

Tears, sighs at scene of Lagos collapsed building

Ambulance Services: 50 dead

By Kayode Aboyeji and Ayodeji Olatunji, Staff Reporters

AMID wailing and weeping, rescuers yesterday retrieved over 50 victims, several of them dead, from the rubble of the collapsed building in Ebute-Metta, Lagos Mainland.

Red Cross officials on the scene said no fewer than 14 people were killed, as of yesterday evening.

An official of Lagos State Ambulance Services (LAS-AMBUS), Mr Ani Baba, confirmed that more than 50 bodies recovered from the collapsed building had been deposited at the mortuaries in Gbagada, Ikeja and Lagos Island General Hospitals.

Mr Olubode Ojajuni, Lagos State Police spokesman, said about 42 persons

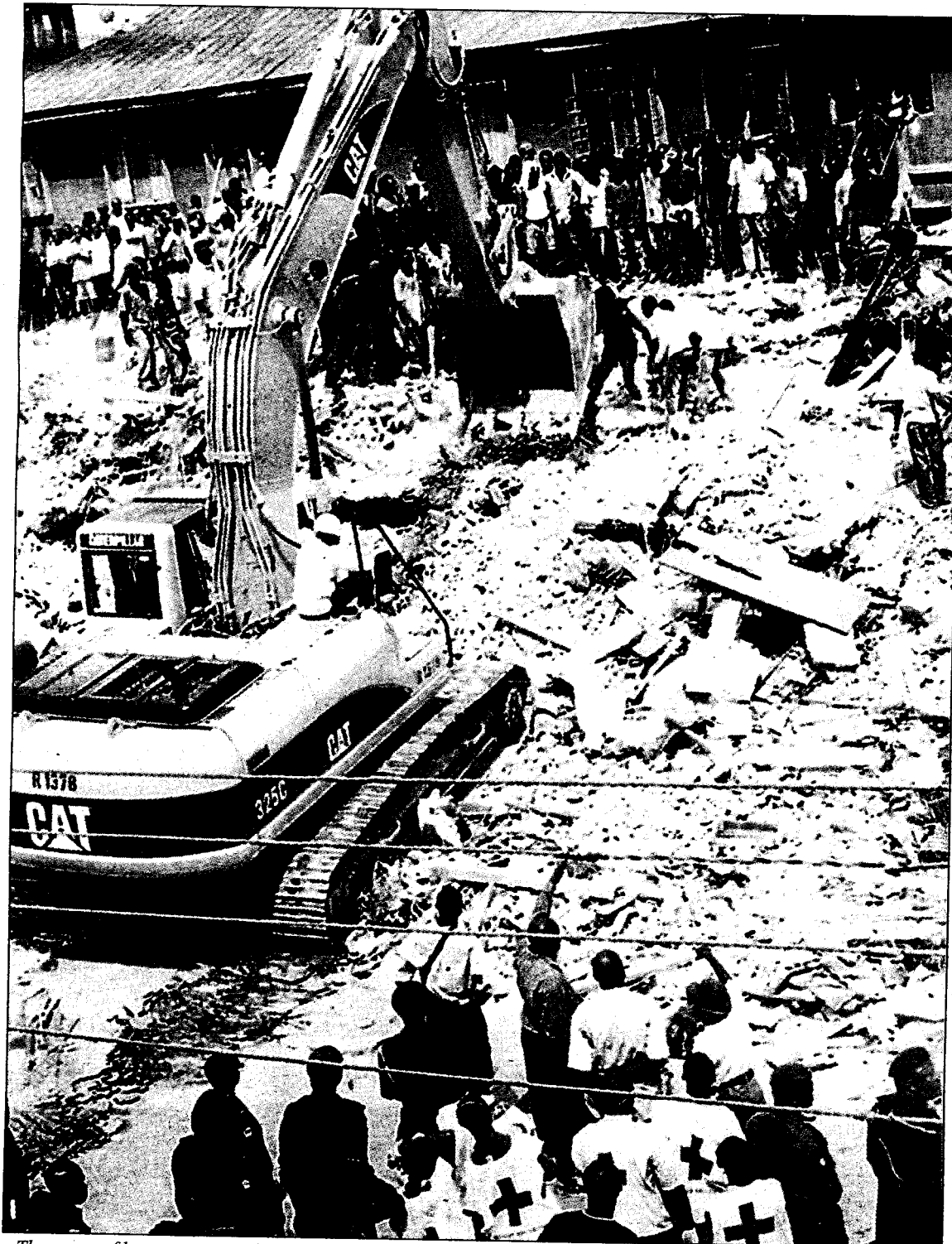
were rescued on Tuesday night. "Immediately the building

collapsed, the Divisional Police Officer in the area mobilised security agents to assist in the rescue exercise," Ojajuni said.

