

Two die as lorry plunges into river

TWO people, one of them a woman, died in an accident yesterday in Okada town, Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State, when a Mercedes Benz 911 lorry plunged into a river.

Two other passengers who were seriously injured in the accident were admitted at the Igbinedion University Teaching Hospital, Okada, in which morgue the bodies of the deceased were deposited.

In another crash, four persons were killed at Papalanto junction, Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway when a fuel-laden tanker caught fire.

When *The Nation* arrived at the scene in Okada, the driver of the lorry was still submerged in water with the lorry, as at 4pm, eight hours after the accident occurred. The lorry was carrying yams.

Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) officials, who were involved in the rescue operations, said it would require a crane and divers to bring out the driver who may have died.

Four passengers who were rescued told *The Nation* that the lorry with an Ebonyi State registration number, XA 249 CHR, took off from Asaba in Delta State and was heading for Lagos when the accident occurred.

The Okada Unit Commander of the FRSC, Mr. Uzor Chukwuma, who led the rescue operation, said he was not permitted to talk to the press and referred further inquiries to the Edo State Sector Commander of the commission.

The Nation gathered that the accident occurred when the lorry driver drove against oncoming traffic and apparently not familiar with the lay of the road, failed to see the tiny bridge ahead.

The FRSC in the state had blamed most of the accidents along that section of the road on drivers.

According to FRSC sources, more than 80 accidents have been recorded along that stretch of the road in the last two months.

The commission has repeatedly called on the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency to consider the repair of that section of the road as a priority.

The incident at Papalanto junction was caused when the tanker suddenly skidded at the nodal juncture linking Ilaro and Sagamu, hit an object and burst into flames.

From John Mayaki, Benin and Femi Shodunke, Abeokuta

Among those dead were two Samaritans who had closed in on the scene of the accident to save one of the trapped persons in the inferno that ensued as a result of the mishap.

Two of the victims were rushed to the Olabisi Onabanjo University Teaching Hospital (OOUTH), Sagamu for medical attention.

The fire later spread to some of the adjoining shops and razed them down at about 4.15p.m, an eyewitness told *The Nation* yesterday.

Alao Oladele, a mechanic who lost his shop among the 18 business premises burnt, told *The Nation* that the tanker was heading for Abeokuta on top speed when it skidded off the track, hit an object somersaulted before it burst into flames finally on the expressway.

According to him, Abiodun Oladiti and an unnamed person were killed when the spilling fuel caught fire.

He stated that the survivors were first taken to the General Hospital in Abeokuta where they were rejected because of lack of facilities to treat the degrees of burns sustained in the inferno.

A middle-aged man, Taiwo Olabode of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) said he lost a Toyota Carina 11 to the incident.

According to him, he was in the area to repair a minor fault in his car when gushing fuel ignited fire at the mechanic section of the 18-unit business premises.

Among several properties lost were an upholstery shop, electronics and electrical shop, radio and television technicians' shop, ManDebo Shop and Sulaiman Fadahunsi shops, Bola Sola soft drink shop and others.

Observers, according to the eyewitness, expressed appreciation to God that the adjoining filling station, Alao-Oladele Petroleum, did not catch fire.

A victim of the disaster, Musbau Oladimeji appealed to government and well meaning individuals to come to the assistance of the victims.

According to him, the owners of the burnt businesses were the struggling people who needed assistance to enable them eke out a living.