

Hajj: Death Toll Rises Now 32

•Trailer crushes 7 in Sokoto

*From Imam Imam in Gusau, Mohammed Aminu
in Sokoto and Victor Efeizomor in Asaba*

Thirty-two Nigerians have now been confirmed dead during this year's Muslim pilgrimage as a result of various mishaps.

Although there is no official breakdown of the figures yet, Zamfara State has confirmed that eight pilgrims from the state died in a road accident, weekend, on their way to Mecca from Medina on their visit to historical sites in Saudi Arabia.

Two pilgrims from Lagos

State were also reported to have died in another mishap.

A statement signed by the Zamfara State Director of Press to the governor, Adamu Sani Katuru, yesterday, said the government would do everything possible to assist the families of the dead pilgrims.

According to the statement the governor had ordered the inauguration of a high-powered committee to advise the

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George Opare of the NDC, polled 6,729. In a close contest for the Korle Klottey seat, the incumbent, NDC's Ishmael Ashitey narrowly edged out NPP's Samuel Adjei Tawiah, polling 30,633 as against 28,011 by Tawiah.

Minister for Water Resources, Works and Housing and the MP for Salaga, Alhaji Boniface Sadique Abubakar, also lost to the NDC's Abubakari Ibrahim. He polled 16,033, while the NDC candidate polled 19,079.

Seth Adjei-Baah, popularly known as Shaaba, an independent candidate, beat the incumbent NPP MP for Nkawkaw Constituency, Kwabena Adusa Okerchiri. Shaba polled 19,757 votes to defeat the incumbent who had 14,376 votes.

The second deputy speaker of parliament and NPP candidate for Yendi, Alhaji Malik Al-Hassan Yakubu, also lost his seat to NDC's candidate, Sulemana Ibn Iddrisu Jr. The NDC candidate polled 10,831 while the incumbent had 10,214. Also, Deputy Minister for Education and Sports, Angelina Baiden Ammisah, lost

promised to closely observe the concluding phases of the process, particularly the collation and declaration of results which was yet to be completed at press time. It also promised to handle whatever disputes that emanate from the declaration of results as well as make further declaration if the need arises.

ECOWAS team also offered preliminary recommendations based on its observation of the Sunday elections. It urged government to encourage the participation of women and youth in the political process. It also suggested that as a way of reducing the long queues in future elections, the electoral commission should increase the number of booths and polling station with corresponding staff.

Gowon said their field reports suggested that the elections were keenly contested in all the 230 constituencies, commending the government, electoral commission, political parties and the people of Ghana for their determination for and commitment to the electoral success of Sunday. The mission also urged the electoral body to maintain its neutrality by adhering to constitu-

•Former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida (left), with Mo Abudu, during Mo Abudu's visit to Minna, at the weekend

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state government on the best way to offer assistance to the bereaved families.

The committee would also be mandated to seek ways to avoid a re-occurrence of such disaster.

The governor assured the people of the state that all necessary arrangements would be put in place for subsequent accident-free hajj operations, the statement said.

It stated that the accident should be viewed as an act of God.

Nigeria's head of medical team, Dr. Ibrahim Kana, had told newsmen on Sunday that 17 other pilgrims from the state were injured, with two persons in critical conditions.

He said the accident occurred 120 kilometres away from Mecca when the pilgrims were going to Mecca after their visit to the Holy Mosque of Prophet Muhammed and other historical places, all in Medina.

He added that the pilgrims were travelling in a 50-seater bus.

However, Kana did not disclose the identities of the victims.

But the head of medical team said some of the injured had been treated and discharged, except for those who were in critical conditions.

Also, Kana had, last week, said 24 Nigerian pilgrims had died in Saudi Arabia.

According to him, two of them died as a result of road accidents, while others were killed after suffering from various ailments.

In another tragedy, a truck crushed no fewer than seven persons to death in Sokoto yesterday while the Sallah celebrations were on.

THISDAY checks revealed that the driver of the truck visited the same fate to a commercial motorcyclist at the old Sokoto Central Market Sunday evening.

A witness told THISDAY that the driver crushed six other persons to death when fleeing from the angry mob that was

pursuing him.

