

National Sports Festival: Kano thrown into sorrow as 19 athletes returning home die in auto crash

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...Tinubu, Abiodun, NSC, others mourn, commiserate with Kano govt

From Desmond Mgbah (Kano), Juliana Taiwo-Obalonye, Romanus Ugwu, (Abuja) and Laide Raheem (Abeokuta)

The ancient city of Kano on Saturday thrown into mourning as no fewer than 20 members of the Kano State contingent in the just concluded 22nd National Sports Festival in Abeokuta, Ogun State lost their lives in a fatal weekend crash.

Witnesses said the accident happened in Kura Local Government Area; about 30 minutes drive into the metropolis.

Sunday Sun gathered that the ill -fated vehicle -a Coaster bus- fell off the infamous Dakatsalle Bridge at about 8.50 am on Saturday morning,

The bridge and its axis are notorious for several cases of accidents in the past.

The vehicle, it was further gathered- had travelled over the night and all the way from Abeokuta, Ogun State following the conclusion of the National Sport Festival.

While 20 victims had been reported dead, several members of the contingent sustained injuries and taken to nearby Kura General Hospital.

Although a statement is still being expected from the FRSC, the Chairman, Kano State Sports Commission, Umar Bala Fagge confirmed the tragedy

He explained that the bus conveying 30 athletes fell off the bridge.

“As I am talking to you now, we have counted 19 dead bodies” he told the media from the scene of the accident.

Meanwhile, the accident has thrown a pall of sadness and mourning across the entire metropolis of the state.

Kano State Deputy Governor, Comrade Aminu Abdussalam Gwarzo, has conveyed the heartfelt condolences of Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf and the entire state government to the families of the Kano athletes who tragically lost their lives in a fatal accident at Chiromawa Bridge along the Kano-Kaduna-Zaria Expressway

In a statement issued by the Deputy Governor’s spokesperson, Ibrahim Garba Shuaibu, Comrade Gwarzo—speaking on behalf of Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf, who is currently in Saudi Arabia—expressed profound grief over the tragedy.

He described the incident as a devastating loss not only to the bereaved families but also to the entire state and the sporting community.

As a mark of support, the Deputy Governor announced that Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf has approved a donation of One Million Naira and food items to each of the affected families.

Visibly shaken to tears, the Deputy Governor visited the Nasarawa Specialist Hospital, where the remains of the deceased were deposited. He was accompanied by the Secretary to the State Government, Alhaji Farouk Umar Ibrahim, along with other senior government officials.

The delegation also visited injured victims receiving treatment at Murtala Muhammed Specialist Hospital. During both visits, they met with the grieving families, offering words of comfort and prayers.

Comrade Gwarzo prayed for the repose of the souls of the deceased and asked for divine strength and healing for the bereaved and the injured.

The Deputy Governor reaffirmed the Kano State Government’s unwavering commitment to supporting the victims’ families and emphasized the urgent need to implement proactive measures to prevent such tragedies in the future.

President Bola Tinubu in reaction to the incident expressed profound sorrow over the tragic accident involving members of the Kano State.

According to a statement issued by Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, the President extended heartfelt condolences to the Kano State government, the families of the victims, and the entire Nigerian nation. “This is a devastating blow to the nation. It casts a shadow over the National Sports Festival, a celebration of unity, talent, and excellence,” he said.

Paying tribute to the victims, the President acknowledged their dedication and aspirations, describing them as embodiments of the resilient Nigerian spirit. He emphasized the need for concrete measures to improve transportation safety standards nationwide to prevent such tragedies in the future.

The President also prayed for the peaceful repose of the departed souls and strength for their bereaved families.

Meanwhile, the National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, has expressed deep grief over the tragic death of 20 young athletes from Kano State, describing it as national loss.

In a statement from Edwin Olofu, his Chief Press Secretary, Ganduje, also described the incident as a heartbreaking tragedy that has dealt a heavy blow not only to the bereaved families and the people of Kano State but also to the entire nation.

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Ganduje who is currently performing Hajj in Saudi Arabia also called on the relevant authorities to thoroughly investigate the cause of the accident and implement stronger safety protocols to protect Nigerian athletes during future national assignments.

He lamented that the deceased athletes are promising and dedicated youths who embodied the future of Nigerian sports and the pride of Kano State.

“This is a deeply sorrowful moment. These young athletes travelled in the spirit of unity, patriotism, and excellence to represent our state and nation. To lose them in such a tragic and untimely manner is a devastating national loss,” Ganduje noted in the statement.

