

Road crash claims seven Customs officers

By Jude Isiguzo, Crime Correspondent

OFFICERS of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) attached to Ports Terminal Multiservices Limited (PTML), Tin Can and Seme Boarder Commands, have blamed the service's leadership for the death of seven of their colleagues.

The officers died in an accident at Shagamu, Ogun State on their way to NCS headquarters in Abuja, following an alleged emergency summon by the Assistant Comptroller General (ACG) in charge of Enforcement and Drugs. It was gathered that the signal for the trip was sent around 4pm that fateful Thursday.

The Nation's investigation revealed that the ACG invited all officers from the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Customs (DSC) and below, attached the Examination Department, to Abuja for a parade.

Sources told *The Nation* that the officers immediately chartered a bus to convey them to Abuja. It was learnt that at Shagamu, the bus rammed into a stationary truck and killed the occupants.

Some officers who spoke with *The Nation* under the condition of anonymity said the deceased were "wasted" because the pur-

pose of their journey could be resolved without leaving their base.

According to them, an officer in the Examination Department at Tin Can Ports, last month, released a container, whose content was registered as toys but was later discovered to be carrying contraband wine.

They maintained that the headquarters could have leveraged on the NCS computer network to fish out the officers involved in the scam.

"They did not need to summon all of us to Abuja over such issue. Now they have caused the death of these officers over nothing", an officer said.

Some other officers said the NCS wanted to pick officers for the new National Task Force that would soon be formed.

"If it is the National Task Force, they would have asked our Comptrollers to submit names of officers. Must we travel to Abuja for everything? Did they give us any money to facilitate our movement and stay in Abuja? Now, these officers have died; that was their

end. Nobody is going to say anything about them again. The families they left behind will now begin to suffer", another officer said.

Reacting to the incident and the allegations, Mr Steve Okoma, a Superintendent of Customs (SC) and the Public Relations Officer of PTML Command, said the headquarters had the right to summon any officer when the need arises.

He added that the signal that ordered the officers to Abuja came on Tuesday and not Thursday, adding that there were other officers who travelled by road and still got to Abuja safely.

Grandmother, 72, son die in Ibadan fire

From Oseheye Okwuofu, Ibadan

The only survivor in the incident, 13-year-old Latifat Ajasa, was said to have been rescued by neighbours and taken to Emiloju Hospital, Agbatomi, Teachers' Quarters, Omi-Adio, Ibadan.

When *The Nation* visited the hospital yesterday, Latifat was wrapped with bandage, but she was said to be responding well to treatment.

A nurse, Mr Olarewaju Opeyemi, said Latifat was brought to the hospital around midnight with severe burns on her legs, face and other parts of her

body.

Her two-room apartment where fire was said to have started was razed down. The cause of the fire is still unknown.

Mrs Ajasa who was yet to recover from psychological trauma was weeping uncontrollably over her loss.

The woman's landlord, Pa Amusa Okegbemi, who narrowly escaped death, was rescued by neighbours after his door was forced open.

"I heard a strange sound from the main parlour; then I decided to check the corridor and I discovered that everywhere was filled with smoke and flames. I cried for help before the door was forced open and I was rescued by neighbours," he recalled.