By NJOROE wa KARURI
and KHAKHUDU AGUNDA

A loud explosion rocked a shop and a hotel in the centre of Nairobi yesterday afternoon.

The explosion was caused by a faulty underground telephone cable, according to fire brigade officials.

The blast on Luthuli Avenue between Hotel Salama and Thathi-in Mansion caused weekend strollers in the area to flee in panic while others went nearby to find out what was happening.

A fire started after the explosion from the telephone control box outside the hotel and plain-clothes policemen had a hard time controlling the crowd. Several people were injured in the commotion.

Soon after the explosion, there was a power blackout on Tom Mboya Street and Luthuli Avenue.

A spokesman from the Kenya Power and Lighting Company said the supply was interrupted deliberately to prevent fire from spreading to buildings in the area.

Mrs Florence Mukora of the nearby Wataalam Radio Services shop told The Nation: "I thought it was a bomb and I quickly ran from the shop when I saw stones land at our shop from the telephone control box."

Mr Silas Mwenda, who was in the vicinity, said he saw stones flying from the underground telephone cable cover.

A man identified as Mr Clement Chesire was injured in the elbow when two matatus collided at the junction of Tom Mboya and Ronald Ngala Streets, following the explosion.

Mr John Kiaye, a trainee at the CID Training School in Nairobi West, told The Nation he was travelling in one of the matatus.

Said Mr Kiaye: "I heard a loud bang as we reached the junction and did not realise what was happening till our matatu landed on its side and people came and pulled us out."

A colleague of his at the CID School, Mr Chesire, he said, was injured on his elbow.

Several people hurt as blast causes road accident