The driver of the tipper was said to have damaged several other vehicles and motorcycles in the process while other people were reportedly injured and are currently receiving treatment at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Teaching Hospital, Sokoto.

The driver was said to have sought protection from the Police outpost close to the market but the angry mob swiftly moved in and razed down the outpost while the driver fled in the ensuing pandemonium.

However, the angry mob in an attempt to torch the truck was strongly resisted by the policemen drafted to the scene to forestall the escalation of violence.

The State Acting Police Commissioner, Mr. B. B. Marcus, who confirmed the incident, said due process must be allowed to prevail in the matter, pointing out the Police are on the trail of the fleeing driver with a view to bringing him to book.

According to him, all the

seven corpses had been deposited at the mortuary of the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Teaching Hospital, Sokoto. It was not yet confirmed if other persons were also injured by the truck driver.

Armed policemen had since been drafted to the market to forestall the possible breakdown of law and order.

But the celebrations went on all the same, as Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola (SAN), observed the Eid-el-Kabir prayers with a plea that all must show understanding, restraint and tolerance to one another at all times.

Fashola, who spoke with newsmen at the Dodan Barracks Praying Ground, Obalende, said it was time for all Nigerians across all religious ranks to come together and embrace one another irrespective of faith.

Delta State Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan also enjoined Muslim and Christian leaders to continue to show love as well as exercise restraint and maturity in all their activities and messages to believers.

Uduaghan, who made the appeal during his Eid-el-Kabir goodwill message, said religious tolerance, peaceful and harmonious co-existence are the hallmark of a good Muslim.

Also, Governor Liyel Imoke of Cross River State reminded Muslims that Eid-el-Kabir is a moment for Muslims to contemplate their existence and purpose on earth so as to pursue only those spiritual things that give life its greater mean.

Imoke stated this in a Sallah message, saying the celebration of this important day in their lives as Muslims is an affirmation of their faith in Allah, and the teachings of Prophet Mohammed.

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tively manage their revenue and re-evaluate their developmental programmes, adding that in Akwa Ibom, his administration had decided to finish all ongoing projects before initiating new ones.

But Washington, DC-based IIF released its forecast at a press briefing in Washington, DC, United States, yesterday with some promising news for Nigeria.

First Deputy Managing Director and Chief Economist of IIF, Mr Yusuke Horiguchi, said the forecast was based on events in the market which indicate a dramatic fall in oil demand due to a slow-down in world economy and a possible

recovery next year.

The planned reduction of oil supply by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will also affect the market, he added.

Horiguchi stated that the collapse in the global economy is here to stay for some time. A slow recovery is expected by the middle of next year, which will spur growth, commodity demand and lead to a spike in prices, said Horiguchi.

There is "tremendous weakening in oil demand relating to collapse of world economy... This will continue for sometime and we are not seeing any recovery in world growth until the middle of

next year... Once economic activity starts growing faster than now, in the second quarter of next year, demand will increase," said the economist.

Asked to assess the risks of the volatile price of oil to the Nigerian economy, IIF Special Advisor and Director of the Africa-Middle East Department, Mr George Abed, told THISDAY the deficit in the 2009 budget might be more than three per cent, given huge spending.

"Budget that has been put before the legislature assumes \$45 per barrel. At that price, given the spending, deficit will widen beyond three per cent, perhaps three per cent plus," he stated.

He added that there might be a strong demand to fund deficit projects with money from the foreign reserves.

The IIF in a report also stated that the recovery process for the world could be more painful than expected. The baseline scenario projects a rapid deceleration in global growth from 3.4 per cent in 2007 to 2.2 per cent in 2008 and 1.4 per cent in 2009.

Economic activity is expected to stagnate through mid-2009 in most advanced economies, as asset price and consumption boom deflate and financial institutions curtail credit to reduce leverage, said IIF.

Emerging and developing

economies will be adversely affected by the crisis through reduced investment, trade and external funding, adds the institute. As a result, growth in emerging markets and developing countries is projected to moderate from the rapid pace of growth over the past several years, as spillovers from the global financial crisis intensify, the IIF stated.

The global financial crisis has led to a decline in oil prices from record highs mid this year to record lows this month. The commodity peaked in July costing well over \$147 per barrel, falling to a four-year low \$40 yesterday.