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# Gone With The Fire!

Wailing, lamentation and anguish filled the air in Mubi, the commercial nerve centre of Adamawa State, as families helplessly watched their loved ones and properties perish in a fire disaster that burnt wild and wide.

It was indeed a black night for the Adamawa State University community as the inferno razed uninterrupted for several hours, and when it finally decided to abate four persons lay dead.

The victims were: Maimunat A. Yakubu, a 100 level student of Biological Sciences and Safiya Adamu, a pre-degree student. Both were students of the state university Mubi. Others were Aisha Ibrahim and her two months old baby.

The tragic incident repackaged the gale of fire disasters in the state.

Late last year, many houses were razed. Though there were no records of lost of lives, properties worth millions of naira were reportedly lost in the fire disasters.

In the last two months, no fewer than 20 houses were reportedly burnt down in the state. One curious but common thing about the disaster is that they are always linked to electrical problems.

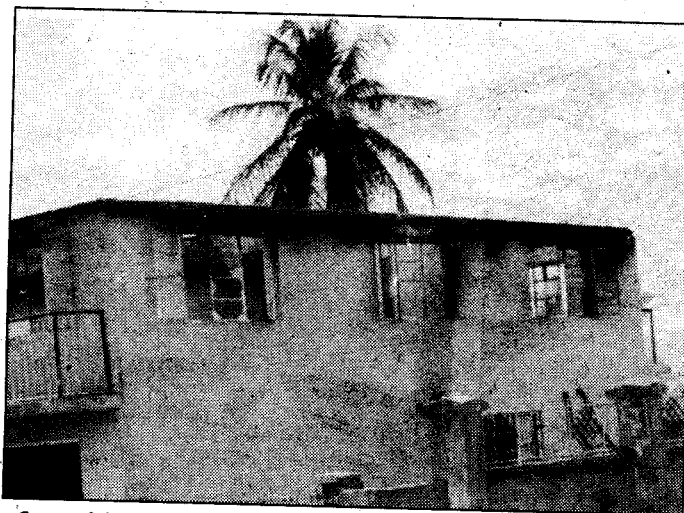
In Yola last week, one of the leading cyber café centres, Unique InfoTech, was almost completely burnt, were it not for the prompt intervention of the staff on duty and other customers browsing at the time the fire broke out.

That of the cyber café started from the prepaid meter installed by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). The installation was said to have been faulty. The incident was the fifth of such resulting from pre-paid metre in the state.

It was gathered that the management of Unique, like other victims, are seriously making a case with the company to claim damages.

When the incident at the café happened, there was pandemonium as the metre exploded and smoke and flame took over the business premises.

The Mubi tragedy took place at about 11:30p.m. The inferno razed a story building apartment housing some of the



• Some of the houses razed



• Adamu



• Yakubu

staff of the university and others. The victims had no premonition of their painful deaths as they went about their daily activities before they retired to bed. Some of the occupants, who survived the incident, spoke on their ordeal. One of the survivors, Ahmed

Sajoh, who is the information/protocol officer of the university, narrated the story to newsmen. He said the four persons that died were on the top floor of the building where the inferno started.

Sajoh stated that there were about eight persons on the top

floor at the time of the incident but four escaped in miraculous circumstances.

"I was in the room with my seven-year-old son, Farouk, when we noticed that the post was already taken over by fire. We then broke the glass window from where we jumped down,"

he said.

He said there were other neighbours' children in their room who also managed to come out to the balcony from where sympathisers asked them to jump down and they did.

According to him, when the children jumped from the

balcony, the waiting crowd of sympathisers caught them mid-air.

However, the four that died could not wake up as they died in their sleep, adding that some of them were burnt beyond recognition.

He said that the casualty rate would have been minimised if fire fighters had responded to the distress call, adding that because the fire service men did not turn up, the situation worsened.

"A sad Irony to the whole episode was the failure of the fire service to respond to three delegations that went at different times to invite them to the scene of the incident. The fire raged for about 12 hours, yet no fire service men came around. Indeed, the absence of professional fire fighting facilities like ladder, fire proof jackets, gas masks and helmets greatly hampered the rescue efforts," he said.

The heart bleeding disaster has left the families of the deceased in tears. Prominent among the early callers to the affected families were the Emir of Mubi, Isa Ahmadu; the leadership of the university, delegation from Adamawa State House of Assembly and the representatives of former vice president, Atiku Abubakar, Ibrahim Bapetel, Action Congress (AC) governorship candidate in the state and many others.

The central messages of the sympathisers were for the bereaved to take it as an act of God, adding that only the grace and mercy of God could condole the families.

The victims are gone forever, but the big question is: for how long would the fire incident continue from house to house and market to market with the attendant casualty? When shall the country have pro-active effective and efficient fire fighters?

Respondents, each time disaster occurs, always push the blame to electrical fault. But who is behind this electrical works in the homes, offices and markets; are they quacks or professionals? The question goes on and on. However, the bottom line is, Nigerians must be safety conscious at all time to avoid avoidable disasters for as the saying goes, a stitch in time saves nine.