

57 roasted to death in Rivers, Delta

**Soni Daniel and
Sola Adebayo**

NO fewer than 57 people were burnt to death on Sunday in two separate road accidents in Rivers and Delta states.

In the accident in Rivers, 50 people lost their lives when three buses collided with each other at a point on the Elele-Port Harcourt Road.

The others died when a Peugeot station wagon, in which they were travelling, rammed into a stationary trailer on the Benin-Warri Expressway.

Although the Rivers State Police Command and the state sector of the Federal Road Safety Commission could not confirm the death toll, an eyewitness told one of our correspondents that he counted at least 50 dead bodies. He, however, did not say if there were survivors.

Another eyewitness said that two of the passenger buses were heading for Owerri, Imo State, while the third was returning to Port Harcourt when they crashed into each other.

The source added that the impact of the collision led to an explosion, which

left most of the passengers burnt beyond recognition.

A lady, who gave her name as Amaka Ofe, said, "What I saw at the scene of the accident shocked me. I have never seen human beings roasted like animals.

"Some of the dead passengers were partially burnt. For some, the fire burnt their heads and left their lower parts intact. In others, the legs were reduced to charcoal while the heads were badly bruised.

"Smoke was everywhere when we stopped to see what was happening and the bodies were strewn on the road. People from the nearby community rushed to the scene to see what had happened."

The state Sector Commander of the FRSC, Mr. Sobowale Oke, confirmed the incident.

He said that his men were able to remove the corpses to the Elele General Hospital.

Oke, however, added that the details of the accident would be made public on Monday (today).

The Special Adviser to the Rivers State Governor on Emergency and Fire Service, Chief Godwin Okpabi, said officials of the

agency were dispatched to the scene to help in putting out the fire and get details of the accident.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Ireju Barasua, said that the command had received the report of the accident but that she did not know the exact number of the dead.

The Elele-Port Harcourt Road is the major link between Rivers and Imo states.

But it is a single-lane highway and part of the East-West Road that the Federal Government is trying to dualise at the cost of N230bn. The contract is being jointly handled by two companies - Julius Berger and Setraco.

Our correspondent in Warri however reported that the accident in which seven other people died occurred on the Benin-Warri Expressway.

It was learnt that the car, which was going to Warri from Benin, ran into the stationary trailer marked, Delta XB 298 OGB, at Opuraja Junction in Okpe Local Government Area.

The car was said to have immediately caught fire that roasted the occupants to death.

The trailer, loaded with

scraps, was also burnt.

Our correspondent, who visited the scene on Sunday afternoon, saw the remains of the victims in the wrecked car.

Sympathisers, who besieged the scene wept as the corpses were evacuated to an unknown mortuary.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Delta State Command, Miss Olabisi Okuwobi, said she was yet to get details of the accident when contacted on the telephone.

However, a senior police officer at Orerokpe Police Station, who pleaded anonymity, confirmed the crash.

ASUU strike

John Alechenu, Abuja

THE Senate Committee on Education has initiated moves to end the ongoing national strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities.

The Chairman of the committee, Senator Joy Emordi, who presided over a meeting involving ASUU, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and the National Universities Commission last week, expressed confidence on Sunday that a truce would soon be arrived