

Controversy over boat mishap

•LASEMA insists seven died •No, it's 13, claim residents

By Precious Igbonwelundu

HOW many people died in Saturday's Ijede, Lagos boat mishap? Seven, Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA) insisted yesterday.

But residents of the neighbourhood are claiming that the casualty figure is 13.

According to LASEMA, besides the dead, eight others survived including the four discharged from Ikorodu General Hospital yesterday.

Also yesterday, the family of one Kareem Lasisi, who said he is yet to be found, claimed he was a passenger in the boat.

The boat, the first to take off after the monthly environment sanitation held across the state last Saturday, capsized around 10:30am en route Badore.

It was said to have hit a heap of sand packed by sand dredgers, causing the 20-passenger boat to overturn.

Four persons including the driver, motorboy and two passengers, were said to have walked out of the wrecked boat without assistance.

Among the survivors were 21-year-old Ayebo Atinuke and Adetula Makunju, 28.

A source at the crash site, who gave his name as Bode, told *The Nation* that 13 people died including the jetty's ticketing officer identified as Taiwo.

He claimed that four bodies were initially recovered dead; adding that the rescuers later got three persons, who were proclaimed dead on arrival at the Aromedics Hospital.

Another man, he said, was also confirmed dead at Ikorodu General Hospital.

According to him: "The boat had 20 people, 17 passengers and three

crew members; it was going to Badore and it was the first boat to leave after environmental sanitation. It crashed into a heap of sand midway to Badore and only four people walked out alive. Four others were recovered dead from the water.

"Much later, three persons were rescued and rushed to Aromedics Hospital which is nearby but they were confirmed dead on arrival. Four others were rescued again and taken to Ikorodu General Hospital, where one of them died.

"Now, we are still looking for Lasisi. His children have been here since and that man is still missing."

Another source told *The Nation* that the boat conductor identified as Sunday Ebijimi has been arrested by the Marine Police at Ijede.

He explained that no commercial activity has taken place since the accident occurred, adding that the only boats that have plied the water are those on rescue operations.

LASEMA boss Michael Akindele, who insisted on the casualty figure of seven, however said only the manifest could ascertain the number of those on board.

"We still stand on our seven dead toll; I have visited the General Hospital and I can tell you that the four surviving victims there have been discharged. One person was pronounced dead on arrival there, while two people had similar fate at a private hospital in Ijede, Aromedics.

"So far, we can say that eight people survived but without the manifest, I cannot tell you for sure how many people died or were on board the boat. We will get the manifest before this week runs out and then, we can reconcile the figures," he said.