

Dam Collapses, 100 Feared Dead

• Zamfara seeks FG support

About 100 people are now feared dead in the Gusau Barrage Dam disaster in Zamfara State even as operations to get relief material to the survivors got underway yesterday in Gusau, the state capital.

A Village Head of Birnin Ruwa, the area worst affected by the disaster, Mallam

*From Imam Imam
in Gusau*

Muhammadu Birnin Ruwa, told newsmen yesterday that they were yet to account for 98 persons made up mostly of women and children.

The dam, which collapsed Saturday afternoon after a down

Continued on Pg. 4

Atiku Tasks EFCC on

— DAM COLLAPSES *Cont'd from P1* —

pour that lasted from Friday night to early hours of Saturday, had destroyed at least 500 houses in the areas around the dam and its river bank.

At press time, some residents were stranded with men of the Nigeria Army Ammunition Depot, Gusau leading the rescue operation. Men of Zamfara State Fire Service and local residents are assisting the soldiers in the operation.

Speaking at the scene of the incident at about 12 midnight Saturday, the state Governor, Alhaji Ahmad Sani Yarima, said the enormity of the disaster was unequalled in the history of the state and called for immediate federal assistance.

According to him, the state government could not handle to disaster alone, adding that efforts were being made to contact the Federal Government through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) for further assistance.

As an interim measure, the affected communities are being settled at Birnin Ruwa Secondary School and Birnin Ruwa Primary School in Gusau. Similarly, 50 bags of rice and cloths have been distributed to the victims by the state government.

Although the cause of the collapse was yet unknown, investigation by THISDAY at the Zamfara State Water Board showed that an electricity, powered engine, which releases excess water when the dam is filled up to capacity failed to function.

A source, who declined to be named said: "There was no

electricity to power the engines while the alternative power source failed to function. Even before the dam collapsed, we were telling people to move away from the area. The fact is we could not reach many because the standard way to send such emergency messages out was to use the dam alarm (siren), unfortunately, due to the power failure, it refused to work."

Reports also indicated that the state government had recently awarded contract for the refurbishment of some sections of the dam but the contractor, Mr. Renato Salas, currently wanted by the EFCC in connection with money laundering and financial irregularities at the Zamfara State Water Board, was unavailable to hand over the job.

According to the source, "Salas has actually completed the job but refused to hand it over to us because he claimed he has not been paid, so it was difficult to even get to some of the machines and put them to use."

However, when contacted on the possibility of negligence being the cause of the disaster, Sani denied the claim, saying it was a natural disaster, which had its origin somewhere else.

He said: "It is not a machine malfunction. Reports I have indicate that the problem started in Funtua (Katsina State) where another dam is said to have collapsed even though we are so far yet to confirm that.

"Whatever it is, it happened because the water came with excessive force; that is why it caused such destruction."