

Hamza Idris, who was in Potiskum

PEOPLE in all the villages along the highway from Kari in Bauchi State and Damaturu in Yobe State have made rescue operations part of their routine because of the recurrent accidents along the route. "Whenever we hear a big, noisy sound, the only thing we do is to say Inna Lillahi WA Inna Ilaihi Raji'un (from God we come and to Him we shall return) because we know that an accident must have happened," Adamu Mohammed, a resident of Dagare village in Yobe State told Weekly Trust. "Sometimes we do succeed in rescuing the victims alive but on many occasions, we only participate in evacuating corpses...it is always sad to partake in such operations," Mohammed, a farmer added.

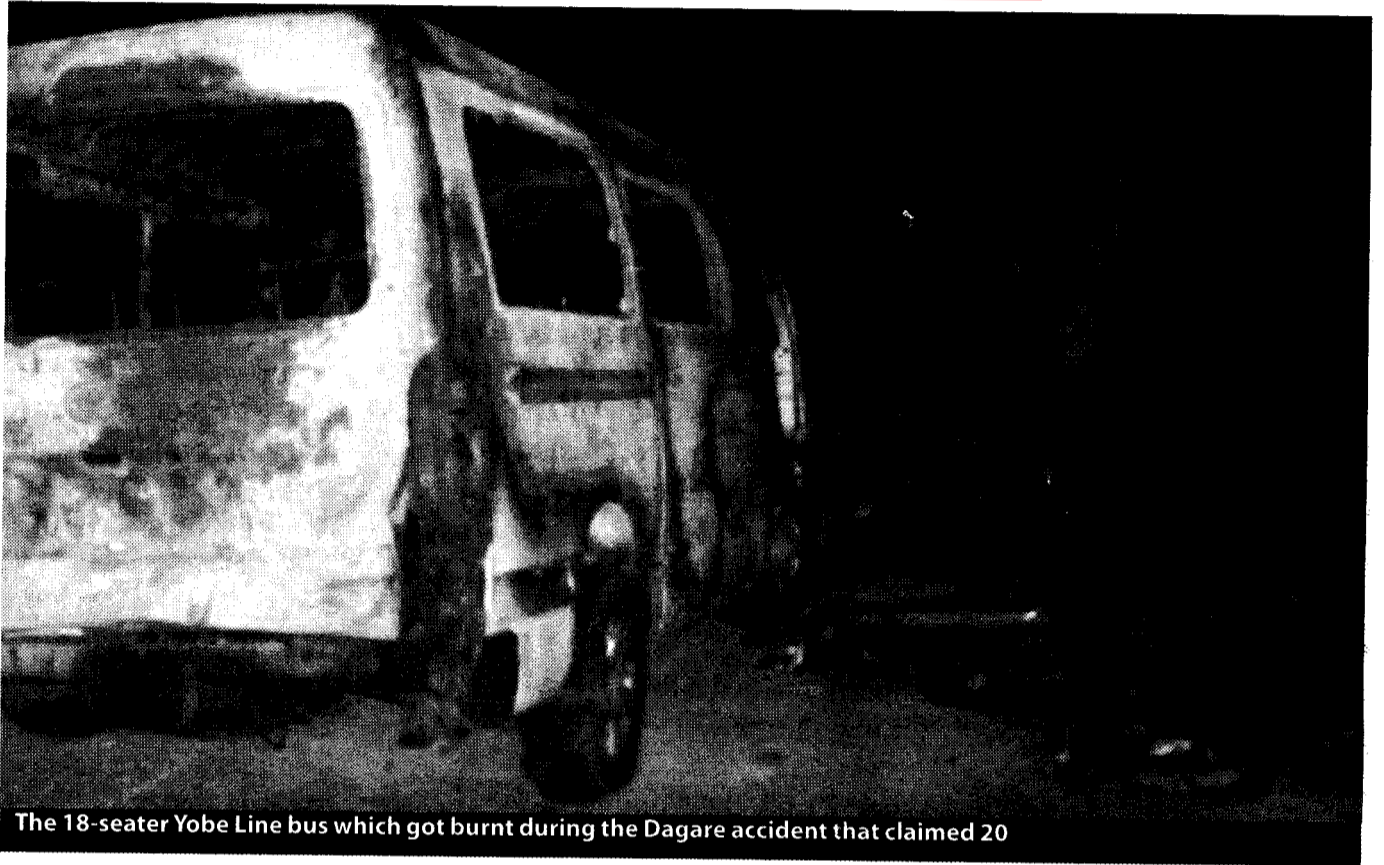
Road officials believe that the less than 300 kilometre Kari-Damaturu road has claimed more than 300 lives in the last three years. The road has remained a nightmare for drivers, passengers and other road users. The latest major accident on the road was the one that occurred penultimate Monday at Dagare, close to Potiskum local government area of Yobe State which claimed the lives of twenty people including men, women and children. Two buses belonging to the Yobe Line transport company where moving at high speed when the driver of one of the buses, while attempting to dodge a pothole and at the same time overtake, had a collision with another bus belonging to the Cross Country transport company.

