

# Five killed, 14 injured as fire guts vessel

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NO FEWER than five persons have been confirmed dead when a commercial vessel, M. T. Rocky, caught fire at a spot along Calabar River channel, near Marina jetty during a welding activity on the vessel.

This is as a four-storey building located in the high-brow Tinubu Square area of Lagos on Monday collapsed trapping the occupants and traders who use it for their businesses.

The fire, which occurred at the weekend, also resulted in at least 14 persons sustaining serious injuries.

The State Police Public Relations Officer, Etim Dickson, who confirmed the incident on Monday evening, said the police have been informed of it.

## • Scores trapped as Lagos building collapses

Dickson said five persons died, while the injured persons had been taken to the Naval Clinic and the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH) for treatment.

"The vessel was carrying out some maintenance job when the fire occurred and some people died.

"So far, they have recovered five corpses and some people with various degrees of injury rescued", Dickson said.

Eyewitnesses' account had it that the casualty rate would have been higher but for the swift intervention of the Navy and Fire Service personnel, more so as the incident occurred near some Naval gunboats.

Naval spokesman, Navy

Captain Adekunle Okeniyi, confirmed the incident, blaming it on carelessness of the vessel crew who embarked on welding while carrying petroleum products.

A source within the ship, however, maintained that there was no petroleum products in the vessel, stressing that those who died were victims of hysteria as they panicked, jumped into the river out of fear and got drowned.

The building on 24 Alli Street, off Tinubu Street, Lagos collapsed at about 5.15 p.m., when the occupants suddenly heard a deafening sound that reduced the massive structure to rubbles.

Speaking to *Daily Independent* at the site of the tragedy

an occupant, named Akin who occupies the fourth floor and escaped the mishap, said the building, which was developed by a developer 14 years ago, did not show any sign of structural defects.

According to him, the building had been marked by the Lagos State government for demolition, adding that the owner had just retrieved it from the developers who collected rent for 15 years and had been assuring them of plans to rehabilitate the house.

An eye witness, living in the neighbourhood urged the Lagos State government to constitute a task force to appraise most of the recently built houses in the Island to ascertain their structural level.

Meanwhile, the Lagos State Commissioner of Physical Planning and Urban Development, Francisco Abosede, said Messrs Julius Berger Plc had been contacted to release the cranes and other heavy equipment needed for rescue operations to officials of the Lagos State Emergency Management Authority.

Amid commotion caused by the collapse street, urchins, popularly known as 'Area Boys', were seen carrying out rescue work to save the people trapped in the debris of the building.

As at the time of filing this report, over 14 occupants had been rescued, including an aged woman identified as Mama Iyabo, and children who were immediately rushed to the hospital by LASEMBUS ambulances on standby in the area.

Babangida, Atiku, others for INL book presentation

