

Flood kills 11, destroys houses in Niger

Francis Falola, Minna

DISASTER struck again in the riverine villages of Akere and Babanrami in Niger State on Tuesday, when no fewer than 11 persons were reportedly killed by flood that swept the communities after a downpour.

Our correspondent gathered that several houses were destroyed by the flood while over 50,000 people were reported to have been rendered homeless.

A similar disaster occurred in Akere village two weeks ago during which three persons died while several others were rendered homeless.

The Chairman of the Niger State House of Assembly Committee on Land, Survey and Environment, Mr. Pius Wakili, told journalists in Minna on Tuesday that the condition of the people in the affected areas was "critical."

He added that the people of the area needed urgent attention.

- Wakili, who had visited the flooded areas, said that the people had been cut off from other parts of the state following the collapse of the access roads to the villages.

The lawmaker warned of a possible outbreak of epidemic in the areas.

He explained that the

people had resorted to drinking the flood water for lack of portable water.

Wakili claimed that the victims had been sleeping in the open without any protection from mosquitoes.

He stressed the need for the government to urgently send relief materials to the

areas.

He appealed to the National Emergency Management Agency to assist the victims with relief materials.

He said, "The people are exposed to mosquitoes and have even been drinking the

flood water. This can cause epidemic in the area any moment."

The lawmaker said his committee would soon submit a detailed report to the assembly on the need for the government to come to the aid of the affected persons.

Setback for Obi's N8bn work-plan

John Ameh, Awka

THERE were indications on Tuesday that the execution of the three-month "Work-plan", unveiled in August by Anambra State Governor, Mr. Peter Obi, might not be realised.

The state's House of Assembly said it would not endorse any financial requests from Obi until it had been briefed on how the administration spent the 2007 budget.

Obi set an ambitious target for himself in August,

promising to complete many ongoing multi-millionaire projects between September and December 31 this year.

Investigations by our correspondent showed that some of the projects included the Phase I of the state secretariat complex; the dualisation of the Nnamd Azikiwe Avenue, Awka; the Awka Ring Road Government Lodge, Onitsha and Judges' quarters in Onitsha and Awka.

It was also learnt that he submitted a supplementary appropriation bill of N8 bn to the House for approval to accommodate the project "among other government services."

The House, whose 36 members belong to the rival Peoples Democratic Party, had however, reportedly refused to touch the document. Obi is a member of the All Progressive Grand Alliance.

Members were said to have insisted on having the breakdown of how the over N48bn 2007 budget was spent before they would consider Obi's request.

Some House sources confided in our correspondent on Tuesday that "powerful PDP people" were reportedly backing the House's position in a bid to checkmate Obi.

Officials in the executive circle of government also raised the fears a delay in approving the supplementary budget could "jeopardise some of Obi's projects."

The sources said this could further worsen the alleged frosty relationship between the governor and his Deputy Mrs. Virgy Etiaba.

It was Etiaba who submitted the contentious budget to the House in December 2006 and began its implementation after it was approved by the legislature in January 2007.



•L-R: Minister of National Planning, Gen. Muhammed Daggash (rtd); Guest lecturer, Prof. Bala Chakravarthy; and Managing Director/Chief Executive, Shell Nigeria Exploration and Production Company Limited, Mr. Chima Ibeneche, during the master class session on Business Leadership Lecture in Lagos ...on Tuesday. Photo: Bayoor Ewuoso.

Three die as police, hoodlums clash in Anambra

John Ameh, Onitsha

NO fewer than three people lost their lives on Tuesday following a clash between riot policemen and suspected hoodlums in Obosi, an Onitsha satellite town in Anambra State.

At least, four policemen were also said to have been wounded in the fracas.

Investigations by our correspondent revealed that the incident forced the police to seal up the Mgbuka Obosi Market, a popular old vehicle spare parts market in the area.

Heavy gun battle, lasting hours, reportedly ensued between the police and the hoodlums.

The police, however, admitted that only one person died but denied that any of their men was wounded in the clash.

The hoodlums, described by the police as "Indian Hemp smokers" reportedly vandalised property at the market in an apparent bid to avenge the death of their

colleagues.

Our correspondent gathered that trouble started after men of the Obosi Police Division raided a bush close to the market, believed to be the hideout of the hoodlums.

Their presence in the bush, where they allegedly smoked the substance, had constituted security threats to traders and their customers, a development that informed the raid.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police at the state Police Command, Mr. Amusa Bello,

who confirmed the incident to our correspondent, said the "account of the incident has been exaggerated."

He said, "As a matter of fact, the incident did not occur inside the market; it was in a nearby bush."

"Our men raided the bush to flush out the criminals who usually gather there to smoke Indian hemp; in the process, there was shooting."

"One of the hoodlums was injured; our men did not even know that he was injured. If they had known, they would have taken him to the hospital

immediately.

"He was later taken to the hospital by his colleagues where he gave up the ghost; later on. The hoodlums regrouped and went into the market in an attempt to cause commotion."

Bello added that in order to forestall further acts of lawlessness in the area, the police had to shut down the market.

"The market has been closed; just for today and policemen have taken control of the place."

Dokubo dismisses threat by MEND

Ibanga Isine, Port Harcourt

THE leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, Alhaji Mujahadin Asari-Dokubo, on Tuesday dismissed recent threats by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta to resume attacks on oil installations and abduction of foreign oil workers in the region.

Speaking on the security

situation in the volatile region, Asari-Dokubo denied that Henry Okah, alias Jomo Gbomo, was the leader of MEND.

He described Okah as a criminal, who had exploited the Niger Delta struggle for his selfish goals.

The NDPVF boss said that Okah was never among those who initiated the Niger Delta struggle.

Asari-Dokubo added that

MEND did not have the men to carry out any significant attack in the region.

He said, "Henry Okah does not know anything about the formation of the movement. He was only approached by somebody who is close to us and somebody who was supplying us arms to fight for my release and that of Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha."

"Because some people were afraid that their emails could be traced, we had to make releases from South Africa so that it would be safer for them to get to the international media."

"Henry Okah is an arms dealer. The government of South Africa is aware, the government of Nigeria is aware. He has been carrying several passports. This issue has been in the public domain since."