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Friday, November 21, 2008

A plunge unto death ...off Third Mainland Bridge

By *Bertram Nwannekanma*

FOR the second time in less than two years, Lagosians yesterday received the tragic news of a blue Volkswagen Jetta car with Registration Number, Lagos, PJ 132KJ, which plunged into the Lagos lagoon at the Third Mainland Bridge on Monday evening, killing the two occupants.

Though the incident was not known until Wednesday, when search and rescue operations intensified and the identities of the occupants became known, many Lagosians had been anxious, afraid of the possible huge loss of lives that follow any accident in the Bridge.

The victims were the driver, Anthony Sunday, who hailed from Kwande Local Council of Benue State and Mr. Edward Unaji.

Only Unaji's body had been recovered by yesterday.

The driver Sunday, a worker at Westcom, a company located at Ogun Street in Osborne Estate, Lagos, lived with his family at No. 13, Ilaje Street, Ajah, Lagos.

A call from the company to the family, who had not seen their breadwinner for two days before the search started, brought the terrible

The incident brought back memories of the shock at about 10.00a.m. on February 8, 2007, when a commuter bus popularly called molue heading to Obalende, plunged into the lagoon, killing two people among whom was a pregnant woman.

The driver of the bus was reported to have lost control and the vehicle hit the aluminum railing of the bridge,

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hanging precariously on the railing, its human contents tumbling into the lagoon.

Apart from the two persons confirmed dead, many others sustained injuries.

The molue marked XD 333 APP was coming from Oshodi and it was said to have lost control due to over-speeding. The gravity with which the bus hit the bridge caused a part of the vehicle to tear off completely from the main body, making it possible for passengers to fall into the lagoon.

Unlike the molue, which was coming from Oshodi, the Jetta car that hit the railing and plunged into the lagoon, on Monday was coming from the Ebute Metta end of the Bridge.

At about 10.00a.m. yesterday, hundreds of sympathizers thronged the scene.

That nobody knew about it four days after, was still a mystery to the sympathisers as well as local fishermen whose effort led to the eventual recovery of the car.

According to an eye witness, Chief Abraham Mesu from Iwaya in the Mainland Local Council, Yaba: " We did not know that a car had plunged into the lagoon till Wednesday at about 8.00 a.m."

The local fishermen, using two sand trawlers, pulled out the vehicle.

A Police traffic officer, Mr. Tony Akigbola, said the vehicle might have been on top speed.

"The accident happened at the Ebute Metta end of the Bridge.

The body of the driver was yet to be recovered.

" We will wait to get his body and do autopsy before we can determine much else.

" There are indications that the accident happened at night. His kinsmen are here and they are expecting that his body would be found," he added.

But a local fisherman, who gave his name as Akin, said they were still searching.

Sunday's Idoma kinsmen, who gathered at the scene, said they were yet to come with terms of the incident.

One of them, Raymond, described the incident as ugly,

saying the late Sunday's wife just delivered a baby.

At the scene of the incident were also officials of the Lagos State Ambulance Emergency Services, who took the recovered body to the mortuary in Lagos Island, officials of the National Civil Defense and Security Corps, (NCDSC), the police and officials of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA).

Meanwhile, a private investigator with The Force Headquarters, Lagos, on private investigation, Mr. Kelechi Ekezie, regretted the low level of the nation's response to emergency.

He said it was a pity that rescue operations started four days after the incident, which did not leave any hope for any survivor.

He called on government to improve on emergency and accident response capacity as well as ensure constant patrols at accident-prone areas in the state.

An onlooker, Mrs. Jumoke Aina, who was obviously touched by the incident remembered, "When it happened last year, people lost their lives and many more were injured.

"Lagos motorists should reduce their speed, especially on the top of the bridge," she advised.

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