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EDITORIAL

Convoys, speed and ghastly accidents

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Of all the accidents involving governors' convoys, perhaps the most recent- that of the Gombe State Governor, Ibrahim Hassan Dankwambo and three buses along Gombe-Bauchi road- in which no fewer than 14 persons were reportedly killed, may have taken the cake in terms of fatalities. The notoriety of the speed of these convoys once engaged our attention in a previous editorial comment in which the scant regard for safety and speed limits was duly noted as the

metaphor for power drunkenness.

In recent history, the convoys of both Governors Adams Oshiomhole and Idris Ichalla Wada of Edo and Kogi states respectively have been involved in fatal but avoidable accidents and it is disconcerting to note that apparently the governors equally have scant regard for the admonitions in our comment, because rather than abate, these speed-induced accidents still continue, thus setting a morbid trend and fuelling the impression that the governors, the chief law officers of their respective states, have become notorious for breaking the rules that apply to the general society.

The Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) once requested that the staff of the commission be retained on the governors' convoys to ensure compliance with the speed regulation, a request that was rebuffed because it may not be practicable in the face of the conceit of power as there cannot be any let for any of the commission's staff at any level to ensure such compliance.

The fact that these accidents have always regrettably claimed the lives of innocent citizens make them really morbid and should ordinarily cause remorse for the governors if they should be credited with decent conscience. The treacherous roads in the country ought to counsel moderation in terms of speed which may have mitigated the fatalities if they obeyed the speed regulations.

It would, however, seem that for the most part, the drivers on their entourage in their usually long and interminable convoys think that the governors' immunity also entitles them to some impunity and since none of these drivers has ever been booked and sued for murder or dangerous driving, they could be morbidly right. When the convoys kill people, should the culpable drivers be so easily let off? How many of these murderous drivers have ever been legally sanctioned? Should the victims' relatives and dependants simply mourn their losses privately?

Although it is not clear from the media reports if the relevant authorities made efforts to ascertain the cause of the accident and the culpable parties, usually the mindless and reckless styles of convoys make them prone to avoidable road mishaps. It is, however, certain that these accidents can be reduced if they regularly take the pains to investigate the accidents thoroughly and book the culpable parties accordingly.

Now that the issue of reckless convoys on a killing binge has become too regular to ignore, it is our considered opinion that the time is ripe for the government to take a more serious look at it. A situation in which innocent and defenceless lives are wasted so cheaply through the carelessness and impunity of the convoys of those who should actually protect them without any form of reprimand, should ordinarily not be acceptable in any decent society.

In this regard, the FRSC has a pivotal role to play by keeping the records of erring convoys against the level of fatalities and the outcome of subsequent litigation. If the governors are shielded by the immunity clause, their culpable drivers are not and such records can even be in the arsenal of the opposition to be used as campaign tools. The victims' relatives and dependants should also not sit on their rights and mourn their irreparable losses privately because as it has been proven, until legal steps are taken to seek redress, it will be impossible to know the exact level of reprieve that can be sought in the law courts.

Already, the country is bedevilled by a myriad of absurdities without adding the unjustifiable and wanton killing of citizens by their supposed protectors and adequate steps should be taken to put a stop to the emerging trend

immediately. The wanton killings by governors' convoys on the roads should be seen as a tacit disavowal of the sanctity of human lives as enshrined in the constitution and it should be stoutly resisted and repudiated by collective action.

Exalted public offices and immunity clauses should not be appropriated as an excuse for impunity especially for acts bordering on the crime of murder. The social upheaval which nearly occurred at the scene of the Bauchi accident may have been the beginning of a social protest against what the people saw as injustice in the rather heavy death toll caused by the tragic incident, but the subsequent threat issued by the police is hardly the answer.

The answer is in seeing that justice is done and future accidents are prevented through the circumspect, responsible and sensitive behaviour from those who manage the convoys.

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