

Four die as car plunges into Benue river

●Robbers attack Catholic Church priest in Makurdi

Cephas Iorhemen
MAKURDI

At least four people lost their lives when a Hilux van plunged into the Tyo-Mu River, a tributary of the River Benue near the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Base in Makurdi, Benue State.

The victims were returning from holidays when the accident occurred on Sunday.

Also in Benue State, gunmen yesterday attacked the Parish House of St. Augustine's Parish, Demekpe in Makurdi metropolis. They stole valuables, including the mobile phones of the priest in charge of the church, Rev. Fr. Solomon Ukeyima Mfa.

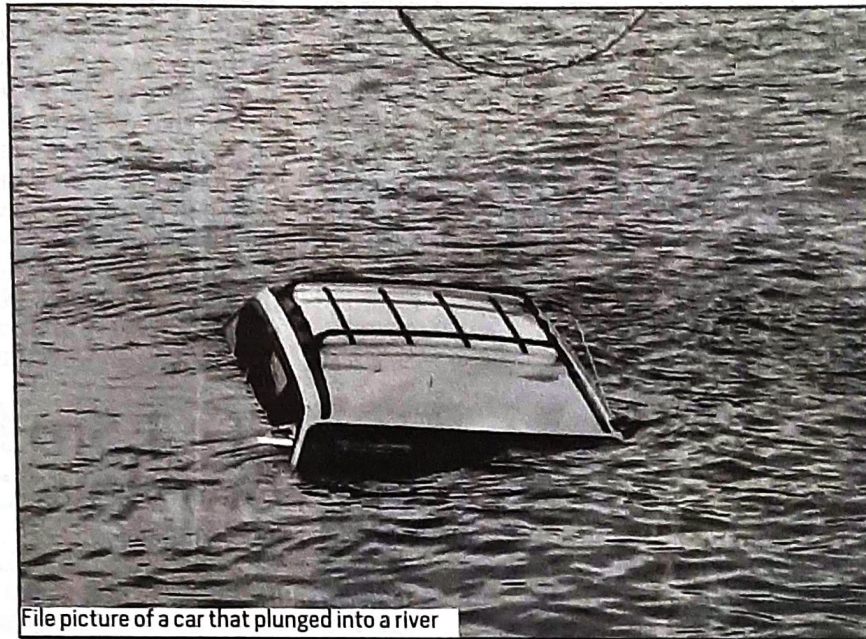
It was learnt that the Hilux, conveying the victims, was returning from a holiday at Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State when it plunged into the river near a bridge.

The driver, New Telegraph learnt, lost control of the vehicle, veered off the road and somersaulted into the river.

At press time, only one body had been recovered.

But the attack on the Catholic Church occurred in the early hours of yesterday.

The Director, Social Communication, Makurdi Diocese, Rev. Fr. Moses Iorapuu, said



File picture of a car that plunged into a river

journalists on the phone that the attack occurred about 2am.

Iorapuu said the Parish Priest, Rev. Mfa, told him that the robbers took away several items including phones, ATM cards, shoes, drinks as well as a huge amount of money.

He said: "They asked him for dollars but he told them he did not have any. So, they took away the money they could find among other items. He has reported to the police.

"Now that the robbers have infiltrated the church and attacked priest, I do not understand. These are criminal elements who have come into

Benue State and are operating freely. Whatever they took, they begged for forgiveness from the priest. They were taking the items and saying forgive us father."

Mfa said one of the robbers begged him for forgiveness after picking each item from the house during the operation which lasted more than one hour.

He said: "I love the confidence and the calmness in them. One of them, for anything he picked, he would say 'forgive us Father.'"

The priest added that the robbers broke into his bed-

room about 2am, having scaled the perimeter fence to the parish house and the window to the priest's living room.

Mfa said none of the robbers covered his face, although he could not recognise any one of them.

The priest said he had forgiven the robbers and prayed for them

to change from their evil ways.

He added: "They shot in the air twice, after they were done with my brother priests that spent the night with me and were about leaving.

"They made away with proceeds of the family thanksgiving by four families, offertory, phones, selected footwears, sound system and some drinks.

"I have forgiven them and I ask others to also pray for them. They are young people. There is one of them who was speaking impeccable English Language. Let them make a complete u-turn and put to good use the talents that they have."

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Catherine Sewuese Anene, said the "case is under investigation".