

Buhari Mourns as 158 Feared Dead in Kebbi Boat Mishap

May 27, 2021 3:24 am



●Bandits kill Sokoto village head, 21 others

Deji Elumoye in Abuja and Laleye Dipo in Minna

President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday described the reported capsizing of a boat in Ngaski Local Government Area of Kebbi State as devastating, offering his condolences to the families of those affected by the tragedy.

About 158 people are feared dead in the incident.

In Sokoto, Governor Aminu Tambuwal yesterday confirmed 22 persons killed by bandits in Rabah Local Government Area of the state.

The boat, conveying about 180 passengers from Niger State to Kebbi State, sank in the Niger River.

The boat was said to have taken off from Loko Mina in Niger State at about 7.30 am and was heading to a market in Kebbi State.

THISDAY gathered that as at 6.30 pm yesterday, only 22 passengers had been rescued while four corpses had been recovered.

It was learnt that the cause of the accident was the overloading of the boat and its old age.

The Administrative Head of Ngaski District in Kebbi State, Mr. Abdullahi Wara, said only 22 survivors and one corpse were found.

"We are talking of around 140 passengers still missing," he added.

Wara blamed the accident on overloading as the boat was meant to ferry, not more than 80 passengers.

The vessel was also loaded with bags of sand from a gold mine.

The Director-General of the Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA), Alhaji Ibrahim Ahmed Inga, confirmed the incident.

Inga said the agency had received the report of the accident, adding that "search and rescue operation is ongoing by the marine police, NIWA and our local divers."

Reacting to the incident, the president, in a statement by his spokesman, Mallam Garba Shehu, said from media reports, there were indications that the boat was overloaded and there was no official confirmation on the number of casualties.

While efforts are ongoing to recover more survivors, the president extended his gratitude to all those involved in the rescue efforts and wishes those injured from the accident quick recovery.

Sokoto Confirms Village Head, 21 Others Killed By Bandits

Governor Tambuwal, yesterday confirmed 22 people killed by bandits in Rabah Local Government Area of the state.

Tambuwal, who visited one of the attacked communities, sympathised with the residents and families of the deceased members of the vigilante group and pledged to restructure vigilante groups.

In separate attacks on Sunday and Tuesday, the bandits killed 22 people, including a village head.

The victims, including 21 vigilante members, were killed during a shootout.

The village head of Sabon Birni, identified as Umar Sanda, was killed in the Tuesday attack.

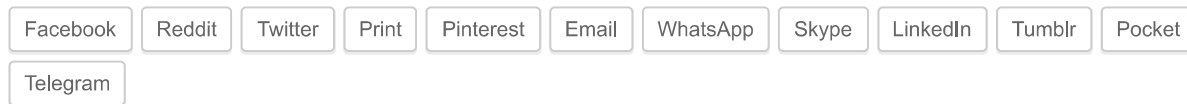
The bandits had on Tuesday night, reportedly blocked the Sabon Birni-Shinkafi highway robbed local merchants of millions of naira and rustled many cows.

Tambuwal, in a statement by his media aide, Mr. Muhammad Bello, said: "We are going to restructure and reposition the vigilante groups in Sokoto State. We are going to make sure that we provide them with motorcycles and communications gadgets."

He said this would enable the vigilante members to communicate with security agencies effectively and to provide basic information and guidance to security agencies.

He added that his administration would also provide allowances to the vigilante members "for the sacrifices they are making towards providing security to their localities, the state and the country.

"The 21 victims of the recent onslaught were among the vigilantes recognised by the security agencies in the state, Governor Tambuwal pledged that the state government will advance a token of gifts and cash assistance to the families of the victims to ameliorate their sufferings."

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