



BOATS ON LAGOS WATERS RICKETY, UNSAFE —Investigation

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In hushed tones, and cluster of twos and threes, they discussed the latest incident; men and women, decked in various outfits ready to embark on another voyage across the lagoon from the Majidun jetty in Ikorodu all the way to C.M.S in the heart of Lagos Island. Time was 9:00 am Monday, May 19, 2014 and the mood this time was far from what it used to be. News of a boat accident at Victoria Island two days earlier where one person, a lady identified as Claire, died and eight others escaped miraculously, had sent shivers down the spines of many.

While scores elected to go by road on this day for fear of what is gradually becoming a frightening trend, the few others who kept faith with the system that sunny morning, did so with their hearts in their mouths. A handful in this category told our correspondent they were also worried about their safety travelling by this means of transportation.

"I also heard about the news of the accident, I am a little bit scared but I know that God will surely take control," a woman who sat next to our correspondent in one of the boats headed for C.M.S, said. Several others looked extremely alert, rather than relaxed, as the boat throttled on vigorously, emitting fumes from its engine.

Today, exactly two weeks after the latest tragedy, there is still fear and apprehension in the air. Visits to jetties in other parts of the city like FESTAC, LASU-Ojo, Apapa, Liverpool, Lekki, Epe, revealed how poor traffic had become. The situation is a far cry from what it used to be. A lot of people are staying away for fear of a possible tragedy.

The accident on May 17 is the third major incident in less than three months this year on Lagos waters. Earlier in March, about 12 people died when a boat they were travelling in capsized in the FESTAC area while few weeks later in April, another nine perished in the Oworonshoki axis of the lagoon in similar circumstances. The boat, filled with workers heading home to Ikorodu after the close of the day's business, sank after its nose hit a log of wood on its path. It took efforts of local divers and officials of the National Emergency Management Agency to rescue 22 others. For the survivors, it was a chilling experience – a close shave with death.

Bimbo Adamolekun, who lives at Oriwu in Ikorodu but works with an IT firm in Victoria Island told *Saturday PUNCH* during a conversation inside a BRT bus in the course of the week, says that he does not trust the system enough for him to patronise the local boat operators running the route.

"My colleague who lives in Ikorodu too told me about the ferry at Majidun and another one at Ebutte. But I am scared to even go there. I don't know how to swim in case anything happens so I prefer to find my way through the traffic than to risk my life. As far as I am concerned, the water is not safe."

There are dozens like Adamolekun who the poor state of commercial boats and the rising cases of water accidents continue to scare away from the jetties.

Daniel Peters, one of the survivors of the FESTAC boat mishap, doubts if he'll ever have the courage to go by that means of transportation again. The experience, he says, continues to haunt him.

"I just thank God for my life, the situation was not funny. We were more than 24 on the boat and the load was just excessive. It was the last boat for the day and everyone rushed in.

"As I was in the boat, suddenly, water started entering into the boat. At first it was like a joke but before we knew what was happening, the boat capsized. That was how we all fell under the water.

"It was battle for survival. I know how to swim but other people were pressing me under water. So, I was gradually losing strength. But when it occurred to me that I was going to die if I did not act fast, I mustered energy and swam with my last