

Three feared dead in building accident

THREE persons were feared dead yesterday following an accident at an eight-story building under construction on Ogunu Road in Warri, Delta State.

It was learnt over 30 persons sustained injuries.

Sources at the Warri Central Hospital and Lily Clinic in Warri, where the victims were rushed to, said one person died at each hospital.

Unconfirmed reports also said one of the victims died at the accident scene.

A source at the Lily Clinic on Etuwewe Street, Warri, said "one of the victims, a young man who was brought in injured, died at about 3:20 pm. Scores of other victims sustained life-threatening wounds, including multiple fractures, broken spines and head/skull injuries among others."

Others, according to him, were taken to the University of Benin Teaching Hospital in Edo State.

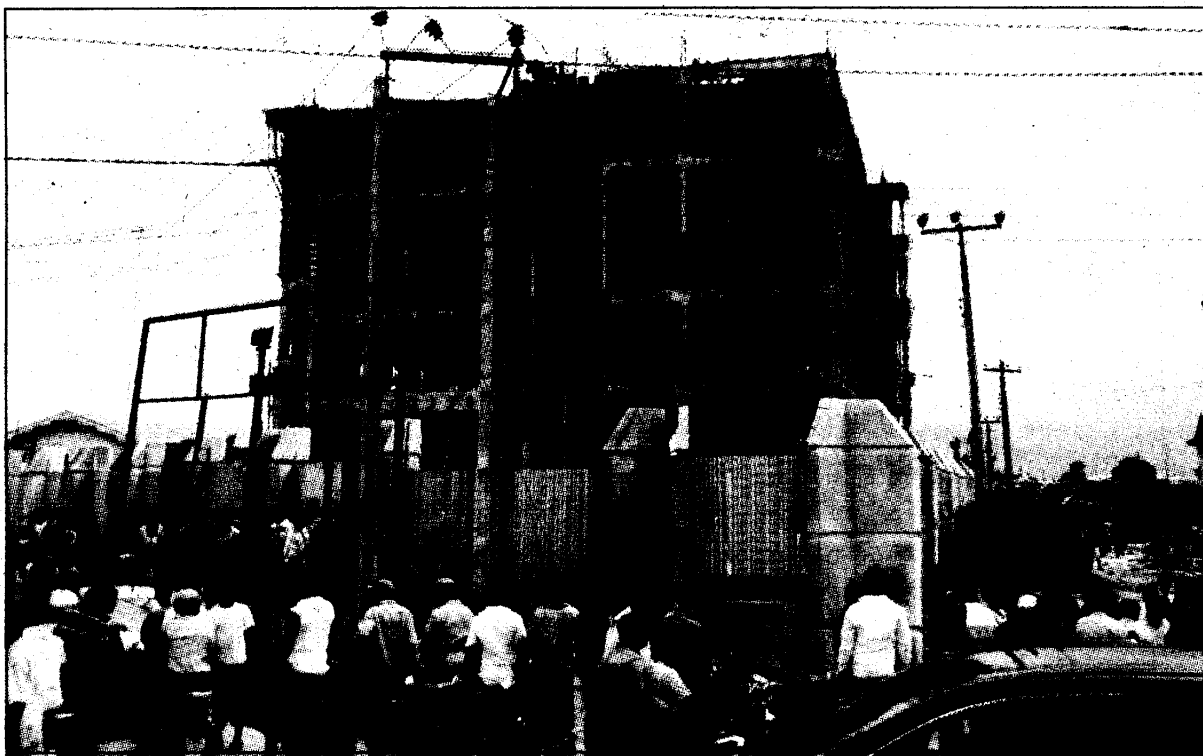
The incident occurred at the site, owned by businessman and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain, Mr. Ayirimi Emami, when a wooden scaffold gave way at the fifth floor.

An eyewitness said most of the victims fell 100 metres from the fifth floor.

Emami, who visited shortly after, said the building was earmarked for his pet project, 911.

He said he awarded the contract to a competent firm and a COREN (Council for the Regulation of Engineers in Nigeria) certified engineer.

