

BENUE'S WEEK OF SORROW: How capsized boat killed set of triplets, 23 other youths

...as state grapples with spike in Coronavirus cases

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It was a week the people and government of Benue State would not forget in a hurry. The ravaging coronavirus conspired with a boat mishap to cast a pall on the North-Central state. The people were still smarting from the news of the new grounds broken by the deadly Covid-19 pandemic when a boat capsized and killed no fewer than 26 young men and women.

Signs of an unpleasant week emerged on Saturday, July 4, as the media team of Governor Samuel Ortom invited journalists for an emergency press conference with the governor in Government House Makurdi.

At the press conference, Governor Samuel Ortom revealed that his wife had tested positive to Covid-19 alongside his domestic staff and the entire household, and had consequently been kept in

isolation.

Governor Ortom had disclosed that apart from his wife, key appointees of his administration, including the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), the Head of Service (HOS) and the Chief Of staff (COS) had tested positive for the deadly virus.

Yet the most shocking aspect of the sad news was the governor's disclosure that the Vice Chairman of the COVID 19 Emergency Committee in Benue State, Prof. Godwin Achinge, had also tested positive for the virus.

Achinge, a Professor of Medicine and Deputy Vice Chancellor of Benue State University (BSU) Makurdi, had been appointed into state's COVID 19 committee close ie basis of his vast experience. He had worked diligently with the chairman of the committee, Engr. Benson Abound, who is also the deputy governor of Benue State.

Achinge's infection by the deadly virus was seen by many as a big blow to the battle against the pandemic and a source of worry to the Benue State Government, members of the committee and the entire university community where he was also very active in the senate and council meetings.

Worse still, less than 24 after the governor governor broke the sad news of Achinge's infection by Coronavirus, he gave up the ghost in the hospital where he was undergoing treatment.

As it would be expected, his death sent shock waves down the spines of many residents of the state, particularly as many other key appointees of the administration were already down with the virus.

Unfortunately, the dust raised by the sudden death of Prof. Achinge had not settled when another tragedy struck: a boat carrying 28 youths of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Adeke, Makurdi capsized on River Benue, killing no fewer than 26 of them, including a set of triplets.



The Nation investigation revealed that the youths were going on an evangelism mission to a neighbouring community when tragedy struck.

The Secretary of the English Section of the ECWA church, Miss Favour Simeon, said she was with the 26 youths who died in the accident at Sunday service earlier in the day.

Speaking with our correspondent amid tears, Simeon recalled that shortly after the Sunday service, the youths had come together and decided to embark on evangelism in another community across the River Benue.

She said among those who drowned in the river when the boat capsized were a set of triplets by name Peter, Paul and Paulina, who are children of a mobile policeman identified simply as Inspector Bulus. Inspector Bulus was said to be away on Special duty at the time the incident occurred.

Simeon, an acquaintance of the 16-year-old triplets who were supposed to celebrate their 17th birthday in September, "their mother actually warned them against going to River Benue because the volume of its water had increased, but one of them (Paulina) accused her of trying to weaken her faith.

"It was on that basis that their mother allowed them to travelled for evangelism," Simeon said.

She described the incident as unfortunate, saying that the deceased triplets were devout Christians who had strong faith in God and loved to worship Him.

Asked how she received the news of the death of his church members, she said: "My elder brother called me on the phone and asked if I went to evening service and I said no. He requested for Shadrach, one of the victims' number.

"I was trying to call my brother again when a neighbour ran to me and said a canoe had capsized with our church members on board and all of them had died.

"I ran straight to the house of the triplets at Mobile Barracks and saw people gathered and the mother was crying.

"I ran to the bank of River Benue where the incident occurred and saw a body recovered on the bank of the river. I wept profusely."

She blamed the police for what she described as a poor rescue operation, saying it took the intervention of the Benue [close](#) Commissioner of Police before the Marine police move to the scene for a search-and-rescue operation.

"By then, it was too late as most of them had drowned," she said.

Grief seized the atmosphere at Squadron MOPOL 13 Mobile Barracks when our correspondent visited. Some residents of the barracks were seen in front of their houses weeping as relations and friends trooped in to console them.

The grief was, however, more pronounced in the home of Inspector Bulus because apart from his triplets, two other members of his household, Miss Sadutu Kabina and her sister Precious, were said to have died in the boat mishap.

Inspector Bulus was yet to return from the special duty when The Nation visited. Only his wife and second son were seen struggling to contend with tears.



•Residents at the river bank where the boat capsized



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