

# Season Of Tragedies

PAUL DADA

**L**ast December was peculiar because it was the month both Christians and Muslim faithful celebrated their most important festivals, the Christmas and the Eid-el-Kabir. However, it was probably the darkest of all the months of the immediate past year in terms of the tragic incidents that occurred during the month.

As the frenzy of the festive season gripped the nation, many people had tales of woe to tell. On the last Boxing Day, Lagosians were shocked to hear that at least 500 people were roasted to death by fire from pipeline explosion at Abule Egba. They had gone to scoop petrol when the tragedy occurred.

The NNPC pipeline was said to have been tampered with by some vandals in the wee hours of the day. The thieves were said to have come with four tankers. They successfully stole fuel and made away with their loot before tragedy struck.

The ill-fated residents who woke up to see oil oozing from the damaged pipeline thought it was 'manna from heaven' for them, what with the acute shortage of fuel at the time of the incident. Oblivious of the fact that their action amounted to sabotage, the people rushed to the scene and started scooping the oil.

The people turned deaf ears as some community leaders tried to restrain them from endangering their lives. Suddenly, there was an explosion and the people, mostly youths were roasted to death.

The explosion was attributed to various causes. Some said the explosion occurred when one of those scooping oil received a phone call on his GSM handset. Others said the use of fireworks at the scene caused the explosion. Victims included youths and pregnant women, among others. Survivors are still recuperating at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH).

Earlier in December, the bodies of Alhaji Adams Shuaib, a 32-year-old bricklayer and his friend, Aliu Aboroki, were recovered from the rubble of a collapsed building at Airport road, Ajao Estate.

The two friends were among the construction staff working at the building site. Out of the many workers who may have died when the building collapsed, only two bodies were evacuated. This was four days after the building collapsed.

Some people who were at the scene expressed disgust at the way the state government handled the incident. One of them blurted out in anger: "This is outrageous if this happened in America, you would have seen an helicopter hovering over the place on rescue mission. Rescue efforts would have been accelerated and people saved. If we had a good government the victims would have been saved. What was supposed to be a rescue mission has turned out to be an evacuation mission."

Also, some of the workers who had survived with injuries and were admitted in a private hospital at Oshodi, lamented that they were abandoned by their employers.

The last festive season was also a period when several people became victims of men of the underworld.

There was the report of a gang of daredevil robbers who stormed a luxury bus coming from the northern part of the country and killed five passengers, the driver and two police escorts. The robbers were said to have chased the bus from a long distance before catching up with it on the bridge linking Ojota with Maryland on Ikorodu road.

They reportedly snatched a bus they used for the operation. The criminals set the luxury bus ablaze after their operation.

In Sango Ota, a town in Ogun State close to Lagos, a 21-year-old man, Bassey Ebri was kidnapped by Oseni Obanla and his accomplices and later killed by his abductors. They plucked out his eyes to sell to ritualists. He was then buried secretly at a shrine near Oseni's home.

His fiancée, Joy Etteng, explained what happened thus: "We slept together and he said he was going to urinate at about 2 a.m. and when he did not return, I reported to the Landlords Association which organised a search party."

"When policemen at Alakoko police station heard about the incident and gathered some information within the neighbourhood, they went to the shrine owned by Oseni where they were told Bassey was buried."

Oseni was nabbed in connection with the incident.

The tales of the victims of the last festive season seem endless. At the Alaba international market, Ojo, at least six persons died when about 19 robbers

dressed in mobile police uniform stormed the place. The robbers were said to have carted away millions of naira from a new generation bank in the area.

During the raid, the robbers who armed themselves with AK 47 rifles, killed a couple who were in a Peugeot 504 car and wounded several others.

Their stray bullets also killed a woman at the scene of the robbery operation around Alaba-Rago.

At Ogombo town in Eti-Osa Local Government area, miscreants who were said to be members of the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) went on the rampage. The thugs were said to have dealt with the people who were opposed to the *Baale* of the area, Chief Ambali Amoja Bakare, who was deposed but reinstated by the state government.

The hoodlums were said to have shot and maimed residents of the area. Houses were vandalised and looted.

Another feature that marked the close of last year was fire incidents. The motor parks at Oyingbo was thrown into a state of frenzy as two luxury buses worth N140 million naira were burnt to ashes overnight by a mystery fire.

A source said that the fire, which started at about 2 a.m., was allegedly caused by Mallam Sule Abdullahi, a motor park attendant. Abdullahi was said to have lighted a candle in the shanty where he lived and left to have fun in the area.

The shanty was said to have later caught fire which razed the buses and the entire park, spreading to a refuse dump nearby.