Responding to a question, he said: "I do not have anything to say right now because I have not spoken to the engineer on the site when the accident occurred. But it is instructive to note that it was not the building that collapsed, it was just the scaffold that caused this ac-



The crowd in front of the building... yesterday

From Shola O'Neill, Warri

cident.

"You can go and find out, this building was duly approved and it is being handled by a qualified engineer registered by COREN. It is unfortunate that this accident occurred today, but I will have to find out the details before I can speak",

he said.

Divisional Police Officer, 'A' Division, Mr. Okong Effiong, a Chief Superintendent of Police, confirmed the incident.

A doctor at the Warri Central Hospital, Dr. Paul Okubo, did not confirm the death toll, which sources say could be more than three.

The incident caused panic yesterday

around the Shell Contractors' Gate linking the Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA) bypass as it was initially thought the entire building collapsed.

Hundreds of persons were milling around when *The Nation* visited.

There was a huge traffic build-up on the busy Ogunu-Ajamimogha Road yesterday.

Gunmen kill two in Rivers

•Two kidnap victims rescued

GUNMEN on Tuesday night in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, shot and killed two persons, including a 23-year-old woman, Veronica Bassey Akpan.

It was learnt the woman would have been 24 on Sunday.

The young man, identified as Cyril, and the woman were killed at Mile Three, Diobu, in Port Harcourt.

Men of the State Police Command yesterday rescued Mrs. Peace Ekwunife and Mr. Frank Rufus, who were kidnapped at Egbelu in Oyigbo Local Government Area around 6:20 pm on Tuesday.

Police sources said the victims were rescued at the Petrochem Pipeline Forest at Oyigbo around 2:30 am.

It was learnt their Mercedes Benz 190 car was recovered.

The police also intercepted a Toyota Hiace bus, with registration No: 1RVSG1708, belonging to Government Technical College, Port Harcourt, in front of the Npolu Police Station,

From Bisi Olaniyi, Port Harcourt

near the main gate of the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST).

Sources said the bus was snatched at gun point at Akpajo-Elleme, near Port Harcourt around 8 pm on Tuesday.

Three men in the bus were arrested with two pistols.

Police said the suspects were injured while trying to escape.

State police spokesperson, Mrs. Rita Inoma-Abbey, said she has no details of the murder of Cyril and Miss Akpan.

She, however, confirmed the other incidents.

The *Nation* learnt that the woman was going to buy drugs at a nearby pharmacy on Ovim Lane, off Azikiwe Street, around 9:30 pm on Tuesday, when Cyril engaged her in a conversation.

Cyril, who lived next door to Miss Akpan, was unaware he was being trailed by the gunmen, who were in a Toyota Camry car.



•Uduaghan

DELTA State Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan has urged the new Secretary to the State Government (SSG) to be avoided being distracted by politicians.

Uduaghan spoke at the swearing-in ceremony of Dr. Beatrice Omeni in Asaba, yes-

Uduaghan swears in SSG

terday.

The position of SSG is strategic and central in achieving the three-point agenda of his administration.

He said her appointment was on merit and a reward for hard work.

The governor said Mrs. Omeni, a retired permanent secretary, "was of great assistance to me as my Executive Assistant and was, therefore, the natural choice when the position of SSG became vacant."

He said the choice is strategic because he needs somebody to "watch over the government and avoid leakages" while he is in the field politicking.

He called on the SSG to handle issues with calmness,

level-headedness and the diligence and honour her office demands.

"Try and remain on the part of truth and honour, be diligent and calm and let God direct you," he said.

Uduaghan praised former SSG, Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa, for his contributions to the administration.

The governor said he accepted the former SSG's decision to further his political ambition.

Dr. Omeni promised not to betray the trust placed on her.

She expressed appreciation to the governor for finding her worthy for the position.

She is the first female secretary to the state government since Delta State was created.

House clears Akpabio's nominees

From Iniobong Ekponta, Uyo

from Oruk Anam Local Government Area.

Mbe and Okon are slated for commissioners, while Udom is expected to be named as Special Adviser.