At the Kuba Clinic, Ebute-Metta, where some of the survivors were taken for treatment, a staff nurse, Mrs Racheal Ogungbemi, said that about 80 victims had been given free first aid treatment.

Scores of people were trapped overnight in the four-storey building on Ibadan Street. It collapsed suddenly Tuesday night.

Leading the army of sympathizers and rescuers was Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who mounted a caterpillar to address the crowd and direct the



• The scene of horror ... yesterday.

PHOTO: MOSES OMOSEHIN

Tinubu: 'You have done a great work. All the personnel are here. We will prosecute the developer; he cannot run away. We will also enact laws to punish those who don't comply with building standards'



• Governor Tinubu on the scene ... yesterday.
PHOTO: TUNDE OGUNDEJI

'I just called her now. She said the caterpillar was on her head. Please help me get her out. She must not die. Look at her clothes. She went to rescue one of her twins when she got trapped'

operations.

Sighs of relief punctuated the atmosphere of grief and wailing when an expectant

woman and two babies were pulled out and stretched to one of the about half a dozen Lagos State amb-

ulances waiting to convey victims to hospitals.

But the wailing resumed shortly after as another

expectant woman, her head smashed, was brought out.

"My God, what is happening here?" a shocked sym-

pathizer, who later identified herself as Mama Risi, asked no one in particular.

•Continued on page 2

COLLAPSE OF FOUR-STOREY BUILDING IN LAGOS

Tears, sighs at scene of Lagos collapsed building

•Continued from page 1

"Since I was born I've never seen anything like this happen," she added, wiping tears from her eyes with the edge of her dress.

Hassan, a brother-in-law of one of the trapped residents of the 25-room structure, Kafayat, broke down in tears and pointed to the direction of the ruined building where the victim was trapped.

He watched helplessly as a caterpillar combed the debris of the spot, seeking to remove bent iron rods and broken blocks under which the victims were buried.

"I just called her now. She said the caterpillar was on her head. Please, help me get her out. She must not die. Look at her clothes. She went to rescue one of her twins when she got trapped," Hassan said even as the hours passed without any success of the victim being rescued.

When *The Comet* called 08059322849, Kafayat's mobile telephone number obtained from Hassan, "not reachable".

But another call at 4:48pm, was replied. A younger brother of the victim, who identified himself as Monsuru, confirmed that his sister had been rescued and taken to the hospital.

He said Kafayat had been taken to the General Hospital as she was seriously injured. Her relatives were denied access to her in the hospital because "the doctors said she needed rest".

Besides Tinubu, others at the scene are: Mr Abolaji Abosede, Commissioner for



• Sympathisers at the scene.

PHOTO: SULAIMAN HUSAINI

Physical Planning and Urban Development, Mr Hakeem Gbajabamila, who was at the helm at the Physical Planning Ministry, Commissioner for Housing Mr Sulaiman Yussuf, General Manager, Physical Planning Development Authority and officials of the Red Cross.

A large contingent of mobile and regular policemen was on the scene.

Both Ibadan and Bola Streets, in which the two arms of the building were located, were jammed by sympathisers.

It was hectic for the police. Governor Tinubu pleaded with the surging crowd to

move away from the site, but many refused to leave. The entire neighbourhood was jammed as many watched the scene from windows and balconies of nearby houses.

The four-storey building, until Tuesday night, had 36 apartments' self-contained rooms and parlours.

When Tinubu arrived at the scene at 1.00pm, wearing a mournful look, the crowd shouted: "no more developer in Lagos!"

The Governor climbed a caterpillar from where he spoke to the people.

He praised the efforts of the residents in being the first line of help to trapped the victims immediately the incident occurred.

"You have done a great

work. All the personnel are here. We will prosecute the developer; he cannot run away. We will also enact laws to punish those who don't comply with building standards," he said.

The Governor urged the people not to obstruct the rescue team but to give enough space for easy passage of rescued victims.

He was thereafter led to two other buildings in the street. They were said to have been constructed by the same developer responsible for the collapsed building.

The buildings are a brown three-storey structure on 42, Ibadan Street and a green storey building on number 49.

The leader of the Red Cross team, Mr Ola Ige, said

that the manual labour used in the rescue effort resulted in the team's slow pace.

