

## Seven feared dead as boat explodes in Bayelsa

**EBIOWEI LAWAL - YENAGOA**

AT least seven persons are feared dead after a boat in which they were travelling exploded at the popular Swali market in Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa State.

According to a survivor, Miss Deinyefa, the boat, which was conveying about 40 people, food items and PMS to Akassa in Brass Local Government Area, had barely left the Swali Jetty before it exploded.

She said: "when the boat crew members loaded our goods in the boat, they drove to a floating petrol station near the jetty and started loading gallons of fuel into the boat. After they finished, the boat started moving and not long after, it exploded.

"I saw a nine-year-old boy and his mother sitting close to the gallons of fuel caught by the explosion as we tried to escape. When I jumped into the water, a woman who

could not swim grabbed me. It was by the grace of God that I broke free and made my way to the shore."

An eyewitness, Mr. Makeni Freeman, said no property was recovered from the boat, adding that he saw some persons burning as they jumped into the river.

"I have been working at this jetty several years and this boat drivers are used to loading fuel in their boats, while market women are on

board the boat. I knew this would happen one day. I am sure over seven persons must have lost their lives in the accident," Freeman said.

However, all attempts to reach the state chairman of Maritime Workers Union, Comrade Ogoniba, proved abortive, as his lines were switched off.

In his reaction, the Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Harcourt Johnson, said the

fire might have been caused by a spark from the engine of the boat.

"These local boats are designed in such a way that where they keep their fuel containers are close to the engine, but what they don't know is that when fuel splashes on the engine, a little spark could cause fire.

"Let me not say they are ignorant of this danger; they just ignore this fact. This may have been the cause of the fire on that boat."