

Kerosine explosion kills 4 more in P-Harcourt

Pregnant woman, 3 daughters latest victims

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ROAD TO THE NIGER DELTA



PORT HARCOURT — A PREGNANT woman and her three children were killed yesterday in Port Harcourt in the latest of the kerosine fire explosions in Rivers and Delta states. The children were aged between six and 12. The explosion brings to 22 the number of people who have been killed so far by the explosions.

Seventeen were killed in Delta State over a period of three weeks and one physically-challenged woman in Port Harcourt last week. Many others have been left severely burnt.

Fear has already gripped residents of Yenagoa following the increasing open sale of condensate in many parts

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of the state. Condensate is a lighter variant of crude oil and it is widely used in parts of the Niger Delta for cooking. It is more combustible than kerosine.

Vanguard gathered that the latest fire in Port Harcourt was sparked when the head of the household attempted to light a lamp at about midnight. What followed after striking a stick of match was an explosion from the kerosine lamp and within seconds, the room was on fire. It was shouts of "my family, my family," by the man that woke up neighbours.

However, as the fire spread, neighbours could do little or nothing to save the trapped woman and her children.

Fear grips Bayelsa residents

Meanwhile, fear has gripped residents of Yenagoa as hawkers of condensate have taken over all the nooks and crannies of the state capital.

The killer product, *Vanguard's* investigation revealed, is being smuggled from the Okaka axis bordering Bayelsa and Rivers States and the Nembe creeks in barges and sold to businessmen and women at some locations.

Most filling stations having petrol were selling between N75 and N90 as against the approved N70 pump price.

But most product users prefer buying from roadside hawkers who sell a 50-litre jer-

ry can of the stolen condensate from oil pipelines crisis crossing the mangrove swamp between N500 and N1000 depending on a buyer's bargaining skill.

This development, *Vanguard* investigation revealed, has caused many vehicles especially those using injectors to be grounded while most Bayelsans having exotic automobiles have parked such cars at home for fear that they may be damaged.

Only recently, nine buildings were razed while four persons were seriously injured with various degrees of burn following an outbreak of fire in Nembe-Bassambiri allegedly caused by adulterated kerosine believed to be condensate.

In spite of the high risk as-

sociated with the trade, most unemployed youths in the capital city have taken to the sale of this killer fuel because of the high profit margin involved.

NLC chief tasks Delta Police

Chairman of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in Delta State, Mr. Mike Okeme, has urged the police in the state to halt the haphazard arrest of persons who sell kerosine in surface tanks, saying they are neither the vandals of oil pipelines to siphon condensate nor the rogues distributing the killer-kerosine which has killed no fewer than 20 persons and seriously injured more than 30 persons in the last few weeks.

Mr Okeme made the call in Asaba while playing host to the national chairman of the Human Rights Defenders Organisation of Nigeria (HURDON), Sir Casley Omon-Irabor, and other executive members of the body who paid the NLC leadership a courtesy call.

He said the NLC would take the matter up with the Commissioner of Police in Delta State, Mr. Hezekiah Dimka, adding that Congress would not condone such behaviour by the police. No fewer than 20 persons were reported to have been arrested by the police in connection with kerosine explosions in Warri, Ughelli, Asaba and other parts of the state.

Sir Omon-Irabor had earlier in his address told the NLC leadership that his group was in their office to see how both partners could partner to work and take common stand on issues of national importance.

Fuel scarcity looms

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petroleum products scarcity loomed large yesterday after the Petroleum Tanker Drivers Association (PTDA) commenced an industrial strike to protest the seizure of 100 trucks and arrest of 16 tanker drivers by officials of the Lagos and Ogun State Governments.

While the PTD insists its members will not lift petroleum products until the Lagos State government gives it a written assurance that trucks of its members will never again be impound-

trucks until they got a suitable place where government officials would not harass them.

Writing on behalf of his members, the Lagos zonal secretary of the union, Mr Adebayo Atanda, said agents of the Lagos State Government swooped on its members causing "serious damage to tankers!" at a time that they were looking up to the August deadline given to tank farm owners by the Federal Government's multi-agency task force on de-congestion of traffic to and within Lagos under Commander B.B. Kole.

He asked for the President's

the development said the state government would not be intimidated by any individual or group of people who bent on subverting the authority of the government by disobeying the rules and regulations of the state.

He said since the operators had decided to draw a battle line with constituted authority by continuously flouting its directive, it behoved the government to demonstrate that laws enacted for the general well-being of the people of Lagos State were not trampled upon with impunity.