

Boat mishap: Death toll rises to 40

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The death toll from last Monday's mishap in Bagwai local government area in Kano State, when a canoe conveying a bridal party to her husband's house capsized in the middle of a lake, rose to 40 yesterday. Many other passengers on the ill-fated canoe were still missing, according to rescuers and survivors who spoke to *Daily Trust* at the accident scene.

The canoe was ferrying a bride and her entourage from Badau village to Bagwai town, and it capsized only a few meters to the river bank, killing most of the passengers.

Survivors said 22 women with 15 infants and five men were on board the boat, as were its two operators and some other young children who were not in the bridal party.

Chairman of Bagwai local government area Alhaji Abdulhamid Idris said the number of those aboard the ill-fated boat could not eas-

Cont. on Pg. 10



Rescuers combing the Bagwai dam for survivors of the canoe mishap yesterday.

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Continued from Page 1

ily be ascertained as the accident occurred at night.

Fire service officials were not at the scene of the accident at about 8 am yesterday, when our reporter visited the Dam.

One of the survivors, Habiba Bagwai, who is now recuperating bed at Bagwai General Hospital, said apart from herself, none of the 22 women with their 15 infants survived the accident. She said she lost all her three children in the mishap. She listed the lost children as 17 month-old Abdullahi, six year-old Isiyaku and four year-old Asiya.

"There were 22 women on board the canoe, and among them, only the bride and her best friend were without a child. Some had more than one child, and like me, I had three, and they all died", she said.

Fire service officials from Kano, however, said they could not ascertain the exact number of casualties. Personal Assistant to the state Director of Fire Service Mustapha Muhammed said as rescue operation is still on, they cannot say how many persons died.

"All I can say now is that

we have worked tirelessly since Monday night till the early hours of today (yesterday), and we are right now continuing with the operations", he said.

Also speaking in Kano, one of the boat operators, Malam Abdullahi Sani said he cannot say how many passengers he was carrying as it was dark at the time they boarded the boat, and that most of the women accompanying the bride were carrying infants.

Daily Trust reports that victims' relatives who stormed the river bank in lamentation, however, confirmed that over 40 persons died.

"As I am talking to you now we are sure that after the rescue of three people and recovery of nine corpses, there are over 20 still missing and the number may increase as families now travel to Dabau to see whether their loved ones were among those in the bridal party before the tragedy", one of the rescuers, Sani Bagwai, said.

Daily Trust also learnt that the capsized boat was conveying the third and final bridal entourage, which included the bride, Malama Bilkisu Bibiyo Ado Rinji, when the accident occurred.

The bride and her aunty who brought her up died in the accident.

"It is difficult or almost impossible to expect any survivor after over ten hours under the water, so we are only working to discover the corpses", the traditional custodian of the river, *Sarkin Ruwa* Malam Umar Garba, said yesterday.

Hundreds of victims' relatives, government officials and many other sympathizers were seen at the Dam's bank watching search and rescue operations in the river. Many of them were in tears.

Local rescue workers returned to the river for further rescue mission by 10am yesterday after a long wait for men of the fire service from Kano, who reached the Dam at around 11 am.

Prayers were conducted at mosques in most communities around Bagwai for the victims.

The town's grave yard, which is near the Dam, was yesterday filled with voluntary workers who waited for any corpse recovered to arrive for burial. Already, nine were buried, mostly those found on the night of the accident.