Karuma bridge accident: Strong waves hamper search for bodies

Losing hope. The search for the bodies of those who perished in Karuma bridge accident has been affected by the strong water waves.

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Missing. The scene where Tata lorry registration number UAW 356C plunged into River Nile at Karuma bridge on Sunday.
PHOTO BY JULIUS OCUNGI

KIRYANDONGO. The search for bodies of three people who are believed to have died after the vehicle they were travelling in plunged into River Nile at Karuma bridge is being hampered by strong water waves.

Assistant commissioner of police Charles Ssembabulide from the traffic and road safety directorate, said the search exercise is being hampered by the strong water currents on the Nile.

Last Friday evening, a Tata lorry registration number UAW 356C, laden with dried cassava veered off the Karuma bridge and plunged into the fast flowing river after the driver lost control of the truck.

The bodies of the trio and wreckage of the vehicle was by Monday morning still missing as rescue efforts entered day four.

Witness

Mr Emmanuel Esaku, an employee working at Sinohydro Corporation Ltd in Karuma Trading Centre, told *Daily Monitor* that the vehicle hit the left rail guard of the bridge before plunging into the water.

He said he witnessed the accident while trying to cross Karuma bridge from Karuma Trading Centre.

"I was on a boda boda motorcycle from Karuma Trading Centre. We saw the truck approaching the bridge heading to Kampala and stopped," he said, adding: "But instead of the truck adjusting to maintain its course on the left hand side, it went straight and hit the rail guards on the bridge and plunged into the water."

"All we heard was a loud bang in the water, I don't know the fate of the occupants," Mr Esaku said.

He noted that as the vehicle was approaching, they had to stop before entering the bridge since the vehicle was "big".

Rescue teams deployed

Police marine unit along with their counterpart, the army, were at the weekend deployed at the scene to search for the bodies of the trio and wreckage of the vehicle, according to Ssembabulide.

"Our personnel on the ground have not yet sighted the bodies and wreckage of the vehicle. We don't know whether the bodies have been flushed to unknown location or not," he said.

"But the search exercise is really very hard because of the strong water currents. The water is flowing very fast and this is slowing our progress, we shall however still continue with the search," Mr Ssebambulide told *Daily Monitor* in a telephone interview on Monday.

Cause of accident

According to Mr Ssembabulide, the accident could have been caused as a result of mechanical breakdown in the breaking system prompting the driver to lose control.

Police at the weekend identified occupants of the vehicle as Nelson Baraza, the driver, Arafat Farid, the turn man, and Ibrahim Abonyang, a passenger who hired the vehicle.

They were reportedly from Paidah Town in Nebbi District heading to Hoima District when the accident happened.

The Friday's accident is the second in a period of five months at Karuma bridge.

In February, a lorry laden with cotton seeds from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo plunged into Karuma Falls in Kiryandongo District.

The truck diver survived the accident with minor injuries.

In 2000, a Gateway bus plunged into the River Nile waters at the Karuma Bridge, killing at least 11 people leaving several others with serious injuries.

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