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Three die ahead of NAFEST 2009

From John Ogiji, Minna

BARELY 24 hours to the commencement of this year's National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) to be hosted by Niger State, two labourers have been electrocuted during renovation work on the state secretariat in Minna.

Also, a woman politician, Hajiya Maryam Yunusa, whom The Guardian gathered was a special assistant to the governor on Women Mobilisation slumped and died at the governor's residence while attending a meeting preparatory to the visit of the first lady, Hajiya Turai Yar'Adua, who was expected declare the festival open in Minna yesterday.

The two labourers, Ibrahim Alabo and one other (name withheld), were said to have been electrocuted at the Abdulkareem Lafene Secretariat. While Alabo died on the spot, the second victim was said to have died at a private hospital in Minna, where he was rushed to for medical attention.

It was gathered that the two met their untimely death when the iron ladder they were using to paint the secretariat suddenly touched a high tension wire. The renovation and repainting of the secretariat was part of preparations for the official opening of NAFEST.

Efforts made to quickly rush the victims to the hospital, it was learnt, failed as there was no vehicle to convey them. The situation was further compounded as none of the official or private cars parked within the premises could volunteer to assist the victims until fellow labourers solicited the services of a commercial motorcyclist.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, Niger State Command, Mr. Richard Oguche, confirmed the incident. Oguche said that Alabo was electrocuted as the iron ladder he was using for the painting work touched a naked wire, adding that the second victim sustained injury in the process of attempting to save Alabo's life and was rushed to the hospital for treatment.

The contractor handling the project, while speaking in an interview with The Guardian, lamented the incident, which he described as very unfortunate. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the contractor urged the deceased families to see the development as an act of God, while promising to assist them.

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