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Nigeria: 80 Feared Dead in Delta Auto Crash

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Yearly carnage on the roads during the Christmas season took about 80 lives in Delta on Tuesday, raising the tally to 112 in five days, when counted with the 21 who died in the state between Thursday and Monday, and the 11 in Plateau on Sunday.

The accident in Umunede on Tuesday was a multiple one on the Asaba-Benin Highway. That of Monday also occurred in the area.

All but six passengers aboard a luxury bus and others were burnt beyond recognition during the accident which blocked traffic for over nine hours.

That is an eye witness account.

But Edo, Delta and Anambra Zonal Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Nda Zakari, put the casualty figure at four, claiming that other passengers on the bus escaped before the bus went up in flames_.

What is not disputed is that the accident involved two fuel tankers, two cars, one Faka bus, a Mercedes Benz 190, a luxury bus, and four motorcycles.

Delta State Governor, Emmanuel Uduaghan, reacted to the accident by cancelling all celebrations on Tuesday to honour the dead.

He has put a machinery in place for rapid response, and evacuation, as well as the restoration of normalcy on the Agbor-Asaba Highway, according to Information Commissioner, Oma Djebah.

Zakari said the accident was caused by one of the tanker drivers.

He narrated that "there was an abandoned luxury bus which two cars ran into. The first fuel tanker came and stopped, then the second tanker ran into it, leading to a heavy explosion which burnt the vehicles involved, including the four motorcycles close to the vehicles.

"We cannot ascertain the actual number of people that are dead because some of the passengers were burnt to ashes. Only four bodies burnt beyond recognition were recovered and taken to the Agbor Central Hospital mortuary."

The accident resulted in the temporary closure of both sides of the road. Motorists had to make a detour through the old Lagos-Asaba Road.

On Monday, 12 passengers in an 18-seater bus lost their lives in another crash very close to the scene of the latest one.

The bus, which was heading for Abuja, in a bid to avoid a water tanker making a U-turn, skidded into a gutter and went up in flames.

Twelve passengers were burnt beyond recognition. Only six survived.

FRSC Agbor Unit Commander, Anthony Ogbodo, blamed the accident on excessive speeding and overloading.

He said four of the six survivors did not receive any injury and that the two others were taken to the Agbor Central Hospital.

Nine persons had died and several others were injured in an accident involving three vehicles on the same road last Thursday.

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It took place around Alifekede, the border community between Edo and Delta States, caused by the collision of three vehicles.

Five survivors received injuries, according to FRSC Delta Sector Commander, Oluwasusi Famoloni.

He confirmed last week that the state recorded 82 auto crashes from September to date, claiming 33 lives, and inflicting injuries on many others.

Besides, the Asaba-Benin Highway some months ago claimed the lives of 14 students of Christ the King College, Agbor who were on excursion to Benin.

Eight males and six females died. Three males and 12 females were injured.

The Pastor of a Pentecostal church, a mother and her two-year-old daughter died on the same highway this year when their vehicle had a burst tyre and ran into a stationary trailer.

Then in another collision, a man lost his wife, mother, and sister on the road after he had gone to pay his wife's bride price.

On Sunday, nine female footballers and their two coaches were roasted to death in a motor accident in Mangu, Plateau State.

A total 15 footballers were returning from a match with a local team when their Peugeot J5 collided with a Volkswagen Golf car.

The Peugeot somersaulted several times and caught fire. Eleven of the occupants died before help could get to the scene.

Six of the victims who received serious injuries were first rushed to a nearby hospital and eventually taken to the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).

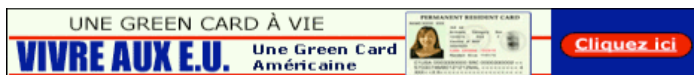
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