

50 feared dead in Ogun pipeline explosion

BY DAUD OLATUNJI
and IFEANYI OKOLIE

● Petrol scarcity may worsen

● Surviving vandal tells his story

Over 50 suspected vandals were, yesterday, feared dead in an explosion that rocked the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC, pipeline at Arepo village, Owode, Ogun State. Sunday Vanguard gathered that the explosion was sparked by some vandals who stormed the creeks by boat to siphon fuel from the NNPC pipeline.

Arepo was the scene of the killing of three NNPC officials by vandals last year. One of the survivors of yesterday's incident was said to have participated in the

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officials murder. He was arrested by the police alongside a doctor who, according to reports, was taking him to hospital for treatment. The doctor claimed he had only responded to distress calls. There were fears, last night, that damage to the pipeline could worsen petrol scarcity as it supplies the product from Atlas Cove Jetty in Lagos to other South-West states.

An eyewitness account stated that the explosion came after an argument erupted between two of the vandals who were struggling to siphon fuel from the pipeline and it resulted into a brawl that made one of them who was armed with a rifle to shoot indiscriminately into the air.

Sunday Vanguard learnt that bullets from the rifle hit the ruptured pipeline and led to an explosion.

Meanwhile, operatives of the Inspector General of Police Special Task Force on Anti-Pipeline Vandalism Unit, who have been on patrol of the area, responded to the explosion.

It was in the course of the response that they made the arrests.

Those arrested included the survivor identified as Sunday Reuben and the doctor. The source alleged that the doctor was trying to smuggle the survivor to his private clinic for treatment. The survivor, with severe burns, told Sunday Vanguard that there were more than 50 of them stealing petrol from the ruptured pipeline when the explosion took place, pleading for the rescue of his colleagues "blown away by the force of the blast and dying in the creeks."

His claim could not be confirmed as the fire was still burning at press time thus hindering access to the place.

My story-surviving vandal

He narrated the story of how he came to be involved in yesterday's incident: "I was in my house when Suleiman my friend

called me that there was a job at Arepo creeks. He asked me to look for a canoe and come with as many gallons as I could carry. Shortly after I arrived, I saw people fighting before I heard a gunshot. The next thing was an explosion, I was lucky that I wasn't close to the pipeline. It was the heat of the fire that affected me. I managed to run to my boat where my mother was waiting. There were so many of us both men and women. We were more than 50 over there and most of us are still inside that fire. Most of them are still in the creeks dying, please help them. Iya Olabode called a doctor who was about taking me to hospital when we were arrested by the police."

The doctor said he acted on his oath to protect life. He explained that Iya Olabode, his customer, called him to attend to a patient in her house at Abule Oba, Ikorodu area of Lagos. "I am a family doctor to Iya Olabode for the past three years. So when she called me that there was an emergency, I rushed to her house where I saw Reuben badly burnt. I advised that we should take the man to my clinic for better treatment. We were on our way when the police accosted us."

He further claimed that he never remembered to ask the patient how he sustained the burns. "I forgot to ask him because I was in a hurry to save his life. I never knew that he could be a vandal because Iya Olabode is a good and respectable business woman. I am terribly sorry; I was only trying to save a life." Confirming the arrests, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Friday Ibadin, who is in charge of the Task Force, said that the explosion started at about 2am yesterday.

"Shortly after the explosion, policemen led by Sector Commander, Lagos, DSP Onaghise Osayande, cordoned off the area to reduce casualties while they

awaited the arrival of fire fighters to quench the fire. It was in the process that they stumbled into a vehicle carrying one of the survivors and a medical doctor who was on his way to hospital. In the course of interrogation, we discovered that the survivor was one of those who participated in the killing of some NNPC officials last year. "The taskforce arrested six suspected vandals who were alleged to have participated in the incident that led to the killing of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) staff at Arepo Village, Owode in Ogun State".

Looming petrol scarcity

Meanwhile, a source close to the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in Ogun State, which deployed its men to the scene of pipeline explosion, hinted that the NNPC had been asked to stop further supply of petrol to the pipeline to reduce the inferno.

Experts said the interruption of supply was bound to worsen fuel scarcity of petrol in the south west states. The Public Relations Officer of the NSCDC in the state, Olanrewaju Kareem, who con-

firmed the incident in a press statement, in Abeokuta, said there was an explosion at "the NNPC pipeline on waterways at journalists Estate, Arepo in the state".

He said, "the fire was noted yesterday by our surveillance team posted to monitor the situation around the place. "The fire might have been caused by vandals activities as we received an earlier call by the same surveillance team of suspicious movement around the waterways. "Our combat team were on

their way at about 8:15 am when the out-break occurred, the team was instructed to move in by commandant Aboluwoye Akinwande for possible arrests.

"However, no arrest was made as the vandals made their escape through Majidun side of the water ways. The Corps Commandant, Aboluwoye Akinwande, was there early this morning to have on the spot assessment of the situation.

"He immediately called on NNPC to stop supply through the route. In due course, NNPC has made us to know that the fire will come down gradually".



The Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi (left), explaining his ordeal to Governor of Osun State, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola (right). With them are two of his Oloris whose properties were affected by the fire that gutted the Alaafin's palace on Tuesday: Olori Folashade (left); Olori Abiodun; and Senator (Prof) Bola Adeyeye, representing Osun Central (2nd right), among others, during the condolence visit of the governor to the Alaafin, yesterday.

Boko Haram leader caught in former Rep's house

BY OUR REPORTER

ANOTHER breakthrough came the way of security agents in their confrontation with members of the dreaded Jamaatu Ahlil Sunna Lidawati wal Jihad.

reportedly disclosed, upon interrogation, that his brief as a sect member was to "carry out robbery activities by dispossessing members of the public of their cars".

The security guard in the former House of the Reps member's residence (who was described as a mere gateman)

of Bukar, Sunday Vanguard was made to understand that the suspect disclosed that the cars used for suicide bombings by the sect were stolen vehicles.

One of the very indicting statements of Bukar, the source said, "was that he implicated the former Rep by