Witnesses said because of the level at which they were moving, the second Yobe Line bus rammed into the first two buses that collided. "Shortly after the accident which occurred around 4:40pm, the vehicles burst into flame and most of the passengers in the Yobe Line bus got burnt beyond recognition," Mallam Sabo, a witness said. "Most of the villagers were at home when we heard a thunderous sound on the highway. Immediately we rushed to the scene, we saw the vehicles in flames and the passengers wailing and crying for help."

Sabo continued: "It was a gory sight. Amidst confusion, all the villagers went back home and rushed back to scene of the accident again with buckets of water, leaves and anything handy as part of our efforts to put off the fire that has overwhelmed the vehicles. Unfortunately, our efforts were defeated because the raging flames continued burning until most of the victims could not cry anymore," he said.

Our correspondent learnt that it took the intervention of the fire service men from Potiskum along with the police that were patrolling the road as well as officials of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) to contain the raging fire. "The government rescuers (FRSC and co) removed the charred remains of the people and took them to hospital," another witness, Mamuda Dagare said.

# Day 20 perished in Yobe auto-crash



The 18-seater Yobe Line bus which got burnt during the Dagare accident that claimed 20

It was learnt that 23 other people got injured, many of them with serious burns and are now receiving treatment at the General Hospital, Potiskum. One of the victims, Mrs Aisha Mohammed who was seen at the hospital said she was from Abuja on her way to Maiduguri. "The truth is that our driver was on high speed just like the drivers of the other vehicles...I lost my daughter in the accident and I have a broken limb. We thank Allah for saving our lives," she said. Maryam Hamza, a student of the University of Maiduguri who was a victim of the accident sustained bruises. "I and few others were so lucky to have been removed by the villagers before the fire engulfed our vehicle," she said.

While few of the victims sustained minor injuries, many were seen in serious pains with little chances of survival at the hospital. Their predicament was aggravated by the pitiable condition of the hospital in Potiskum which had only one doctor at the time this reporter visited. This became evident when many patients, some in critical condition were seen

in queues waiting to be attended to. "There are nurses in the hospital but some cases require the services of experts as well as equipment. You cannot put a patient with serious burns on any kind of hospital bed," a senior staff in the hospital said.

The area which the accident happened is getting increasingly notorious for hosting ghastly auto crashes. About ten days ago, many people died in an accident involving two trucks, a few metres away from a mass grave which was dug in 1995 where over sixty school children and other passengers were buried inside when the luxury bus they were moving in had a head-on collision with another one.

There was also another accident in 1997 close to Damagun in Fune local government of Yobe State involving a luxury bus that claimed the lives of over forty people. Then 44 soldiers were burnt beyond recognition after an accident at Siminti village in 2008 while on their way back to Monguno Barracks in Borno State after peace-keeping operations in Dafur, Sudan. The place where

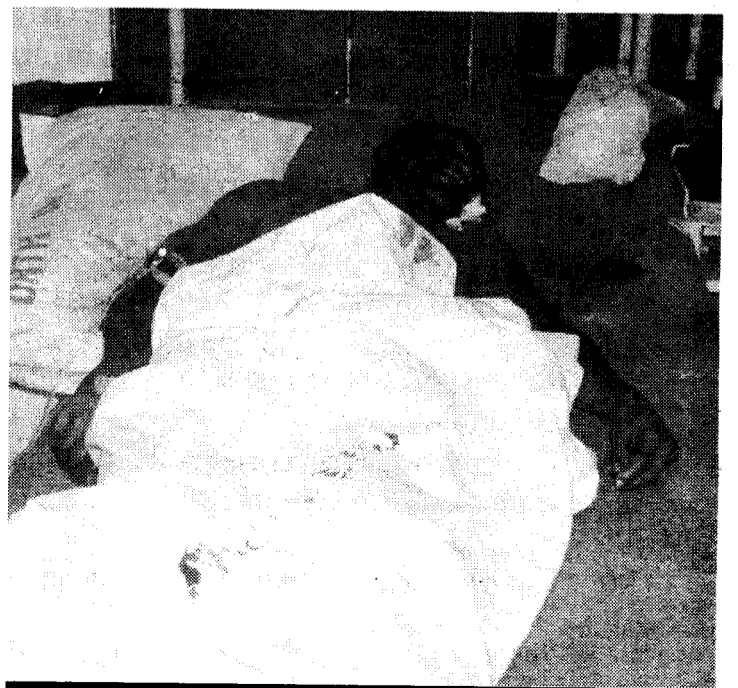
the soldiers died is not far from the place where the accident that claimed the lives of 20 people last week. Records of accidents along the Kari-Damaturu route can go on and on, even as most of the people plying the road have remained gullible, attributing the recurrent misfortunes to God.

FRSC commander in Yobe State, Mr S.G Maitizumahs said there are a lot of challenges confronting road administrators. "We are doing our best but we are constrained. Most parts of our highway are in bad shape and in need of serious repairs. Drivers are also not helping matters. Whenever accidents happen, rescue operations are difficult for us. We need more ambulances and patrol vehicles," he added.

The then Obasanjo-led government had awarded a contract for the dualisation of the Kano-Maiduguri road and the project is still ongoing even as the government has stealthily ignored the Kari-Potiskum portion of the highway, a place motorists interchangeably describe as "the axis of death."



A bus, crashed beyond repair, at Mamudo, Yobe State



A victim of the accident in Dagare which claimed the lives of 20 people