

# Saturday NEWS

## Lagos tanker explosion: 5 lives lost, 25 vehicles burnt; hoodlums loot offices, vandalise property

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**A** Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) tanker explosion which occurred Thursday night on Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way, Ikeja, Lagos has claimed five lives with several others sustaining injuries. No fewer than 25 cars were also destroyed by the inferno while a part of the Ogun State Property Investment Company (OPIC) Plaza, which houses different commercial outfits was severely damaged.

And to compound the unfortunate situation, hoodlums were said to have taken advantage of the fire incident to loot offices adding to the woes of the victims.

The tanker reportedly exploded while in motion at about 10.32 pm on Thursday. According to eyewitnesses, the impact of the explosion was felt inside buildings in the Government Residential Area (GRA) axis of Ikeja.

The Acting Zonal Coordinator, South West Zonal Office, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Mr Ibrahim Fadiyoye, confirmed that five persons had so far lost their lives in the fire incident.

Fadiyoye said yesterday that three bodies were earlier recovered from the scene of the incident by emergency response agencies. "Sadly, two out of the 13 persons who were rescued and taken to the Trauma and Burns Centre at Gbagada General Hospital, passed on a few minutes ago. This makes it a total of five persons killed in the explosion so far," he said.

He said the explosion was alleged to have been caused by leakage while the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tanker was in motion.

According to him, "The resulting fire travelled with the wind to the premises of Ogun State Property Investment Company (OPIC) Plaza besides Sheraton Hotels, which houses different commercial outfits including a Chinese Restaurant. The fire was put out at about 12.30

a.m. after concerted efforts of five fire trucks from the Lagos State Fire Service and two trucks from the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency Response Unit. The initial search and rescue activities revealed that 13 persons sustained various degrees of burns. Out of this, nine are males while four are females. We have so far recovered three bodies from the incident. The bodies were recovered from the generator house of OPIC Plaza and the restaurant."

Fadiyoye said the affected victims were taken to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) and that four of the victims with severe injuries were later transferred to the Trauma and Burns Centre at Gbagada General Hospital. "Comprehensive post-disaster assessment on the extent of general damages would be done later today (yesterday)," Fadiyoye added.

Scores of onlookers and sympathisers thronged the scene of the tragedy as rescue workers battled to bring the situation under control. The attendant gridlock worsened as

while the gas tanker was moving toward Ikeja.

"The victims, who suffered varying degree of burns from the gas explosion were consequently taken to Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, LASUTH and Gbagada General Hospital Burns and Trauma Centre for treatment. They are responding to treatment, while five persons lost their lives."

Also, the Director, Lagos State Fire and Rescue Service, Mrs Adeseye Margaret said the unfortunate incident which was reported at about 2235 hours on Thursday, was promptly attended to by the firemen.

She said: "A distress call was received from Opic Plaza, 28/30 Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way, Ikeja that a Gas Truck heading towards Ikeja reportedly exploded from a leakage which travelled through atmospheric conditions to meet an ignition point on the ground floor of the OPIC Plaza which houses a restaurant among other outlets resulting to Fire Outbreak."

Adeseye added that three fire engines and crew were promptly detailed to rescue the situation and they completely put out the fire at the incident scene.

She further explained that on arrival at the scene of the incident, the firefighters discovered that not less than 25 vehicles of various brands including the gas truck and the rear section of the plaza building was extensively damaged by the resultant inferno. She however, said that firefighting operations was concluded at 3 am Friday, as comprehensive post-fire disaster investigation and assessment has begun in earnest.

### Victims, eyewitnesses' account

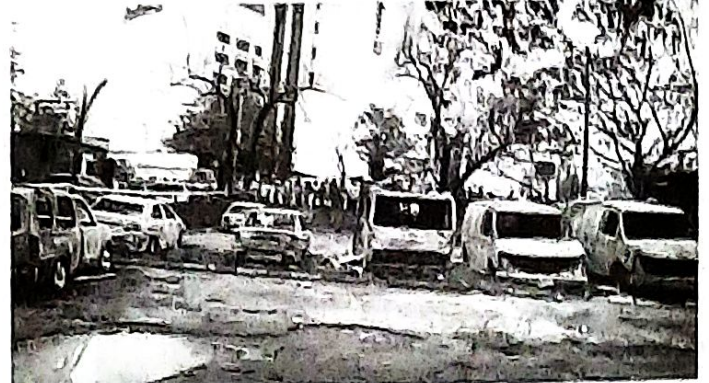
An eye witness account said it took the Lagos State Fire and Rescue Services over two hours to respond to the emergency calls by residents.

