

Ibadan residents cry to Makinde over deaths in Gege River



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Gege is a very popular area in Ibadan South West Local Government area of Oyo State. Until recently, the place was associated with filth, the reason it was being addressed in a derogative manner as "Gege Olorun". The canal that stretches through the community from Orita Merin Market through Gege Abattoir to Oke Ado axis, always exudes offensive odour from garbage and wastes that are emptied into it particularly whenever it rains.

Despite the fact that successive govern-

ments had periodically evacuated destitute (mostly Northerners), who usually sat on Gege Bridge begging, thus constituting eyesore, some were still seen this week, lining the edge of the bridge.

The menace of beggars in the area has however, become a tip of the iceberg considering the dreadful occurrence of deaths occasioned by flooding in the unprotected canal. Records have it that about nine persons lost their lives in the canal when they fell into a deep ditch behind the popular Gege meat market, which would appear to passersby as mere dry area during dry season.

The development, especially as the rainy season sets in, has spurred the residents of the area into sending Save Our Souls (SOS) message to Governor Seyi Makinde to avert further deaths from the canal.

Findings have revealed that the dead body of any victim would surface three or four days later after he or she must have mistakenly fallen into the ditch either early in the morning or late in the night.

Some residents of the area told Saturday Telegraph that a former member of the House of Reps, Hon. Folake Olunloyo, did some work on the river but could not finish it before her tenure ended at the National Assembly. Her successors, Hon. Saheed Fijabi and Hon. Stanley Adedeji (Odidiomo), however did not continue with the project.

A resident disclosed that the Chairman of Ibadan West Local Council Development Area (LCDA), Hon. Tajudeen Adigun (Attuu), had recently visited the area and promised to call the attention of the state authority to the problem, but nothing has been done since his visit. His visit coincided with the day the river returned the dead body of a young girl that had been trapped inside it three days earlier.

During a recent visit to the spot, we saw a temporary barricade made by the community with Red and White Caution Tapes spread around it. It was intended to call the attention of passers-by to the danger zone.

Among the nine people that had reportedly fallen victim, five of them were said to have been buried by the river side.

To forestall further loss of lives in the canal, the residents of the area have therefore cried to the Oyo State Government to remove a dilapidated drainage erected in the middle of the river by a former member of the House of Representatives. To them, it was constituting blockade to free flow of water in the canal.

Speaking on the menace, Miss Akinade

Kehinde, said that she was born in Gege Area and has been living there since. She noted that the problem started some years ago, when it was discovered that there was a deep hole inside the river that is as deep as the height of a storey building. "As young as I am, I have witnessed the burial of some victims by this river side. Our appeal goes to His Excellency, Governor Seyi Makinde, to please help us remove the dilapidated concrete in the middle of the river; close up the ditch and ensure free flow of water as a first step. Then he should help do proper channelization like it has been done for Ogunpa River," she said.

Another resident, Alhaja Mujidatu, who is in her 60s, pleaded with the Governor to assist the people, saying, "Our Governor should come to our aid. As a mother it is very sad to be witnessing deaths of young and agile men in this river. We voted for Governor Makinde and now that we have problem, he should reciprocate by helping us out. Let him visit us; we will tell him what is happening. God bless our Governor," she prayed.

Mr Omotosho Saheed, in his remarks, blamed the problem on the drainage, which was constructed in the middle of the river in 2012, saying, "before then, there was no problem. The drainage didn't cover the width and length of the river, hence whenever there was heavy rainfall, water fill the front of the drainage and created a deep gully like hole.

"This deep hole has become a danger point over the years, claiming so many lives. So, we demarcated the danger zone, but most passers-by might not understand the reason behind the demarcation, especially late in the evening or early in the morning because it was done with cellophane tape. Our appeal is to the government to come to our aid. The government should help us do proper channelization of this canal," he pleaded.