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Lagos Rainstorm: 14 Perish in Boat Mishap

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Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Aderemi Ibirogba

By Godwin Haruna, Gboyega Akinsanmi and Omololu Ogunmade

Forty eight hours after a devastating rainstorm ravaged parts of Lagos, residents on Tuesday were still counting their losses, following the news that 12 pupils and two women perished on Monday morning in a boat mishap which occurred in a riverine community in the state.

The incident, which involved a canoe carrying 22 persons on board, took place at Agbede, a riverine community in Otto-Awori Local Council Development Area in Ojo, Lagos.

The strong winds, which preceded the rain early on Monday, blew off roofs of houses, pulled down streetlights, telecommunications masts, uprooted trees and blew heavy objects and debris around the city, causing deaths and destruction of property.

THISDAY learnt that about 22 pupils and some women left Ojota river bank — another riverine community — in the early hours of Monday and were being ferried to Agbede where their school is situated.

An eyewitness told THISDAY that the boat had almost reached the Agbede shore when the violent rainstorm struck, thereby capsizing the boat and consequently drowning 12 pupils and two women. One of the victims was identified as the wife of the Baale of Ojota. Ten pupils, however, survived the mishap.

It was gathered that the bodies of four out of the 12 pupils, who drowned in the mishap, have been recovered with the help of the local community rescue team.

THISDAY checks revealed that none of the passengers on board the canoe wore life jackets, which the state Commissioner for Rural Development, Mr. Cornelius Ojelabi, said could have minimised the loss of lives.

On hearing of the incident, Governor Babatunde Fashola ordered a team of top government functionaries led by Ojelabi to visit the bereaved families and communities to sympathise with the people. In his message, Ojelabi commiserated with the families of the victims, saying the governor was concerned about the plight of the people and had sent him to assess the extent of damage.

Ojelabi lamented that all the victims, who were aboard the boat, did not use life jackets, stating that it was a law of the Lagos State Government that anyone using the waterways should wear a life jacket.

He said if the passengers of the capsized boat had worn life jackets, the casualties would have been much lower, adding that he came to assess the impact of the damage and see how the state government could forestall future occurrence. The commissioner also decried the fact that the boat was over-loaded and might have been too small to cope with the weight it carried.

He called on the community leaders, “to monitor those involved in the business of ferry services to ensure that they do not carry more than the approved and safe number of passengers”.

Also in a statement, the state Commissioner for the Environment, Mr. Tunji Bello, described the incident as the effects of climate change which the state government had been talking about.

“We have continued on our part to embark on adaptive and mitigative efforts to fight the global scourge. We have embarked on pre-rainy season massive cleaning and dredging of canals and drainage channels to prevent flooding as well as embarked on massive enlightenment campaign to sensitise Lagosians on the need to live in a clean and sustainable environment,” he said.

Bello said the state government had appointed resident engineers and drainage maintenance officers to tackle flood-related matters in all the local government councils/local council development authorities in the state, as well as making public their phone numbers in order to receive complaints on blocked drains, people dumping refuse inside canals, and other related drainage challenges across the state.

According to Bello, “This is a further demonstration of the seriousness the state government attaches to the issues of flooding in the state and its intention to reduce it to the barest minimum.”

He said the resident engineers are expected to interact with respective community leaders, residents associations, community development associations (CDAs), and familiarise themselves with the drainage and canal challenges with a view to proffering solutions to them.

Other measures put in place by the ministry to reduce the incidence of flooding include the ongoing pre-rainy season cleaning and dredging of secondary and primary collectors across the state and the all year de-silting programmes of the Emergency Flood Abatement Department (EFAD).

He solicited the support of Lagosians to join hands with the state government by

ensuring proper disposal of refuse through LAWMA and accredited PSP operators, adding that residents should stop patronising cart pushers who only collect refuse from one point and end up dumping them into canals.

He also warned market men and women in the state to desist from dumping waste into canals as any market caught by the monitoring team would be shut for a minimum of three months.

Also speaking on the issue yesterday, the state Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Aderemi Ibirogbra, appealed to residents “to take full charge of all the drainage facilities in their respective areas”, insisting that “prevention is better than cure.”

The commissioner, who envisaged that this year’s rain might be heavier than last year’s, emphasised the need for all and sundry “to also prepare adequately for the rains because of the havoc it could cause if residents are careless”. He expressed hope that there would be no repeat of last year’s heavy rains, in which many lives and property were lost to the flood disaster.

“Building on drainage channels is a risk to life. Dumping of refuse into drains paths is also a source of epidemic and flooding. Therefore, do not put any structure on these channels or empty your wastes into gutters and other drain paths. It is dangerous and constitutes serious threats to lives and property,” Ibirogbra stressed.

He disclosed that the state, through the Ministry of Environment, had embarked on enlightenment campaigns across the state, using various campaign materials such as hand bills, banners and flyers with a view to sensitising residents on the need to prepare for the rainy season.

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