A resident Mrs Adelajo Kasali, said several calls made to Lagos State Emergency numbers were unresponded to promptly.

A private guard Mr. Tony Omahi, said he felt the heat of the fire as it spread towards his direction before he took to his heels for safety.

According to him, "That was my first experience of seeing how fast fire can travel. I ran as far as my leg could carry me until I noticed the arrival of law enforcement operatives. There was nothing anyone could do to salvage lives and properties"

A victim, Mr. Akande Erinle, who lost his



The gas explosion scenes at the Opic Plaza, Mobolaji Bank Anthony way, Ikeja, caused by gas cylinder vehicle, last night, in Lagos. PHOTO: Kehinde Shonola.



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vehicle to the inferno said he took to his heels when he noticed the rate at which the fire was moving towards his direction. "I was sleeping in my vehicle."

When I suddenly felt hot breeze which aroused me from sleep, Before I could pull myself together, I saw the fire coming towards my direction and I had no option that to run out of my car. At a point, I thought it was an attack until I saw people scrambling for safety at that hour of the night. I ran as far as Ayinle House for safety after which I started coming back.

"Surprisingly, I noticed that my vehicle has got burnt but I thank God that I am alive, after all, when there is life, there is hope."

An eye witness who simply identified himself as Azees, lamented late arrival of emergency responders to the scene of the incident.

"Police were the first responders at the scene but that was an hour after the incident happened, followed by the state fire service which arrived about two hours later. Many workers of the restaurant were trapped in the inferno and their shout for help attracted people like us who rushed to the scene to rescue them. Unfortunately, we could not do much because of thick choking smoke.

"We had to use a torch light to ascertain the exact location of trapped people only to notice that such assistance would require the services of an ambulance."

"We ran to Eko Hospital for support but were referred to the General Hospital and this process was cumbersome and could not be completed. The fire ravaged the more. Men of the fire service then arrived the scene and swung into action. Emergency services arrived five hours later but without ambulance service. This is pathetic," he lamented.

The manager of the affected restaurant, identified as Mr Balogun was said to be among the dead.

Mr. Balogun and his colleagues were trapped in the inferno and three of them were later confirmed dead.

Eye witnesses said that the truck driver and his motor boy jumped out of the truck and ran for safety on noticing that the truck had developed leakage.

A resident, Ayoola Babajide said, "We noticed that the truck stopped abruptly and the next thing was that we noticed a leakage which spread to the neighbourhood. The truck driver and his motor boy were very smart to

have escaped from the vehicle, else, they would have been trapped."

Meanwhile, a businessman, Mr Soun Peters, has decried the looting of his office by hoodlums during the incident which damaged part of Ogun State Property Investment Company (OPIC) Plaza, in Ikeja.

Peters, the Managing Director, Rolling Video Games, told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Friday that his company, located in the plaza, suffered several losses due to the incident.

Peters said: "Three of my official vehicles were burnt and the hoodlums tried to break into my van and my office was looted. I wonder why, because if there is a fire incident, I don't know why people will now use that opportunity to try to loot offices and shops. I think they should stop this dangerous trend when places are burning, rather than look for a solution to it, hoodlums try to take that opportunity to loot." He said the office was vandalised by the hoodlums who carted away some cash, electronic gadgets and wristwatches. "Luckily, they didn't take any of my documents because obviously they are not useful to them, but the whole place is in a mess," Peters said.

### CLASSIFIED CHANGE OF NAME

ORJI - I, formerly known and addressed as Miss Orji Ebera Mercy, now wish to be known and addressed as Mrs. Ikamefuna Amaechi Ebera Mercy. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.