

38 die in boat mishap

• Bride, wedding guests drown

By Our Reporter

THIRTY-eight persons drowned on Monday night when their boat capsized on the 35-year-old Bagwai dam in Kano State. Twenty others are missing.

The boat was taking an 18-year-old bride and her entourage to her groom's residence when the incident occurred.

Among those on board the ill-fated boat were 21 women, 15 infants and other children, six male relatives of the bride and two drivers.

Three persons, two male and a female, survived.

The Bagwai Local Government chairman, Alhaji Abdulhamid Idris, told reporters at the scene yesterday that the accident occurred midstream. He said the body of the bride (Bilkisu, popularly called Biyubiyu) was yet to be recovered.

Idris said it was clear that the actual casualty figure was yet to be determined. He said the survivors insisted that there were still bodies in the river.

He said before firemen arrived in the town at 11 pm

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on Monday, local divers and canoe owners had retrieved seven bodies. The fire fighters, he said, recovered two bodies, he said were recovered yesterday afternoon.

The driver of the boat, Malam Abdullahi Sani, said he jumped out when he realised that it was going to capsize. He said he missed his route and the boat hit a tree stem and started cracking, until it sank.

Sani, who added that he had been ferrying passengers in boats for years, said he could not confirm the number of passengers on board because it was

dark. He said almost all the women accompanying the bride were carrying infants and some had little children.

The only woman survivor, Mrs. Habiba Bagwai, who said she lost her three children, said all the 15 women in the boat, excluding the bride, were carrying infants. Some, she said, also had little kids.

Mrs. Bagwai said she let go her three kids in the middle of the water when she realised that they were no longer breathing to save herself from drowning. "I lost all my three children in the unfortunate accident, the younger one, Abdullahi was about 17

months old while Isyaku was six years and Ashiya the only female was four years."

The rescuers were still trying to recover more bodies at the time of filing this report. Fire service officials told newsmen that they could not ascertain the casualty figure.

The personal assistant to the director of Fire Service, Mr. Mustapha Muhammed, said the firemen worked tirelessly on Monday night till the early hours of yesterday.

The Sarkin Ruwa of the town, Malam Umar Garba, said it was the first major boat mishap. He said it was almost impossible to expect any sur-

vivor in the river after over 10 hours under the water. He said that they were only working to recover bodies.

Relatives, villagers, government officials and sympathisers all rushed to the bank of the dam, praying for the recovery of the bodies of their loved ones.

The recovered bodies, it was learnt, have been buried according to Islamic rites. Special prayers were said in many mosques in the communities around Bagwai for the victims yesterday. At the grave yard which is near the dam, many villagers volunteered to bury the victims.