Ogun State governor, Dapo Abiodun expressed deep sorrow over the tragic incident involving members of the Kano State contingent.

Abiodun, in a statement issued in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital, on Saturday, however, said the incident had left him completely traumatized, especially given that the athletes were vibrant young people who were looking forward to a warm reception from their fans and families after proudly donning the colours of Kano State at the just-concluded Gateway Games 2024.

Expressing condolences to the government and people of Kano State over the incident, Abiodun prayed for the repose of the souls of the athletes, saying that they were heroes whose patriotism and commitment to the cause of Kano State and Nigeria as a whole will never be forgotten.

He said: “It is indeed saddening and distressing that 20 gallant athletes who had represented Kano State at the just concluded Gateway 2024 games have lost their lives in the most traumatizing and painful circumstances.

“This is so painful. These were young people, budding stars that had a lot to give the country with their talents skills, and creativity. In particular, it is tragic that their beloved family members who were looking forward to receiving them after a memorable outing at the National Sports Festival will never get to see their beautiful faces again. Our prayers and thoughts are with their families and friends at this terrible hour.

“Having represented Kano with pride and distinction and made friends with their compatriots from across the 36 states, the athletes were heading home with joy, only for their lives to be cut short just before setting foot on Kano soil.

“We are deeply saddened by this incident, and we pray that Almighty Allah grants them eternal rest.

“I commiserate with His Excellency, Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf, and his cabinet, the Chairman of the Kano State Sports Commission, Umar Bala Fagge, and the people of Kano State over this most tragic and unfortunate incident. May we never witness

this kind of incident again.”

The National Sports Commission (NSC) on its part described it as a dark day for Nigerian sports.

“This is a painful moment for the entire Nigerian sports family,” the NSC said in an official statement signed by its Director of Press, Dr (Mrs) Kehinde Ajayi.

Chairman of the NSC, Mallam Shehu Dikko, described the incident as “a very sad day for Nigerian sports,” stating: “Our hearts are with the people of Kano State at this sad time. Just as we were celebrating a successful and peaceful National Sports Festival, this tragedy has cast a dark shadow. We stand in solidarity with the Kano State Government and will support them in every possible way as they navigate this difficult period.”

Director General of the Commission, Hon. Bukola Olopade, also expressed deep grief: “Only days ago, we gathered in Abeokuta to celebrate the talents and resilience of Nigerian youth through sport. This news is not only devastating—it is deeply personal for those of us in the sports community. Kano State has long been a pillar in Nigerian sports, and this loss has dealt a heavy blow.”

While transportation logistics for festival contingents are the responsibility of individual state sports councils, the Commission acknowledged the urgent need for a coordinated national safety framework to prevent future tragedies.

In response, the NSC has announced a series of decisive measures: **Mandatory Comprehensive Insurance:** All athletes, officials, and personnel must be fully insured for all national sports events.

Mechanical Certification of Vehicles: Only vehicles that are certified roadworthy and insured will be permitted for official use during sporting events. **Post-Festival Safety Roundtable:** A nationwide meeting with state sports commissions will be convened to review travel and safety protocols.

Compliance Audits: Pre-event audits will be conducted ahead of future festivals to ensure strict adherence to safety, insurance, and welfare standards. **Stronger Monitoring Mechanisms:** The Commission will deploy enhanced oversight teams during national sports events to enforce compliance and prevent lapses.

The Local Organising Committee (LOC) of the just concluded 22nd National Sports Festival, tagged Gateway Games 2024, also expressed condolences to the Kano State Government on the tragic incident involving members of the Kano State contingent.

“We are saddened by this incident, particularly with the death of these young people, budding stars that had a lot to give the country with their talent, skills, and creativity in sports.

“Words cannot adequately express the sorrow the LOC feels at this loss. We offer our deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the families of the departed ones, and we pray that God will comfort the families.

Also reacting to the shocking news of the incident that reportedly claimed over 20 lives of athletes, officials and journalists, the President of Nigeria Basketball Federation, Engr. Ahmadu Musa Kida, described the incident as shocking and heartbreaking.

“This is a huge shock and it’s heartbreaking. To loss over 20 lives of athletes, officials and journalists who have just represented their state at the national sports festival in a ghastly road accident, is painful and saddening.

“Words alone can’t express the sadness in the Nigeria sports community. We can only pray that God in His infinite mercies grant the souls of the departed peaceful rest.

“We also pray He gives the government of Kano State, the families, friends and associates of the departed souls, the fortitude and strength to bear the loss,” Kida, said he an emotion laden tone.