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### Fuel Scarcity-induced Accident Claims Lives in Delta

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Fuel queues

By Omon-Julius Onabu in Asaba

The ongoing scarcity of petrol across Nigeria has taken yet another fatal toll with the roasting of at least 10 persons in a multiple accident near Asaba Airport, on the Benin-Asaba Expressway.

Eyewitness account said that the loaded Dangote Cement truck was racing towards Asaba metropolis when he rammed into a 14-seater Mitsubishi commercial bus and other vehicles, which had turned left and were running against the traffic towards Agbor-Benin end of the road.

They said that the accident occurred primarily because of the long queues of vehicles waiting to buy fuel at the NNPC Mega-Station and partly by the recklessness and overspending by the driver of the Dangote Cement truck.

Most of the dead, including five adult males and five adult females, were trapped in the commercial bus conveying them, under the truck which climbed over it before the wreckage burst into flames with the full impact.

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) personnel who were attracted to the scene could only battle to evacuate the charred remains of the accident victims, most of who were burnt beyond recognition and "about three completely burnt" such that their remains could not even be

gathered up.

Only the remains of nine of the burnt victims could be gathered together and taken away by the FRSC personnel.

The driver of the Dangote cement lorry and his "motor-boy", however, managed to escape from the truck before it caught fire, the eye-witnesses said.

Spokeswoman of the FRSC in Delta State, Mary C. Eze, told THISDAY that the ghastly incident occurred at about 10:30am on Friday.

The Mercedes-Benz cement-laden truck with registration number ASB 831 ZH, heading towards the Onitsha end of the Benin-Asaba Expressway, between the Okpanam Junction and state government housing estates on the Opposite side, when the incident occurred. .

Several queues of vehicles, which stretch for over three kilometers from the NNPC Mega Station opposite the Asaba Airport, often spill unto the entire breadth of the road, forcing some motorists to make a detour to the left side of the road facing oncoming vehicles from Agbor-Benin end.

This has been a daily occurrence since the nation-wide acute shortage of premium motor spirit (PMS) or petrol several weeks ago and the resultant rooftop rise in the cost of petrol across the country.

To avoid paying between N150 and N160 per litre at the handful of filling stations owned by both major and independent marketers in an around Asaba, motorists begin queuing at the Asaba NNPC mega station as early as 5am daily (even before the station is opened for the day's business) and the queues would persist till about 8pm when the mega station officially close for the day.

THISDAY also learnt that angry members of the public tried to harass the FRSC officers who rushed to the scene of the accident, accusing them of late response to distress calls shortly after the accident.

The road safety personnel quickly calmed the angry crowd of sympathisers, explaining that the emergency calls should have gone to the fire services since fire erupted almost immediately following the impact of the crash.

However, the only two surviving victims of accidents, who were apparently the driver and assistant in the refuse van, were rescued by FRSC officers and rushed in critical condition to the Federal Medical Centre, Asaba.

Nonetheless, the Delta State Sector Commander of the FRSC, Mr Rindom Kumven, said that accident was clearly caused by the violation of two traffic rules relating to speed and route or right-of-way especially on a very busy expressway.

Meanwhile, most of the filling stations in Asaba metropolis remained practically under lock-and-key on Friday, with the few that were open generally not dispensing petrol but only diesel and kerosene (DPK) to customers.

Therefore, the price of petrol shot up from between N140 and N150 per litre to between N160 and N170 per litre as the few with stocks of the product took full advantage of the scarcity, which has obviously left the DPR (Department of Petroleum Resources), Nigeria's official regulator of petroleum products prices totally helpless.

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