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Fire kills family of 5 in Katsina

From Abdullahi Izma Yamadi, Katsina

An early morning fire on Monday killed an entire family of five and destroyed property worth millions of naira in Kofar Sauri community in the Katsina metropolis.

The victims, 35-year-old Muhammad Habibu, his wife Fatima Muhammad, and their three children, Khadija, Abubakar, and Aliyu, were all burnt to death.

It was gathered that Muhammad Habibu was a casual staff member at the Katsina State Water Board until his death.

Although the exact cause of the fire is yet to be determined, residents suspect it was triggered by a voltage surge when electricity was restored to the area.

It was gathered that the fire started from the living room and quickly spread throughout the building while the family was asleep. By the time they sensed danger, the inferno had already blocked all escape routes.

A relative of the victims, Kasim Aliyu, said around 3:00 a.m., he heard a woman's voice from a distance reciting, "Innalillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un"(Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Him we shall return).

He initially thought it was normal until around 3:30 a.m., when he sensed something was wrong.

Kasim added, "The head of the household was my younger brother from the same father. The fire gutted the house around 3:00 a.m. I sensed something at that time but didn't know what it was until I received a call around 4:00 a.m. informing me that my brother and his entire family had died in the fire. May their souls be admitted into Aljannah Firdausi."

Eyewitnesses said attempts by neighbours and first responders to extinguish the flames failed. They lamented that officials of the Katsina State Fire Service arrived late and made little impact.

A resident, Musa Hamza, said, "I think by the time the fire service arrived, the occupants of the house had already died in the inferno. However, I can tell you they did their best to extinguish the flames, only that they did not succeed in rescuing the family. May their souls rest in peace."

■ Muhammad Habibu and his wife, Fatima Muhammad

One of the neighbours, Magaji Bala, lamented that residents often go days without electricity, only for high voltage to cause havoc whenever power is restored.

"Cases like this have been happening in some parts of Katsina metropolis. Recently, a similar incident nearly happened. This calls for caution among residents," he said.

When contacted, the Chief Fire Officer of the Katsina State Fire Service, Rabe Audi Kurmuyal, confirmed that the fire was extinguished by his men, contrary to claims that firefighters arrived late.

Some residents blamed persistent power fluctuations by Kano Electricity Distribution Company (KEDCO), saying constant outages and subsequent high-voltage returns often damage electrical appliances.

They referenced similar incidents in Sabuwar Unguwa, Kwamren Dorowa, and Abbatoir areas.

Kasim Aliyu, who described the experience as devastating, urged authorities to address the frequent occurrence of such disasters, which claim lives and destroy property within minutes.

Many communities in Katsina have suffered unstable power supply for nearly a decade, with residents attributing both outage issues and voltage surges to failing infrastructure and official negligence.

While commiserating with the families, friends, and neighbours of the victims, the Executive Secretary of the Katsina State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Binta Hussaini Dangani, described the incident as the will of God and prayed for Allah's forgiveness for the deceased and their admission into Aljannah Firdausi.

Dangani, who arrived at the scene minutes after the incident, prayed for an end to such disasters and assured the government's continued support to the victims' families. She advised residents to always switch off electrical appliances before going to bed and handle fire with utmost care.

She said SEMA staff had already conducted an on-the-spot assessment of the damage in preparation for the provision of relief materials.

The Katsina Regional Manager of KEDCO, Aminu Bukari, said that it is unlikely for a high-voltage surge to affect only a single house in a community of over 5,000 homes.