

Another building collapses in Lagos, three killed, others trapped

AFEEZ HANAFTI and
GODFREY GEORGE

THREE persons were confirmed dead and about four others including a security guard and construction workers were reportedly trapped on Saturday after a three-storey building under construction on Akanbi Crescent, in the Yaba area of Lagos collapsed.

It was learnt that a worker, identified only as Sunday, was rescued from the rubble.

The incident, which occurred around 3.30 pm, was coming barely three months after a 21-storey building in Ikoyi, owned by the late Managing Director, Fourscore Heights Limited, Femi Osibona, collapsed, trapping over 50 persons.

More than 40 persons, including Osibona, his personal assistant, Oninye Enekwé, and friend, Wale Bob-Oseni, were killed.

A preliminary report had blamed the Ikoyi incident on violation of the approved building plan initially designed as eight storeys and poor quality of concrete materials.

Some residents and eyewitnesses, who spoke to one of our correspondents on the Yaba building collapse, also fingered compromise in the quality of the materials.

Sunday, one of the survivors, explained that the building had shown signs of distress and he reported it to his boss. He said the boss told him and other workers to ignore the signs and keep working.

He stated, "Even today (Saturday), as we were working, the building was shaking, but our oga (boss) said we should continue (working). We even agreed that after today, we would not come back here again to work. I thank God for saving me from this mess, but my phone is still inside."

A 16-year-old, who identified himself only as Shan, said he had gone to buy food for one of the construction workers and was about to enter when it suddenly collapsed.

He told *Sunday PUNCH* that about five people were still trapped in the rubble but two corpses were later recovered.

He said, "I went to buy food for someone that was inside. When I came back and wanted to go in, the building suddenly collapsed. Other people are inside there. They are up to four or five. I thank God for my life."

An eyewitness present, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said a part of the building had collapsed sometime last year.

He said, "This was similar to

what happened last year when they started erecting the building. A section of the building caved in and destroyed some cars parked by the fence.

"The Lagos State Government was invited and they came, but I don't know whether they told them to stop work or not. After a few weeks, work continued and nothing has been done by the authorities since then until today (Saturday) when the building just crumbled on the workers."

Another eyewitness, who identified himself only as Samuel, said the incident happened so fast.

He stated, "I was upstairs so I could see as the building crumbled. Before then, I could hear some chatter from the building; probably by the workers. I am sure they are still under there. I just pray they are not dead by now because no substantial effort has been made to rescue them."

Late arrival of emergency responders

Our correspondent observed that emergency responders did not arrive at the scene until after one hour when they came without any equipment to carry out excavation.

An aggrieved resident identified only as Tola told *Sunday PUNCH* that the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency arrived at the scene late.

Worried residents scrambled through the rubble to rescue victims while others protested late arrival of cranes eventually brought in by LASEMA around 5 pm.

"They should go. They are not doing anything. They are not helping the situation. We could hear someone shouting for help from the rubble but the victim could no longer be heard after so. However, *Sunday PUNCH* gathered that the building got approval from the Lagos State Building Control Agency in 2020.

Stop-work notice served on building twice - LASBCA

Meanwhile, while speaking to journalists, an official of the Lagos State Building Control Agency, Gbolahan Oki, who declined to give his name, said the agency had on two occasions told the builders to stop work.

He said, "We had told them two times last year to stop work. I wonder why most Nigerians don't listen to authority. Part of this building as we learnt then collapsed before and we told them to stop."

As of the time of filing this report, Monday and other construction workers were still trapped in the rubble.

The Commissioner of Special Duties, Seyi Oladejo, was seen at the scene assessing the situation.

LASEMA Director General, Dr. Olufemi Oke-Osanyintolu, however said the agency deployed heavy duty equipment to the scene immediately after it received a distress call.

The agency said three corpses had been recovered as of 11pm on Saturday.

The South-West Coordinator of the National Emergency Management Agency, Ibrahim Farinloye, said the agency was alerted to the incident late.

He said, "Before the alert came, we gathered that it had happened much earlier. We were hindered by the traffic on the road and other factors. I can confirm that about five people are in the rubble. Two have been rescued now and the rescue process is ongoing and we are hoping we get on top of the situation soon."

Experts negligence, warn against more collapses

Commenting on the tragedy, professionals in the real estate sector said incidences of building collapse, especially in Lagos were indicators of lapses in the supervisory and monitoring roles of LASBCA.

The immediate past President, the Building Collapse Prevention Guild, Mr. Akionla George, said more building collapses were imminent if the agency failed to live up to its responsibilities.

He said, "In my opinion, if LASBCA put up a stop-work order and professionals have gone there to say something is not right, if some people decided to go on with impunity, the consequences are always there to suffer. The consequences of building collapses are always severe.

I have always said that many buildings will still collapse because there is a building procurement procedure that must be followed. A lot of buildings are out there waiting to collapse unless you do integrity tests on them."

On his part, the former national President of the Nigerian Institute of Building, Mr. Kunle Awobodu, stated that he recently warned some LASBCA officials to buckle down on their mandate to stop the recurring building collapse in the state.

