

15 more corpses recovered from Kogi boat accident

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| Lara Adejoro and Gbenga Odogun

The Kogi State Commissioner for Agriculture, Timothy Ojomah, on Wednesday confirmed that 15 additional corpses had been recovered from last Tuesday's boat accident in the Ibaji Local Government Area, bringing the official toll to 35.

Ojomah, in a text message to our correspondent, said almost 20 more passengers were still unaccounted for.

"As of this morning, 15 corpses were recovered, whilst almost 20 persons/corpses are yet to be accounted for. Between 80 and 82 persons were in the boat, and 46 were rescued immediately," he stated.

The ill-fated boat, reportedly overloaded with traders and residents travelling for the October 1 celebrations, departed from Onugwa community in Ibaji en route to Ilushi market before capsizing on the River Niger.

A local farmer, James Otoga, told *The PUNCH* that many of the victims were also returning from a burial in Onugwa.

“The boat was fully loaded with our people going to market for the October 1 celebration. Even those who came for a burial in Onugwa and were returning to Ilushi were missing. We have yet to confirm the exact number of survivors and casualties. Only five survivors have surfaced so far, and many of our people are still lying lifeless beneath the river,” he said.

Meanwhile, the National Emergency Management Agency on Thursday gave a separate update, stating that 24 passengers had been rescued, 14 corpses recovered, and 42 people remained missing.

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NEMA, in a post on X, explained that the accident occurred around 5:40 p.m. on September 30 when a boat carrying about 80 passengers capsized along the Onugwa–Olushi route.

It noted that community divers were assisting official rescue teams, with operations coordinated alongside the Kogi State Emergency Management Agency, the Local Emergency Management Committee in Ibaji, the Civil Defence Corps, the National Inland Waterways Authority, the Fire Service, the Red Cross, and local responders.

NEMA added that its Director-General, Zubaida Umar, had deployed personnel to support the rescue, while the agency’s Abuja operations head, Zakari Abubakar, visited the Onugwa traditional ruler, Chief Patrick Arome, to console the community.

The agency stressed the need for strict compliance with safety rules, including compulsory use of life jackets and adherence to passenger limits on boats.

President Bola Tinubu has also condoled with the government and people of Kogi State.

In a statement by his Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, the President described the tragedy as “shocking and unfortunate,” and urged water transport operators to prioritise safety over profit.

“The President commends the first responders at the accident scene and urges federal, state, and local emergency responders to step up their efforts to provide needed assistance to survivors and victims,” the statement partly read.