The *Nation* learnt that Mbe, who had earlier nursed ambition for the House of Representatives would replace his kinsman, Mr. Saviour Udoh, who is quitting as Special

Adviser to Akpabio on Cooperative Matters.

Okon would replace the Commissioner for Agriculture, Prof. Etok Ekanem.

Ekanem is quitting to seek election into the House of Representatives.

Udom would replace Comrade Udo Kirian Akpan, the Special Adviser to Akpabio on Labour and Productivity, who is quitting to vie for the House of Assembly slot.

Union chief suspended for 'fraud' in Rivers

From Bisi Olaniyi, Port Harcourt

THE Chairman of Rivers State Civil Service Union, Mr. Opuoyibo Lilly-West, was yesterday suspended indefinitely for allegedly embezzling the union's N5 million.

Lilly-West was also accused of violating the union's constitution.

The new Chairman, Mr. Gbagia Kogbara, told reporters in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, that Lilly-West was suspended after a vote-of-no-confidence was passed on him.

Kogbara warned the public not to relate with Lilly-West.

Another union's executive, Mr. ThankGod Olalemi, said Lilly-West was suspended for abusing the constitution.

The suspended chairman condemned the action of the "few disgruntled" members.

Lilly-West accused the executive of conniving with non-members to plot his removal, saying he remains the chairman of the union.

Oshiomhole congratulates Mandela

GOVERNOR Adams Oshiomhole has congratulated former President of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Mandela who was 92 on Sunday.

Oshiomhole said "we felicitate with you as you celebrate another year on earth."

"We remember the great personal sacrifices you made, serving 27 years in prison, just to ensure that your people are freed from the shackles of apartheid."

"Besides, you showed South African politicians, nay, African politicians, the way when you served your people for only one term from 1994 to 1999..."

"While we rejoice with you, Madiba, we pray that God will further elongate your life so that many of us may continue to drink from your fountain of knowledge."

N36b fibre optic firm takes off

By Miriam Ndikanwu

LAGOS State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola, and the Cross River State Governor, Mr. Liyel Imoke, have stressed the need for telecoms firms to inform government of their plans to avoid destruction of infrastructure.

They spoke yesterday at the launch of the N36 billion MainOne, first Africa fibre optic cables.

Fashola frowned at the destruction of infrastructure by telecoms firms while laying cables.

Imoke said the technology would change business and technology in Nigeria and Africa.

Chairman of the company, Mr. Fola Adeola, said fibre optic cable technology is expected to revolutionise Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Africa and Nigeria.

Youth leader alerts JTF of tricks by illegal 'bunkerers'

AFORMER Chairman of oil-rich Forcados in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State, Mr. Futek Zikoregha, yesterday alerted the Joint Task Force (JTF) and the Nigerian Navy in the Niger Delta of new tricks by criminals to steal oil in the region.

Zikoregha told *The Nation* in Warri, that illegal 'bunkering' kingpins have shifted

From Shola O'Neill, Warri operations to offshore facilities, where they target pipelines and well-heads close to the entry point of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Ijaw youth leader accused some officers and men of the JTF and Nigerian Navy of aiding and abetting criminals in the waterways.

He said: "Look, this thing involves everybody; let the

Nigerian Navy be up and doing in its constitutional responsibilities. Now, the 'bunkerers' have moved their operations to the high seas; Togo Triangle is now their major delivery point. Is the Navy saying it is not aware of this? Why then has no arrests been made?"

"What is happening now is just camouflage; you see military houseboats at various

points on the waterways, they are just collection points, they do not do anything about illegal 'bunkering'. Soldiers deployed here only collect their share and allow the operation to continue."

"The only thing that they have done is to ensure that it is not as open as it used to be. Now, illegal refineries are booming; the people are refining because soldiers are in-

involved," he said.

Zikoregha praised former Commander of the JTF, Brig. General Wuyep Rintip, in the fight against illegal 'bunkering'.

Zikoregha threatened to sue the Federal Government and oil multinationals including Shell, Chevron and Mobil, over their alleged refusal to take address attacks on oil installations.