



THE METROSECTION

Fiery fire kills mother, sons

• A woman, her two sons die as suspected electrical power-surge sets home ablaze



• The late Kaffo

A FEW days before last Thursday, when Nigeria celebrated her 49th Independence Anniversary, Mrs. Shakirat Abike Kaffo had marked her 50th birthday.

The good feelings at celebrating Golden Jubilee still filled her heart as she joined other Nigerians to mark the nation's anniversary.

The mood in her two-storey building at Asiri Cover Street, off Adetola Street, Aguda, Surulere Lagos, was joyous.

Her younger sister, Ranti, was on a visit and her two children, who loved their aunt so much, were happy to have her around.

The woman had reasons to be grateful to God and to be happy.

One or two things notwithstanding, she had turned 50 by the grace of God, had her two lovely children, owned the house she lived in and was in good health.

Though from time to time, she had been heard expressing dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Nigeria, she always believed there was hope as long as there was life.

She always said: "After all, it is only those who are alive that can complain and also do something to make the country better."

Now she cannot complain again, or can she hope to ever contributing to improve the state of affairs in the country.

Her younger sister, Ranti, who was with Mrs. Kaffo and her children that Thursday told *The Guardian* she could still remember vividly her last visit and some of the events of the day.

She said she was chatting with Eniola, her sister's first son, who was in his 20s, who told her he wanted to leave the house and join his friends in the Independence Anniversary merry-making.

Ranti said she, however, insisted that he finished washing the clothes he was engaged in before he would be allowed to step out of the house.

Ranti also remembered that Lanre, her younger cousin, took sides with his older brother, Eniola, asking her to let him go out and meet his friends.

While the exchange went on between Ranti and her cousins, Mrs. Kaffo, who was busy watching television, did not pay much attention to them, but would, from time to time, ask Ranti not to bother herself



• The burnt house

By Seye Olumide

with the children, that she should give herself some peace of mind and allow the boys to do whatever they wanted, provided they returned to the house before it was late.

A couple of times, she would turn to Ranti and say: "You don't seem to have something important doing, else you would not allow these boys to trouble you."

As evening approached, Ranti left and promised to pay another visit to the family either on Sunday or Monday while Eniola and Lanre jokingly told her not to bother coming unless she was sure she would bring them presents.

Ranti visited as she promised, but in very different circumstances.

She went there, not to take presents to her sister and cousins as she had promised but to grieve and mourn. Mrs. Kaffo, Eniola and Lanre were burnt to death at about 3.00 a.m. that Monday when an excessive surge of power from Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) caused a fire outbreak, which engulfed the second floor in which, mother and sons died.

Speaking to *The Guardian* about the tragedy, Ranti said she could not believe it when someone called to inform her that her sister and her children were burnt to death in their flat.

"Though I was hoping to visit them as I promised, the call was devastating. I could not believe it and I quickly ran to the house and what I saw was shocking.

"I saw the body of my sister completely burnt on the bed she slept. Eniola was roasted in a standing position where he was trying to force the gate open, while the body of Lanre was found in one corner of the house. Could these have been the family I visited a few days ago?" she asked.

An eyewitness to the disaster said the inferno started at about 3.00 a.m. on Monday.

"There had been power outage in the area that night until when PHCN brought very high current.

There was an explosion and then the fire, which engulfed the floor the woman and her sons slept.

"We all came out to assist when they started shouting for help.

But all the entrances to the house had been barricad-

ed with iron gates and none of them in the flat knew where the keys were.

Eniola and his brother Lanre were running in and out of the rooms in the flat, looking for the keys as the fire kept raging while sympathizers tried whatever they could to force the gates open, but were unable to gain entrance to the flat.

"For a long time, the situation remained same as we all ran helter-skelter looking for any means to rescue the family.

"But all our efforts were in vain as the fire engulfed the entire flat and burnt the woman and her sons to death."

Another eyewitness, Kazeem, a security man in the neighborhood, said nobody could actually say why the fire was so severe as the victims kept her generating set and fuel on the ground floor.

He also said efforts were made to call the Fire and Emergency Service, "but before they arrived, the harm had been done, though the fire did not spread beyond the second floor.

He, however, blamed the death of the woman and her sons on the barricaded gates, saying: "Probably, they would have been rescued but for the gates that were locked and the keys which they could not find.

The two young men were shouting and struggling to come out but they could not force the gate open and I guess, they must have forgotten where they kept the keys.

"I felt so much pity for Eniola who was shouting frantically and struggling with the iron gate where the fire caught and burnt him. He was roasted to death while standing, his two hands gripping the iron bars."

Several sympathizers who came to the scene described Mrs. Kaffo as "a very kind woman who took great pains to satisfy her neighbours, friends and relations or others."

A grieving Ranti said she would miss her sister and her cousins very much.

A Moslem cleric said: "It was unfortunate that such a devoted and generous woman should die such a painful death with her two children.

"Mrs. Kaffo was always in support of whatever we wanted to do. She was so dedicated and God fearing", he added.