

Lightning bolt kills pupil and injures 4 others in Zimbabwe

Winnie Masara and Patience Mutsiwi

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One pupil died while 19 others, including a teacher, were hospitalised following a lightning strike and destructive winds in Binga and Nkayi on Wednesday.

There was anxiety at a top prison in Gweru after some of its buildings, some of them cells housing up to 500 inmates, were destroyed in a storm on Thursday. The prisoners slept outside on Thursday night and were busy yesterday trying to reconstruct the roofs over their cells.

A bolt of lightning struck four pupils and a teacher at Mabobolo Primary School in Binga. One of the pupils died on admission at Kamativi Hospital while four others including the teacher were rushed to the same hospital with serious burns.

At Whawha Maximum Prison Complex in Gweru, at least 500 inmates and 150 families were left homeless after a hailstorm destroyed holding cells and staff accommodation. With the prison complex in darkness after a power outage caused by falling Zesa power lines, prison guards were kept on their toes at a high level of alertness to ensure that none of the inmates escapes. A health hazard is now looming for the prisoners, prison guards and their families because there is no water at the complex.

A source at the Binga school identified the deceased as Michael Phiri (10) whose father is a teacher at the school. "The injured are Garen Tagarira, Lucy Sibingo, Munemo Muleya and the teacher is Munyanyi Lunga (28)," said the source. The incident occurred at around 3PM in Chief Dobola's area in Binga west.

The five were struck while seated under a tree. Binga District Administrator Mrs Lydia Ndethi-Banda said the tragedy had shocked the district. "Currently I can't say much as I'm yet to meet the families. Yes, two of the children belong to staff in the school while the other two are from nearby homesteads," said Mrs Ndethi-Banda. "As the District Civil Protection Unit, we are with the families at this time of hardship. We'll assist with the burial of the boy," she said.

Strong winds and lightning which caused massive destruction were experienced in other parts of Matabeleland North on the same day.

In the Nkayi incident that happened at around the same time as the Binga strike, 15 pupils from Gwamayaya Primary School were stitched up in hospital after sustaining serious cuts from flying

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asbestos sheet debris.

Strong winds blew the sheets off a classroom block while the pupils were having a lesson. Nkayi District Administrator, Mr Mandlamakhulu Moyo, said: "Fifteen pupils were injured in Gwamayaya and three of them were taken to Gwelutshena Hospital while the other 12 who were seriously injured were rushed to Nkayi District Hospital. They received sutures on various parts of their bodies. The winds were very strong. We thank God no one died. As a district we pray for calm rains as we do not wish to experience more disasters this year."

In Nyamandlovu, Chief Deli told the *Chronicle* a man died last week after he was struck by lightning and two homesteads were burnt to ashes on Wednesday after they were struck too.

In January, six members of the same family miraculously cheated death after their home was reduced to ashes by a lightning bolt in Nkayi. They were thrown out of a kitchen hut as their bedroom hut also caught fire. Mr Mandlamakhulu said the family was left with only the clothes they were wearing when tragedy struck. The DA said at that time, the District Civil Protection Unit had a mandate of providing 12 families from Gwitshi area with tents as temporary shelter after their homes were destroyed last December by a storm. National police spokesperson Chief Superintendent Paul Nyathi could not be reached for comment on the latest Binga and Nkayi tragedies.

Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) public relations officer for Masvingo and the Midlands, Chief Prison Officer, Jere Ruzive, said roofs were blown off buildings at the staff quarters and holding cells. "I can confirm that 500 inmates and 150 families were left homeless or without a roof over their heads after their accommodation was destroyed by strong winds which accompanied heavy rains that we experienced on Thursday around 4PM. As we speak, we are making efforts to make sure that the prisoners have a roof over their heads since they slept outside last night. The families were quite safe as they sought accommodation elsewhere which prisoners can't do," he said. He said the vegetable gardens- the source of food for the prisoners were also destroyed.

The incident which also left a trail of destruction at Thornhill Air Base happened when a hailstorm characterised by strong winds left a trail of destruction along the Gweru- Mvuma road. Houses in the area were also destroyed amid indications that the people lost food and goods running into thousands of dollars. Vegetable gardens at the prison, a source of relish for the about 1 344 prisoners were destroyed as well on the same day. Fallen trees, uprooted power lines, debris which included broken asbestos sheets and pieces of bricks characterized were strewn all over the prison and along the Gweru- Mvuma road yesterday morning. At the prison, inmates were busy reconstructing the holding cells which proved to be a mammoth task because of unavailability of building material. Others were trying to fix the perimeter fence.