He said, "Coincidentally, I was at the session of the coroner inquest (on Ikoyi building collapse) on Friday where a senior LASBCA official was in the witness box being cross-examined over the lapses of the agency during the construction of the collapsed 21-storey building. After the session, I was talking to the LASBCA

officials that their job is a risky one and they need to take it more seriously because another building would collapse. All of them shouted 'God forbid, no building will collapse again.'

"That was just yesterday (Friday) and look at what happened today (Saturday). When an assignment is given to an agency to eradicate the menace of building collapse, it should not be considered as an assignment that should be handled by officials of the agency alone because of the large size of Lagos and the rapidity at which construction works are being carried out."

Awobodu said there was the need for grass roots monitoring of building construction projects by professionals in the locality, adding it was likely no professional builder was engaged to ensure the quality of the construction work at

collapsed Yaba building.

He added, "If a professional builder is there, he should be held responsible. There is a need to rejig the agency.

For some years now, we have studied this problem and we have solutions to them but unfortunately we are not in a position to administer all those methods of checking frequent collapse of buildings. This is another sad day for us. As an advocate against built collapse, when a building collapses, it is a minus on our evangelism."

"After the Ikoyi building, this was the fourth building that collapsed in Lagos. The way out is for the government to use the approach that the BCPG has been advocating for years. When a building under construction collapses, it portrays negligence of the monitoring officials. People should be held responsible for building collapse. I really appeal to the government to wake up."



Scene of a three-storey building collapse at 8, Akanbi Street, Yaba, Lagos... on Saturday. Photo: LASEMA

APC moves to bar senators, Reps from voting in presidential primary

ENIOLA AKINKUOTU
and STEPHEN ANGBULU

A fresh crisis is looming in the ruling All Progressives Congress amid fresh plans by the APC to bar members of the National Assembly - who are not principal officers - from taking part in the Presidential primary, *Sunday PUNCH* has learnt.

Currently, all serving and former members of the APC are allowed to participate in the party's convention but this could change should the amendment scale through.

Section 12.1 of the current APC constitution says members of the national convention shall include: members of the Board of Trustees, national chairman and all members of the national executive committee, serving and past presidents; vice presidents, serving and past governors and deputy governors who are members of the party.

Others include: serving and past members of the National Assembly who are members of the party, serving and past Speakers, Deputy Speakers and other principal officers of the Houses of Assembly and all serving members of

the Houses of Assembly who are members of the party, party chairmen in the states and members of the States' Working Committee.

However, a copy of the proposed amendment of the APC constitution which was obtained by *Sunday PUNCH* showed that in the proposed amended constitution, only principal officers which include: Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Senate President, Deputy Senate President, Majority Leader, Deputy Minority Leader, Chief Whip, Deputy Chief Whip, Minority Leader and Deputy Minority leader would be allowed to attend party conventions.

For the National Assembly, the amended Section 12 identifies the national convention members as "the President and Deputy President of the Senate, who are members of the party, the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, who are members of the party, Majority or Minority Leader, party whip and their deputies in the Senate and House of Representatives, who are members of the party, two serving senators from each geo-political zone of the country, who are members

of the party, to be nominated by senators from such zone, one member of the House of Representatives from each geo-political zone of the country, who is a member of the party, to be nominated by members of the House of Representative from such zone."

This means the highest possible number of APC federal lawmakers that would be able to attend a party convention and vote at a Presidential primary would not be more than 30.

A member of the National Assembly told *Sunday PUNCH* that the move would be challenged by the over 373 APC members in the legislative arm of government.

The lawmaker said it was obvious that the APC Caretaker Committee led by Mai Mala Buni was out to punish lawmakers for defying the party's wishes when it amended the Electoral Act.

He further alleged that the Buni committee was seeking to whittle down the influence of the House of Representatives, many of whom had already endorsed the Presidential ambition of APC leader, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu.

"You will recall that many

members of the northern caucus as well as the South-West caucus have declared their support for Tinubu. The National Assembly, which constitutes not less than 40 per cent of the total representation of the Presidential primaries, will now be pushed aside because of Buni and his clique? We will never accept this," he said.

Meanwhile, the APC is also seeking to drop its slogan 'change' and adopt 'progress' as its new slogan.

When contacted on the telephone, the Secretary of the APC Caretaker Committee, Senator John Akpanudoedehe, said the proposal was just a document and everyone was free to make amendments.

Akpanudoedehe said he would not respond to any further questions when he was asked to explain the rationale behind the decision to bar National Assembly members from future conventions.

"Make your submissions. That's what this (proposal) is all about. That is a proposal. You write your contributions, we will look into it. It is not for me to answer. It is not my document. It is the document of the party," he said.

TODAY IN HISTORY

February 13

February 13, 1633

- Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei arrived in Rome for trial before Inquisition for professing belief that earth revolves around the Sun

February 13, 1689

- Following the Glorious Revolution, William and Mary were proclaimed king and queen of England this day in 1689, after which they ruled jointly as King William III and Queen Mary II until her death in 1694.

February 13, 1945

- The German city of Dresden is destroyed by a bombing raid, according to estimates up to 25,000 people were killed in the raids that lasted 3 days.

February 13, 1960

- France becomes the 4th nuclear nation by exploding the 70 kilo-ton "Gerboise Bleue" atomic bomb in the French Algerian Sahara desert

February 13, 1976

- Major-General Olusegun Obasanjo becomes military ruler of Nigeria.