

METRO PLUS

We lost 12 boats to pirates in one month, say Rivers helmsmen

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Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Joseph Mukan

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Helmsmen operating on the Bonny-Port Harcourt waterway in Rivers State have said they have lost about 12 speed boats to pirates in one month.

Some of the helmsmen, who spoke to our correspondent, decried the rising pirate attacks on the waterway and solicited the assistance of the state government to forestall further loss of lives and property.

Recall that one person was killed, while two others were kidnapped during an attack by pirates on the route last week.

The operators said hardly a week passed without abduction, stealing and harassment of passengers in riverside communities, adding that if enough gunboats and personnel were drafted like what the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas was doing for its staff and visitors, the crime rate would be reduced.

“We see a lot of crime here. Just recently, the pirates came and stole our boats, stripped passengers, threw them in the creek and left with their goods. So, let the government help us. See what the NLNG is doing to protect its staff and visitors. The government can also provide gunboats to help us,” one the helmsmen said.

Another helmsman, identified simply as Monday said, “Because of the pirates, passengers are no longer coming and we are losing many goods and property on the sea. If you have maybe N2m to buy a speed boat, at the end, pirates will just come and collect it and you will go back to square one.

“The security agents alone cannot solve this problem. If the communities’ elites and youths can organise themselves and support the government, peace will reign in these areas.”

Meanwhile, the Beach Master of the Bonny Workers Union, Harrison Owosibo, said economic activities had slowed down at the Bonny Jetty due to insecurity, and urged the government to deploy more gunboats and personnel to provide security for passengers and their goods.

Owosibo stated, “The government is doing its best, but we need it to do more. If those gunboats are positioned at appropriate places, it will help us. You can imagine where the pirates stole the boats from.

“The boats just left this place and just turned round, pirates collected the boats. So, we need the government to come to our aid and see how it can help the Bonny people.”