At about 12.05pm, a crane was driven to the scene.

As it set to work, three victims were brought out of the debris.

A fat man in his 30s was the cynosure of all eyes when his body was removed. His head was battered. His dark brown shirt was caked in dust and stained with blood. His lifeless body was taken away amid loud cries from the crowd.

Few minutes after, a baby was recovered. The head moved freely from left to right and back. Again, the crowd wailed.

The battle for survivors was still on as of press time last night.

COLLAPSED BUILDINGS IN LAGOS THIS YEAR

- Three-storey building housing a hospital at 53, Cemetery Road, Amukoko – January 20
- Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB) on Broad Street, Lagos – March 22
- Two-storey building located at 35, Zion Street Sari-Iganmu – May

Building Code will address quackery – Minister

By Toba Agboola

THE Minister for Housing and Urban Development, Dr. Segun Mimiko, yesterday spoke on the collapsed building.

He said that a National Building Code, which will spell out standards and structures as they relate to building is underway.

Speaking at the National Council on Housing Summit, in Kano, the Minister blamed the professionals in the building industry for the avoidable lapses which have led to quacks taking over their statutory functions, leading collapse of buildings.

"The problem is that professionals in the industry are not united with regard to a National Building Code. They have not put their house into order," he said.

He said one of the reasons

this code had been delayed is because those who are involved in the industry have not reacted consensus on its contents.

He said for persons

involved in building a house, their jobs have to be well-defined and established, pointing out that when the professionals in the industry collaborate and co-operate on their proper roles, there would not be a chance for quacks.

However, 38 other persons were also said to have been rescued alive.

Even as the command promised to arrest the developer.

Speaking with *The Comet*, command's spokesman Mr. Olubode Ojajuni, a deputy

AN undergraduate of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State was among the people still trapped inside the rubble of the collapsed building in Ebute-Meta, Lagos, as of press time.

Miss Nkechi Okafor was

visiting her friend, Chioma Ayadike, a resident in one of the houses on Bola Street when the building collapsed.

When she arrived on Tuesday evening, Chioma had taken her to a saloon located on the ground floor of house 71, Bola Street to dress her hair.

However, while the hair dressers were taking care of Nkechi's hair, Chioma rushed home to get something.

By the time she came back to the place minutes later, the building had caved-in, trapping her best friend.

Chioma who could not hold back tears, said: "I have killed my friend. If only

visiting her friend, Chioma Ayadike, a resident in one of the houses on Bola Street when the building collapsed.

When she arrived on Tuesday evening, Chioma had taken her to a saloon located on the ground floor of house 71, Bola Street to dress her hair.

However, while the hair dressers were taking care of Nkechi's hair, Chioma rushed home to get something.

By the time she came back to the place minutes later, the building had caved-in, trapping her best friend.

Chioma who could not hold back tears, said: "I have killed my friend. If only

I had known, I would not have taken her there to make her hair. Oh, God what is this that I have done?"

Chioma said since the incident occurred, she had been talking with her friend, who she confirmed was still alive.

"I have been in contact with her and she is still alive. The only thing she is complaining about is that the place where she is trapped is very dark," she said.

But as at the time *The Comet* was with her, Nkechi's number was no longer going through, an indication that the battery of the telephone may have gone down.

Police say three-year old, three others killed

More men will also be moved in to control the crowd so that rescue operation will not be hindered.

By Jude Isiguzo

superintendent said rescue effort is still on going and that Mobile Policemen have been moved to the Ebute-Meta to supervise rescue operations.

He said that those who had been rescued have

been rushed to the hospital.

On ground at the scene were Assistant

Commissioner of Police (ACP) Sam Adegbiyi, Commander, Area 'C' Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) Amos Marcus Iyadun, Commander PMF 20, Divisional Police Officer

(DPO) Denton Police Station and hundreds of Mobile and conventional policemen.

Ojajuni confirmed that more victims are still trapped in the debris and that rescue operation will continue amidst such odds like lack of equipment and inadequate lighting.

He noted that more men will also be moved in to control the crowd so that rescue operation will not be hindered.

COLLAPSE OF FOUR-STOREY BUILDING IN LAGOS



• One of the survivors ... yesterday.



• Another victim being taken away from the scene ... yesterday.



• An old woman survivor been taken to the hospital



• Sympathisers standing on the collapsed building. PHOTOS: TUNDE OGUNDEJI AND SULAIMAN HUSAINI

A RESIDENT fondly called Baba Ibeji (father of twins) escaped the tragedy because of his late arrival from work.

