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PDP boss, son, 2 aides die in car crashVINCENT ADEKOYE, *Senior Correspondent Benin*

Edo State chapter of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has been thrown into mourning following the death of its chairman, Mr. Samson Ekhabafe, in a motor accident. He was 64 years.

Also dead in the accident which involved Ekhabafe's jeep and a tanker were his 25-year-old son, Ighodaro, a legal practitioner, his police orderly, as well as his driver. The fatal crash took place at the Ewu Monastery junction on the Benin-Auchi road.

The bad spot which has remained in a bad shape for three years, has claimed several lives in recent times.

According to an eye-witness who pleaded anonymity, the PDP chairman's vehicle went up in flames soon after the collision with the tanker trapping in the occupants who were roasted to death. The unfortunate incident took place last Sunday. The late Ekhabafe was a former Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice under the Lucky Igbinedion administration.

The deceased's remain were reportedly buried in a shallow grave near the scene of the incident, have been burnt beyond recognition.

Until his death, Ekhabafe was a member of the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA).

The news of the tragedy which spread across Benin, the state capital, yesterday forced the State House of Assembly to adjourn abruptly. Lamenting the death, the lawmakers threatened to block the Benin-Auchi road to avert further loss of lives.

It would be recalled that seven persons were reportedly roasted to death in another accident that occurred on Sunday evening on the road.

Zonal Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission in Benin, Mr. Zakari Nda, who confirmed the accident in a telephone interview with *Daily Champion* confirmed that the victims were burnt beyond recognition.

Sources said that the accident involved a petroleum tanker, a jeep, a Toyota Hilux van and a motor bike.

The family and political associates of the late PDP leader did not immediately know that he was involved in the accident.

Daily Champion learnt yesterday that he was on his way from his village, Uneme, Akoko Edo Local Government Area of Edo State when the accident occurred.

It was learnt that his family was informed about the accident on Tuesday. They had thought that he was still in the village but had to organize a search party after they got information that he had left for Benin City last weekend.

A source at the FRSC later informed the family that occupants of the vehicle were burnt beyond recognition in the accident and that they were immediately given a mass burial in a shallow grave dug near the scene of the incident since they could not be identified.

Speaking with *Daily Champion* on the incident, Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, Mr. Zakawanu Garuba, lamented the loss of lives on the Benin-Auchi road describing the federal road as a real death trap.

"It is painful and sad that Chief Ekhabafe died in such a painful way. We in the Edo State House of Assembly had cried and taken several steps to draw the attention of the Federal Government to the state of the road and the need to urgently repair it.

Just last Monday, we moved a motion and summoned the Edo State Controller of Works, Edo State Commissioner for Works and the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA) to address the situation.

Countryman

"We are not happy with the magnitude of loss in terms of human and material on that road and that was why we decided to take drastic step to rectify the situation.

"Sadly, you can see what has happened on that road again now. Well the matter is simple, if the Federal Government decides not to repair the road and loss of human lives continue, we shall not hesitate to block the entire road so that travelers including those moving from the Eastern part of the country to the North, those going to the Niger Delta and even those going to the West, will look for other roads to follow.

"We are saying enough is enough to waste of human lives on that road." Garuba said.

Daily Champion gathered that the leadership of the PDP in the state had sent some persons to the site of the shallow grave to see the possibility of exhuming the remains of the late PDP chairman, his son and the other two other deceased to accord them proper burial.

Reacting to the tragedy, a chieftain of the party, Mr. Akhere Ugbesia, described the death of Mr. Ekhabafe as painful and sad.

He called on the Federal Government to repair the road.

In his reaction, a member of the House of Representatives, Mr. Johnson Abolagba, said it was a lesson to the Federal Government adding that it could happen to anybody.

Edo State Commissioner for information, Mr. Abdul Oroh, said it was a loss to the entire people of the state.

It would be recalled that no fewer than 120 persons have so far died on the road in the past few months.

Prominent among them were the former Chief Press Secretary to Governor Adams Oshiomhole, Mr. Chris Nwanchukwu, his Personal Assistant, late Mr. Greg Haruna, Branch Manager of the Akoko Edo branch of the Bank PHB late Mr. John Adumasa, 93 passengers the ill-fated Aba bound Luxury buss and several others.

The late Chief Ekhabafe became chairman of the Edo PDP after the harmonization of the two factions of the party in the state.

He was a Commissioner for Water and Energy under the administration of Professor Oserhiemen Osunbor.

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