

METRO AND CRIME

Many dead, 60 vehicles burnt as tanker explodes



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- **Scores feared dead, 60 vehicles burnt in Lagos tanker explosion**

...accident unfortunate, regrettable, says govt



Many people were feared to have lost their lives while about 60 vehicles were burnt yesterday when a fuel tanker lost control, crashed and exploded on Otedola Bridge on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. Four persons were also injuries while two of them were treated and discharged at the Trauma Centre at the old Toll Gate.

This came as the Lagos State government described the incident as most unfortunate and regrettable. The tanker was carrying 33,000 litres of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), otherwise called petrol. Witnesses said the incident occurred about 5.20p.m. According to them, the driver of the tanker was heading out of the state when he suddenly lost control of the vehicle.

The driver, who was said to have escaped from the scene immediately the truck crashed, waved at the drivers behind not to come near as the tanker was rolling back. But some of the drivers of the burnt cars were adamant. It was learnt that immediately the truck crashed, the content spilled on the road and caught fire, some of the drivers behind the truck were trapped in their cars as a result of the balls of fire from the explosion.

About 60 vehicles were burnt in the process. While the tanker was burning, some passengers in commercial buses and private car owners trying to escape from the fire fell inside the gutter. They were burnt inside the gutter. One of the survivors, who gave her name simply as Mrs.

Adedeji, said she thanked God for sparing her and the lives of her children. However, her car was burnt. She said: “My children and I left our house at Magodo going to Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry to pray.

We were in traffic when we suddenly saw the tanker rolling back. Before we could come out of our car, the fire had already got close to my car. “It was God who saved me and my children; we would have died in the fire. I thank God but some families who were returning from work and those travelling died in the inferno.” Adedeji was rolling on the ground to appreciate God for saving her and her family.

Many sympathisers could not hold back tears as they watched the wreckage of the burnt vehicles and bodies of victims. However, first responders said only nine people died while 54 vehicles were burnt. At press time, the total number of victims and vehicles burnt could not be ascertained. The emergency responders, led by the Lagos State Fire Service and the men of the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Red Cross, the Rapid Respond Squad (RRS), Lagos State Transport Authority (LASTMA) and other agencies, had a hectic time controlling the scene of the accident. The accident also caused gridlock, which extended to the Third Mainland Bridge and spread to tributary roads.

The men of the state fire service battled the inferno for several hours before they could contain it. They rushed to their Alausa Headquarters several times to get more trucks of water. As the fire raged, many could only weep as they could not withstand the heat and the smoke from the scene.

They watched helplessly. Remains of the victims were extricated from the burnt vehicles while those who sustained severe injuries were rushed to the nearby hospitals. Nobody could identify any of the victims. Speaking on the explosion, the LASEMA General Manager, Adeshina Tihamiyu, disclosed that efforts were still on to put out the fire.

He said: “We are trying to extinguish the fire from the vehicles and check for possible causalities from the explosion.” Tihamiyu, however, regretted that commuters’ interference with rescue operation has continued to impede officials to complete the exercise. Meanwhile, LASTMA blamed the accident on the brake failure on the part of the ill-fated tanker. Another survivor, Mrs. Agatha John, said she and other passengers were coming from Oshodi and were held in traffic. John said she lost goods worth over N5 million. She said: “We were still in the traffic when the truck drove past us. Suddenly, I just saw the truck rolling back, before I knew what was happening it had already fallen down and its content was spilling. We thought it was a minor thing. But, a few seconds later, we heard a loud noise. Immediately we saw the fire, we abandoned our vehicle and fled. “The goods I went to buy at Idomota worth of N5 million all burnt in the inferno. But, I thank God I am alive.”

A commercial bus driver, Mr. Najeem Bakare, said his burnt vehicle was given to him last Thursday on instalments. He said: “I ply Lagos-Ibadan route. I was coming from Alaba International where I usually pick passengers and I was in the traffic trying to drive past the truck. But the truck driver assistant warned me to be careful. Before I knew what was happening, the truck had fallen down and exploded. My passengers and I abandoned the bus and ran away.

I thank God.” It was also learnt that some school children, who were returning from school, were also burnt in the inferno. Some drivers and passengers were also said to have been burnt beyond recognition.

A towing vehicle driver, identified as Lucky, who was always at the Otedola end of the bridge, was trying to come out of his vehicle when the fire burnt him. His body was lying in the gutter before it was later evacuated. Meanwhile, the Lagos State government has commiserated with families of victims who lost their lives and property in the tanker explosion.

The government, in a statement signed by the Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Kehinde Bamigbetan, described the incident as a sad development, saying that the incident was most unfortunate and regrettable.

He said: “On behalf of the Lagos State government, we extend our deepest commiseration to the families of persons who lost their lives as well as properties to the incident. Our thoughts and prayers are with them in this time of pain and grief. “As a government, we would not relent in putting measures in place to ensure safety of lives and property of all residents.” The state Governor, Akinwunmi Ambode, visited the scene last night. He commended rescue agencies for their swift response.

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