

8 drown as boat capsizes in Kebbi

Kebbi flood disaster coming at worse time —Buhari

From Ayodele Ajogbe
and Leon Usigbe

EIGHT persons, including women and children, drowned on Tuesday night in Ruga Geru village in Jega Local Government Area of Kebbi State when the canoe in which they were travelling capsized at Tungar-Gegero.

The incident occurred when the victims were travelling to a market in neighbouring Madaci village.

The development prompted the state governor, Abubakar Atiku Bagudu; the Commissioner for Finance, Ibrahim Mohammed Augie,

and other top government officials to pay a condolence visit to the village.

The **News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)** reported that the special adviser on media to the governor, Malam Yahaya Sarki, said the governor prayed Allah to forgive the deceased, grant them **Aljannat Firdaus** and give their families the fortitude to bear the loss.

Bagudu, who expressed deep shock at the incident, also condoled with residents of the community and admonished them to accept the incident in good faith.

The chairman of Kebbi State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Alhaji

Sani Dododo, said: "At about 10.30 p.m., there was an incident at Tungar-Gegero in Jega Local Government Area, where eight persons lost their lives in a canoe mishap.

"Women and children, about 10 of them, were on-board with only one operator.

"They started the journey and crossed to the other bank of the stream successfully, but on their way back, the canoe capsized and all the occupants drowned in the water."

Dododo, however, said that the operator was able to save two women, adding that the

remaining eight drowned in the river.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari has expressed deep concern over recent heavy floods in parts of Kebbi State that led to loss of lives, submerged thousands of hectares of farmlands and houses, destroyed farm produce and personal belongings in affected communities.

A statement issued by the senior special assistant to the president (media and publicity), Garba Shehu, in Abuja, on Wednesday, said the president regretted the timing of the disaster as it came when efforts were ongoing to boost

local rice production.

The statement quoted him as saying: "I am particularly sad over this incident because it's a setback to our efforts to boost local rice production as part of measures to stop food importation."

President Buhari noted that, "Kebbi State is the focal point of our policy to produce rice locally as part of this administration's commitment to agricultural revival, which suffered relative neglect in favour of food importation.

"With the loss of six lives and still counting, thousands of hectares of land flooded and estimated economic losses of more than N1 billion

by rice farmers in Kebbi State, we face a major setback in our efforts to boost local food production.

"This bad news couldn't have come at a worse time for our farmers and other Nigerians who looked forward to a bumper harvest this year in order to reduce the current astronomical rise in the costs of food items in the markets."

The president, while sympathising with the bereaved families and farmers affected by the devastating floods, has assured that "we are going to work closely with the Kebbi State government in order to bring relief to the victims."

Court remands