

Kinshasa power outages

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) -- A high-voltage power cable fell during a storm Wednesday and killed 26 people in Congo's capital of Kinshasa, most of them women working at a local market, authorities said.

Prime Minister Sama Lukonde said the victims at the Matadi Kibala market were electrocuted after the cable fell during bad weather. Authorities said 24 of the victims were women.

"We were crowded in a church in the square to wait for the rain to end. Suddenly, we saw a flame and we shouted 'Lord, protect us!'" said Charlene Twa, a local vendor. "When we went outside, all those who sell along this avenue were lying on the ground, lifeless."

Kinshasa's governor Gentiny Ngabila promised to pass new laws prohibiting "anarchic construction" in response to the tragedy. The government paid and arranged for the victims' funerals.

Twenty-six people were electrocuted on Wednesday when an overhead high-voltage cable fell into a drainage ditch at a market in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's capital Kinshasa, according to local authorities who provided a provisional toll.

"The cable snapped and the live end of it fell into a ditch that was filled with water after morning rain. At present, 26 people have died from electrocution," Charles Mbutamuntu, the spokesman for the Kinshasa provincial government, told AFP.

The Kinshasa tragedy occurred as news broke of a massacre in the troubled east of the country, in which at least 40 displaced people were killed late Tuesday by machete-wielding militiamen, according to a monitoring group and local sources.

At the popular Matadi-Kibala food market in the west of Kinshasa, "most of the people killed were traders and customers, and some passers-by," Mbutamuntu said. "The bodies are being taken to the morgue and an investigation has been opened to establish responsibility."

The Congolese presidency said on Twitter that "all light will be shed on the causes of this tragedy and those responsible will have to answer for it," adding that President Felix Tshisekedi had decided last month on "the rapid relocation of this market in view of the danger posed by its current location."

An official of the state-owned company told AFP that "the law prohibits building or setting up under high-voltage lines, but the land ministry had illegally issued permits covering these spaces regardless."



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Christelle Zindo, one of the traders, said: "Every time there's a drop of rain, the water doesn't drain away but overflows onto the market because the ditch is blocked, and all the traders have to work with their feet in the water."

She criticized "the total indifference of the authorities" to the problem. Electricity infrastructure in Democratic Republic of Congo is often poorly maintained.

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