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50 die in Kwara canoe mishap

From Abiodun Fagbemi, Ilorin

TRAGEDY struck at the weekend in the sleepy boarder town of Bukuro, Baruten Local Council, Kwara State, where 50 people, including school pupils, were feared killed when two canoes capsized on Nano River.

The victims were heading home at Bukuro after the day's business and schooling in neighbouring Yarawodo Village, Benin Republic. Eighty passengers were reportedly on board the two canoes, which capsized midstream.

A visibly disturbed Emir of Gwanara in the Baruten Local Council, Alhaji Sabi Idris, described the incident as the worst in the history of Gwanara District.

The royal father, who sympathised with the victims' families, made a passionate appeal to the Federal Government to provide infrastructure at border towns like those in Baruten Council, which he said had been neglected.

He noted that the incident would have been averted if the Federal Government had provided Bukuro with a good road network and electricity to boost economic activities in the area as this would have discouraged the people from crossing over to Benin Republic to do business or school there.

Village Head of Bukuro, Mallam Isa Aliyu, lamented that his village with a population of about 20,000 could only boast of three teachers in its only primary school.

He said the situation forced parents and guardians to enroll their children and wards in schools across the border in Benin Republic.

Education Secretary, Baruten Local Council, Umaru Zango, disclosed that about 55 school pupils were on board the ill-fated canoes.

Zango asked the Kwara State government to provide more teachers for the Bukuro Primary School to reduce the number of the state's pupils attending primary schools in Benin Republic.

About 30 bodies have been recovered while 35 passengers survived the mishap.

The people of Baruten and Yarowodo share many things in common, with children and adults from both settlements crossing over on a daily basis for schooling as well as business activities.

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