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A plane carrying 20 people and the body of former Ondo State Governor Olusegun Agagu crashed yesterday shortly after take-off from the domestic wing of the Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos.

The chartered Embraer 120 marked 5NBJY, belonging to Associated Aitlines Limited, was heading for Akure, the Ondo State capital for the final leg of the funeral rites for the ex-governor. Agagu died in Lagos on September 13. Thirteen people, including the Ondo State Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Mr. Deji Falae, died in the crash. There were seven survivors.

Deji was the son of Chief Olu Falae, an Akure chief, an elder statesman, a former Secretary to the Federal Government, one-time Finance Minister and presidential candidate in the 1999 general election.

Feyi, son of the late Agagu, who was also accompanying the body, survived the crash. He is hospitalised.

The aircraft crashed on an open space near the fuel storage depot within the airport complex. It burst into

The Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB) confirmed that 20 passengers, including seven crew members, were on board the ill-fated aircraft.

According to the commissioner of AIB, Captain Usman Mukther, six survivors were rescued from the aircraft.

Captain Mukthar spoke to reporters at the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Annex at the airport. He said investigations had begun into the cause of the crash.

The aircraft has capacity for 30 passengers, but only 20 were on board, according to Mukther.

Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) General Manager Yakubu Dati said:

"The aircraft belonging to Associated Airlines crashed between JUHEL and Sahara tank farm at the premises of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport.

"It is a propeller aircraft marked 5NBJY, which crashed around 9:32 am on its way to Akure with 20 passengers on board.

"Rescue operation commenced immediately, moving en masse to the crash site.

"An emergncy response centre has been set up at the NCAA at the medical conference room.

According to Emmanuel Diala of the AIB, all personal belongings of the passengers seen had been safeguarded.

He said the AIB recovered the two black boxes.

The General Manager, Lagos Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA), Dr. Oke Osanyintolu, said 11 bodies were taken to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH).

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Apart from fire fighters belonging to FAAN, officials of the Air Force, the police, National Civil Defence Corps , Red Cross and State Security Services (SSS) were at the crash site.

A few minutes after the plane came down, about five survivors were reportedly pulled out of the aircraft and rushed to the Ikeja General Hospital and the Nigeria Air Force base for emergency medical care.

In the bid to pull out the casket bearing the remains of Agagu, some officials were locked in an argument over who should take charge of the operations. The casket was eventually pulled out of the cargo compartment.

Yesterday was Governor Olusegun Mimiko 59th birthday.

It was learnt that Feyi, the late former governor's son, who also survived the crash, called his mum to break the news.

"No doubt, this is an unfortunate disaster in the life of our dear state. We can only pray that God will visit the state with mercy and give us all the strength to bear these unfortunate losses," a statement by the Ondo State Government signed by Chief Press Secretary to the Governor Mr Eni Akinsola, said.

The lying in-state in Akure, the state capital, was cancelled. The town was thrown into mourning. The venue of the planned programme, which had already been decorated, was dismantled.

At the Lekan Ogunsola memorial House, the mortuary of the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH). where bodies of the dead were taken, people were standing in clusters discussing.

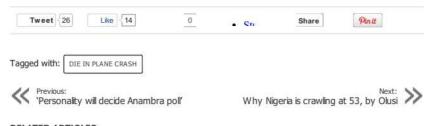
People wailed uncontrollably each time an ambulance came in to deposit bodies of victims. Lagos State Deputy Governor Adejoke Orelope-Adefilure was at the hospital. She said:

"Five people were recuperating at the Surgical Emergency Unit of LASUTH, one at the Air Force-base hospital. Another is at Ebute Metta General Hospital receiving treatment," she said.

You could hear a needle's drop. The mood was somber.

The Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja, Lagos gave the names of the survivors as Feyi Agagu, Akinwande Akeem, Akinsanya femi., Akinwande Taiwo, Owolabi Queeneth and an unknown

The name of the seventh suvivour was not give.



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