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Armed Robbers Trigger-off Explosion in Ogun

By Yemi Akinsuyi and Udem Clement-Ogbuanu,
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Alagbole, a border town between Lagos and Ogun states, was thrown into a state of confusion yesterday morning when an explosion from a gas plant, Elo Gas Company, in the area triggered off a disaster that claimed five lives, destroyed houses and a nearby church within the vicinity.

Eye-witnesses said a group of armed bandits pretending to be customers in a bid to scare attendants at the gas plant located in Ajayi Farm, Alagbole, near Oke Aro, Ogun State, shot into a gas cylinder thereby triggering a big explosion that resulted in a fire that ravaged the neighbourhood.

THISDAY gathered that after frantic efforts by the residents to put off the fire failed, they immediately made distress calls to both Lagos and Ogun States fire service offices, alerting them of the disaster. The fire that started at about 8.30am did not stop until about 2.30pm.

Yesterday's disaster came few months after the explosion at the pipeline belonging to Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) at Ijegun community in Lagos, claiming over a hundred lives and properties worth millions of naira.

Though the fire had been put under control from spreading by the fire services of both states when THISDAY visited the scene of the disaster, thick black smoke still enveloped the neighbourhood.

Officials of the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA) and Lagos Security and Civil Defence Corp were seen assisting in putting off the fire.

Speaking on the incident, Lagos State Commissioner of Police (CP), Marvel Akpoyibo who deployed men from the Lagos State Police Command to keep watch on NNPC pipeline located just three streets away from the scene denied the story that armed robbers shot into one of the gas cylinders, but said the explosion might have been caused by other means.

But his Ogun State counterpart, Mr. Solomon Olusegun, confirmed the armed robbery story, stating that the men of the underworld actually shot into one of the cylinders before the explosion.

Olusegun however stated that there was no record of death, saying the three people that were injured in the inferno were already responding to treatment.

In a chat with THISDAY, Head of Operations, Lagos State Fire and Safety Service, Mr. Sule Gbadamosi, said that his team responded immediately the distress call reached their office. He said the incident was unfortunate, calling on the government to equip the Fire Service properly to enable it act effectively at every point of call. "We must recognise the fact that Fire Service is very important in the country. Our work is to ensure that lives and properties are not wasted in the society", he said. Also speaking, the General Manager, LASEMA, Dr. Oke Osanyintolu, praised the efforts of the residents for alerting the various agencies on time.

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He advised oil and gas companies operating in the country to put appropriate safety measures in place to prevent fire outbreak and loss of lives at every slightest mistake. He also advised the youths in the community to behave responsibly by not seeing the disaster as an opportunity to vandalise the nearby fuel pipeline. Among the team at the scene, were members of the Nigerian Red Cross Society, led by Mr. Francis Jonah, officials of National Emergency Management Agency, Lagos Zonal office and community leaders who turned out in large number to rescue the victims. Also, the residents within the area were seen leaving their homes and moving their properties away to other places.

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