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## 25 die in Makurdi, Maiduguri auto accidents

*From Simeon Nwakaudu (Makurdi) and Njadvava Musa (Maiduguri)*

**T**RAGEDY struck in the early hours of Palm Sunday in Makurdi as 19 persons perished at the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) Junction when an 18-seater bus had a head-on collision with a tanker conveying black oil to Jos, Plateau State.

The petrol tanker with registration number AA 098 AKW was travelling from Port Harcourt to Jos with 33,000 litres of black oil, while the 18-seater bus with registration number AJ 523 MKD was travelling to Otukpo when the accident occurred at the extremely narrow junction.

Also, no fewer than six people were feared dead and eight other passengers sustained various degrees of injuries on Saturday night in a multiple auto crash involving Volkswagen, Honda cars and a Sports Utility Van (SUV) on the Maiduguri-Damaturu road. The road mishaps occurred at Maino village, 58 kilometres west of Maiduguri, the state capital.

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The 18-seater bus was conveying members of the Saint Peter and Paul of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, who were to hold a special conference at Otukpo, with the Bishop of Otukpo Catholic Diocese, Dr. Michael Apochi. Seventeen of the bodies were deposited at the Federal Medical Centre, Makurdi. It was learnt that the two other persons died later in the hospital, while the rest died on the spot of the accident.

Briefing journalists after the accident, the Benue State Sector Commander of the FRSC, Mr. Gbenga Oke, said that the 18-seater bus tried to overtake another vehicle at the bend near the junction, when the accident occurred. He confirmed that 17 persons died on the spot, while he received the report of the two other deaths later.

According to him, out of the 19 persons that lost their lives in the accident, 18 were in the 18-seater bus, with one of the four persons in the tanker losing his life later in the hospital. He attributed the accident to the drizzling in the morning that made the road slippery, thereby causing the loss of control by the two vehicles.

When The Guardian got to the area, it noticed that the FRSC Junction stretch of the Makurdi-Otukpo Federal Highway was very narrow, making it difficult for vehicles to manoeuvre when they faced difficulties.

Confirming the Maiduguri-Damaturu road accident yesterday, the Borno State Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), in an interview with The Guardian, disclosed that the auto

crash was caused by alleged over-speeding and dangerous over-taking on the part of the driver of the Honda Civic car.

He said: "According to our eyewitness of the road accidents, the driver of the Honda car was on high speed and attempted to over-take the Golf cars and in the process, had a head-on collision with a Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) that was coming in the opposite direction."

Eddeh noted that the SUV that was coming from the opposite direction instantly caught fire and burnt two of its occupants beyond recognition, while four persons in the Honda car also died on the spot.

He added that the Golf cars were also partly involved in the highway mishap, as eight passengers were injured and were receiving treatment at the Umaru Shehu ultra-modern hospital, Bulunkutu-Maiduguri, while the bodies of the deceased persons have been deposited at the mortuary for identification and collection by their relations.

Meanwhile, the Benue State government has declared that it would henceforth fine motorists who knock down the solar-powered streetlights and directional signs erected across Makurdi, the state capital.

Addressing journalists at the weekend in Makurdi, Senior Special Assistant to Governor Gabriel Suswam on Public Utilities, Mr. Victor Asemanya, said that the state government could not stay back and watch drunk motorists destroy facilities put in place by government for the use of the people.

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