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## Thunderstorm of sorrow

■ How it killed 4 in Jalingo ■ Exhumed 4 tanks in Nnewri

Sylvanus Viashima, Jalingo

**The coming of the rainy season is generally regarded as a blessing that ushers in new lease of life, one that brings relief to the scourging weather, and prepares the ground for cultivation of farm products.**

For a basically agrarian state as Taraba, the rainy season is invariably awaited with great expectations.

But, the last rains in the state gave the people more than they bargained, as it was more of a nightmare and harbinger of woes than blessings to most residents of Jalingo, the state capital, and its environs.

Mrs Heriata Anthony is one of those in the capital city who are now counting

their losses after the rain.

When three of her cousins, Aisha Useni, Felicia Istifanus and Istiah James, left for the restaurant ahead of her on the fateful morning of May 5, little did Mrs Anthony knew that would be the last she would see any of them alive. She initially saw the rains as a blessing, but this changed to agony.

Her three cousins were among the four persons that were killed when a telecommunication mast fell on their restaurant as a result of the rainstorm.

Anthony who operates a restaurant opposite the gate of the Specialist Hospital explained that her cousins left the house early for work in the restaurant when the incident happened.

"They left the house ahead to come and start cooking while I arrange a few things. I never imagined that would be the last time I would interact with them.

"They finished cooking and were already selling food to customers around 6:00a.m when the rainstorm forced the mast behind the restaurant to fall on them.

"Three of them, including a customer, a driver to the state Commissioner for Water Resource, Mr Emmanuel Gowon, who came to buy food died instantly, while Miss Konah Danjuma, who was also in the shop sustained shoulder and head injuries.

"Rain is supposed to be a blessing and not something that would bring us such sorrow. I am deeply saddened. They died all too sudden and untimely", she said in tears.

Mrs Anthony's story mirrors the experience of many others in Jalingo and other parts of the state, who lost their homes and offices to the turbulent rainstorm.

Another gory story was the unfortunate news of the death of three students of Taraba State University Jalingo, who were on a field trip to Cameroon, from the rainstorm.

The students were identified as Yusuf Mohammed (President of Biological Science Students), Nancy

Samchak, and Grace Fyafa Thomas, while the Head of Biological Science Department, Dr. Robert S. Houmsu suffered severe injuries. Other students also suffered some injuries.

The tragic incident occurred in Bouba Njidda Wild Life Park at Garua, Cameroon Republic after a heavy thunderstorm struck a century old Mahogany tree under which they were reportedly taking refuge, killing three of them instantly.

Some students of the university who spoke with our correspondent expressed sadness over the unfortunate incident while describing the deceased as very hardworking students.

According to Janet Awoshiri, "the news of these deaths and the incident is very disturbing. It is hard to believe that hard working students like these would die under such tragic circumstances".

Grace Akarager, who was also on the trip said that she still couldn't believe that rain could cause so much sorrow so quickly.

"I was also in the tent when it happened. One moment I was with my friend and the next, she was dead. It is as if it's just a dream," she said.

Indeed, the university community and the state generally were hit hard by another tragic incident as the state capital experienced its first rain of the year, which turned the rain of disasters. Several houses, offices, worship centres, schools and market places were destroyed in the ensuing rainstorm, with the university also suffering great havoc.

The midnight rain caught people completely unprepared and so was the disaster it brought. By morning, residents only had to count their losses and thanked God it rained at night.

According Yahaya Yakubu, who has been in Jalingo for over 10 years, “this was rain like nothing one has ever seen in this town. Throughout my over 10 years of stay in Jalingo, I have never seen anything like this. The storm was fiery and persistent. I prayed all through the night”.

The second and third rains of the year were just as bad. And so rather than look forward to the rains, residents now dread possibility of it.

“I am even afraid of going out once the breeze starts. You are not even safe staying in the house. Each time it is about to rain now, it is fear that occupies my heart. I cannot be at rest when it is raining and my children are not with me. We have never experienced this kind of rain in the state. I think this is because of all these bloodshed,” lamented Hajia Aisha Dalhatu lamented.

Mr Albert Ulegah, however, attributed the rainstorm to the massive deforestation going on in the state.

“People are surprised that this is happening now, but I think we have brought this upon ourselves. We are cutting down all the trees without planting new ones. The environment is completely vulnerable. If we value revenue over our lives, then we should not be surprised when disaster strikes.

“In the last two or three years, tens of thousands of trees were cut down in the name of logging. Revenue generation is not a bad idea, but we should be able to replace the trees that we have cut. The place is now open and there are no trees to control the breeze. The government is busy making money without thinking about the implications of this massive deforestation to the environment and our way of life. If we don't correct this now, the situation would only deteriorate”, he said.

In a press statement issued in Jalingo recently, the state Governor Darius Ishaku described the incident as “most unfortunate” and condoled with the families that lost their loved ones and property to the rainstorm. Ishaku said that “problems arising from changes in weather have gradually become a global concern that requires joint action by the government, private sector and individuals to find enduring solutions”.

He assured that his “administration will take all steps necessary to safeguard the environment against disasters of this nature in the state” even as he advised the people to “cooperate with government to ensure the successful implementation of programmes and policies that will reduce the impact of all forms of climatic changes that threaten our environment”.

Some of the people saw the rainstorm as an act of vengeance from the gods for the bloodshed in the state while some others attributed it to the failure of the government resulting from the massive deforestation. And yet others see it as a result of the global environmental deterioration.


Whatever the case may be, residents of Jalingo and parts of Taraba now see the rain as a threat rather than blessing and there is urgent need for the government to expedite actions in replacing trees that are cut down to generate revenue.

For the people, in the interim, the telecommunication companies should also try and relocate their masts to non-residential areas and monitor the ones on ground to ensure that they are in good shape and strong enough to withstand basic environmental elements.

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