as sad and tragic.

Reacting last night, President Muhammadu Buhari described the frequent petroleum tanker explosion and fire incidents as a national scandal caused by indifference to safety standards.

In a statement by Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Garba Shehu, Buhari said “these frequent incidents that result in loss of lives and property are a national scandal caused by our indifference to safety standards.”

He insisted that “many accidents are preventable if proper proactive and precautionary measures are put in place or properly observed as routine policies.”

The president regretted that “ours is a country where we move on whenever tragedies occur instead of taking preventive safety measures to forestall future calamities.”

He called on the country’s transport authorities, traffic and road management agencies as well as law enforcement officials to sit up and enforce safety standards with more seriousness, adding that “refusal to do the right thing can cause potential tragic problems that harm innocent people.”

At least, 50 persons were killed five years ago at the same spot when a truck laden with cement crashed.



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