

# Harmattan cold: How charcoal smoke killed two friends

By Ado Abubakar Musa, Jos | Published Date Jan 11, 2020 5:40 AM

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■ Late Idris Dahiru



■ Late Saminu Idris

When Hamma Hassan returned home around 4:30pm last Friday, she met her son, Idris Dahiru sleeping in her room and woke him up to pray. Hamma later offered the 25-year-old man tea, but he declined and bade his mother goodnight.

Idris, whose room had a leaky ceiling and was under reconstruction, had temporarily relocated to a friend's place. But at the time he bade

his mother goodnight, neither of them had any premonition that it would be their final farewell.

The remains of Idris and his friend, Saminu, were found the next day in an airtight room, where they suffocated from toxic smoke believed to be from the charcoal fire they made the previous night to warm their room.

According to the National Centre for Remote Sensing (NCRS), temperatures in Jos dropped to 6.7 degrees Celsius last Friday, making the city the coldest in the country. With this, many families who could not afford room heaters resorted to the use of charcoal to warm their rooms.

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Our correspondent gathered that amidst the cold temperature, charcoal markets in the city experienced a boom. According to retailers and suppliers, the price of a bag of charcoal rose from N1, 800 to N2, 000 within the week.

Like Idris, Saminu's last encounter with his mother, Talatu Adam, was blissful. "He met me with other family members and we discussed the sharing formula for his sister's marriage expenses, which he promised to contribute. He wished us a goodnight after eating supper, not knowing that it would be our last encounter," Talatu narrated as she held back tears.

Both victims of the charcoal fume, who were 25 years old respectively, were residents of Gangare in Jos North Local Government area of Plateau State. Until their death, both friends nursed the ambition of serving their country in the armed forces. Our correspondents gathered that they applied for the recent 78 regular programme of the Nigerian Army but failed to make the list.

Also, but for divine intervention, Adam Khalid, a close friend of the deceased, would have died with his friends that fateful Friday. Adam, who sold fairly used shoes with Saminu, said he often passed the night at his friend's room, but as fate would have it, on that day he stayed up late into the night in a discussion with his mother and eventually slept at home.

Speaking on the ugly fate that befell his friends, Adam expressed shock and told Daily Trust Saturday that it was the saddest day of his life, which he would find difficult to forget.

At 11:30pm on Friday, just few hours before his death, Saminu, who lived in his elder brother's compound, had called him on phone and requested for a clay pot to start charcoal fire to warm his room. His elder brother, Labiru Idris, explained that having been down with fever, he asked his wife to open the door and hand over the pot to Saminu, which she did.

"Oftentimes I wake them up around 5:30am for Subh prayer (prayer before dawn), but that Friday morning, I overslept and woke up around 6:30am. My wife told me that she perceived the smell of something

burning in the house, but we thought it was an electrical fault,” Labiru explained.

Labiru said that as he approached his brother’s room, the smell became more pungent and he immediately feared the worst. “The door was locked from inside, so I tried to get into the room through the window. I broke the glass but I couldn’t enter because of the choking smoke that came out of the room. I knew that something terrible had happened to the occupants of the room, so I called out to neighbours for help,” he further said.

He explained that when the door was forced open, the entire compound was engulfed with a dark cloud of smoke.

“We couldn’t immediately get into the room because of the smoke. It was choking, so we had to stay outside for minutes. We later used cloths to cover our mouths and noses and went in,” he added.

Daily Trust Saturday learnt that Saminu’s lifeless body was found behind the door, perhaps in an attempt to reach to escape, while Idris was found motionless on a mattress partly consumed by fire. Probably, in an attempt to reach the door, Saminu may have knocked down the clay pot containing the burning charcoal, and as a result, the mattress and other items in the room got burnt.

Speaking separately, Talatu and Hamma were unable to contain their emotions. They described their sons as hardworking, kind and generous, and prayed that Allah grants them Jannatul Firdausi.

Salisu Ismail, father to the late Idris, said though the family received the news of the incident with shock, they had no choice but to accept it as the will of God. He urged residents to desist from the use of charcoal to warm their rooms while sleeping.

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