

14 die as bullion vans crash on Benin-Asaba Expressway

Posted on Dec 9 2016 - 2:25am by Dominic Adewole and Cajetan Mmta« [PREVIOUS](#) | [NEXT](#) »

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- Fuel tanker, commercial buses, cars in flames
- CBN officials, policemen affected
- Millions of naira burnt
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At least, 14 people were feared dead yesterday in an accident involving bullion vans, a fuel tanker, a commercial bus and cars on the ever-busy Benin-Asaba-Onitsha Expressway. The victims included officials of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), policemen and passengers of commercial buses.

Two of the 10 bullion vans which were in a convoy conveying money from Asaba end of the expressway were said to have

collided with a tanker, which burst into fire, before two commercial buses ran into the accident. For hours, those travelling on the road from the eastern part of the country to the western part were trapped by the accident. The accident caused gridlock which made motorists, especially commuters who had important appointments to catch up with, to begin to gnash their teeth.

Drivers, who had the opportunity, diverted to the other side of the expressway, which worsen the gridlock. Many passengers disembarked from the vehicles they were traveling in and trekked long distances before securing other vehicles to continue their journey. Millions of naira notes were burnt to ashes in the accident, which occurred at the slope in Abudu on Orhionwomwon River Bridge

towards the boundary town between Edo and Delta states.

Stern looking military officers, mobile policemen and officials of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) were helpless as the vehicles had no fire extinguishers. The security operatives were sent to the scene to safeguard other bullion vans for fear of being attacked. A witness, who simply identified herself as Faith, said a fully-loaded commercial bus, a tanker, a pick-up van and three smaller vehicles were involved.

She said: “Our own vehicle narrowly escaped the accident when a 14-seater passenger bus that was ahead of our own ran into the burning tanker and a pick-up van.

Three other cars skidded off the road into the river while trying to avoid the crash.” According to

her, the smoke which enveloped the area was that of mint notes but all other bullion vans were surrounded by combined security agents.

When contacted, the Asaba Controller of CBN, Mrs. Elizabeth Agu, said a bullion van only developed some faults on the expressway and that it was being fixed. She said: “They put off a spark underneath the vehicle very far from the back where the money is. So, it is on its way. I just called the branch. Just publish the truth because our money is in aluminium boxes.”

The Delta State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Andrew Aniamaka, said he was yet to receive any signal about the incident. According to him, the scene of the accident did not fall within his command’s purview. He said: “I am not

aware. You are the one giving me the information. I need to get my facts right. Besides, Abudu in Orhionmwon Local Government is in Edo State. But give me time to confirm what happened.”

When contacted, the Delta State Sector Commander of the FRSC, Mr. Rindom Kumven, said several vehicles were involved in the crash. Kumven said although the accident occurred within the jurisdiction of Edo State, his command had to mobilise rescue team of his men at Issele-Uku Unit to join in the rescue operations.

He said: “Multiple vehicles were involved in the crash, and actually there was loss of lives but I can’t give you the figure right now. The tanker was carrying petroleum product and that was why it went up in flames.

“For now, I can’t give you a comprehensive report about the cause of the accident but even though it occurred in Edo State, I called men at Issele-Uku to mobilise to the scene for rescue operation.”

But when contacted, the Edo State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Moses Nkombe, said that the accident occurred outside state command’s jurisdiction. He said: “The accident happened within the jurisdiction of Delta State police command.”