But his wife and a twin child were trapped. He told *The Comet* that he had not been too comfortable because of the way the building was built.

He said he had told the developer twice that the house was not well-built, noting that he had planned to leave the building this year.

"If I had heeded my mother's advice that I should move to her place at Amukoko, this would not have happened to me," he said.

A police officer, who pleaded not to be mentioned, said it would be exactly four years next month that he rented an apartment in the building.

He told *The Comet* that he secured the house for his family and because of the friends and relations that would be coming to visit him but that his family were presently at his official quarters in the barracks.

"Right from the time I came in, I knew that the building was not well built, I made some observation. In fact, I find it difficult to put any nail on the wall."

He said that whenever he called the attention of the developer to the seemingly weak structure, he always told him that the pillars were strong.

He said: "I paid N750,000 for

Mother, twin baby buried in rubble

four years to rent the house."

An eyewitness, Joseph Okolo who has been living in the area for over eight years, told *The Comet* that

the foundation of the building was not good.

Another resident, Gbenga Olaseni, said the building was initially a two-storey before the developer added two floors.

Misplaced aggression

YOUTHS hurled stones and other missiles at a team of rescue officials from construction giant, Julius Berger, which arrived the scene about 9.45 a.m.

Immediately the team got to the scene, the angry youths who had apparently been working all night to attempt to rescue the trapped victims, began to pour invectives on them.

The Julius Berger team comprised an expatriate (the obvious leader), a driver of a crane and three drivers of tipper lorries as well as about half a dozen orders described as engineers and technicians.

From pouring invectives, the youths degenerated to attacking the group with the missiles.

Their anger was that the team got to the scene late and should have come the previous night (when the building collapsed).

It took the efforts of the police to create a path through the crowd for the team to wade through and reach the rubble.

But Lagos State Commissioner for Physical

Planning and Urban Development, Mr Abosede explained to newsmen why, Julius Berger came yesterday.

He said his ministry contacted Julius Berger immediately the incident happened but because most of the firm's staff had closed for the day, they could not mobilise them.

He also said Governor Bola Tinubu had directed all doctors in government hospitals and other health workers to move to health centres to render 24 hours service.

On the way out of incidence of building collapse in Lagos, he said "we have been told that the developer has other buildings at other places and we are investigating that."

"We are putting a professional body, the architects, registered engineers, we are zoning Lagos into various sectors so that those professionals who are registered to practise will be in charge of supervision."

By Kayode Aboyeji

Survivor: God has intervened in my life

"I REMAIN grateful to God for sparing my life," said Miss Bimpe Etioloja, a survivor.

The light complexioned woman told *The Comet* that she was on the top floor watching a movie when the building collapsed.

In her words: "To ease boredom, I reluctantly went to a neighbour who resided at the top floor to collect a movie. Instead of giving me the movie, he persuaded me to stay and watch the film. It was during the course of watching the movie tape that I first heard noises that the building was falling."

She explained that before she could gather herself and make for safety, a large section of the room in which she was, gave way and got covered in thick dust and debris.

"I was paralysed by the noise of the building as it crumbled. This, added to the cry of onlookers, further terrified me even though I noticed that I could still breathe

By Dele Adeyanju

and move certain parts of my body," she said.

Bimpe's escape remained a study in divine providence and sheer luck. "I did not want to go upstairs but I just went there so as not to appear proud or full of myself in response to a neighbour's invitation. Now I wonder if I could have made it alive if I had remained in my room which was located on the ground floor," she said as tears flowed from her swollen and reddish eyes.

She further told *The Comet* that her plea for help went unnoticed for about 25 minutes before help came. Luckily for her, rescuers found a small opening which formed a semi-crater not too far from where she was trapped and pulled her out by drawing her hair weave-on.

She said that what happened was not only very fast but dramatic.

Still in a state of shock and pain due to injuries sustained, Bimpe feared that so many

people may have lost their lives and thanked God she made it out alive.

"I want to be henceforth called Temitope Kokumo because God has personally intervened in my life and I wonder how much I could give Him in return," she said.

Another survivor, 28-year-old Miss Celestina Agbe, described her escape as an act of God, saying: "I was inside the house when I heard a loud shout and I came out to find out the cause and that was all I could remember."

Another victim, Mr Kehinde Owodein, who owns a store in the building, explained that he had already closed for the day and went back to pick his cassette when suddenly the building came down.

The Chairman, Lagos State Red Cross, Mr Timothy Oladele, disclosed that an accountant with the Red Cross was among several people still trapped, adding that his wife and two children had already been rescued.