Efforts to put out the fire proved abortive. However, another twist was added to the story when a driver in the park said the inferno was caused by the enemies of the owner of one the buses.

A sawmill at Makinde Street, Idi Oro, Mushin was also razed during this period. Goods worth millions of naira were destroyed by the fire.

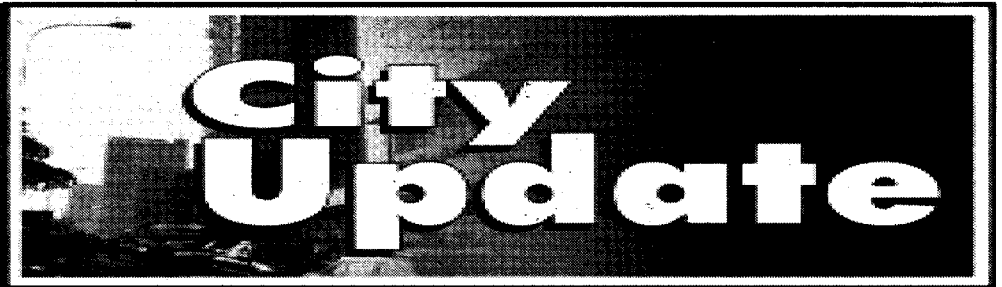
A mechanic workshop in the vicinity where some vehicles were parked for repairs was also burnt along with the cars. A one-storey building beside the plank market was equally razed.

An electrical spark from a PHCN cable in Obalende, Lagos, was said to have caused the fire which burnt a house on Ajeniya street. Some shops at the building were also burnt.

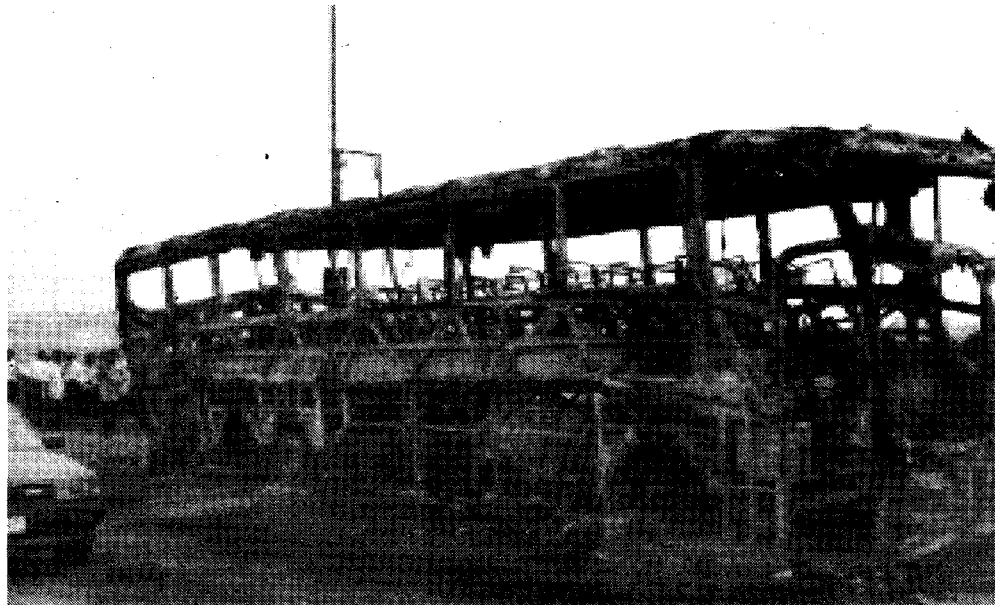
Accidents claimed some lives as well towards the end of 2006. Vincent Iloanusi was killed along Pen Cinema Road, Agege when he was knocked down by a Nissan Pathfinder car driven by Edet Paulinus.

In another incident, a taxi driver, identified as Alhaji Suara Akanmu was crushed to death by a lorry while he was checking a fault in the engine of his taxi. This occurred on Osborne Road, Ikoyi.

Last year's yuletide season certainly had more than a fair share of tragedies that will linger in the memories of Lagosians for long.



•An onlooker using camera phone to take photographs of charred bodies at the scene of pipeline fire that burnt many people to death at Abule Egba, Lagos, recently. Photo: Akin Farinto.



•The luxury bus burnt down at Ojota by armed robbers after robbing its occupants. Photo: Akin Farinto.



•R-L: The Divisional Police Officer (DPO), Isokoko, Supol Mohammed Baba Maiyaki, decorating ASP Faith Ailabegbe, with the assistance of ASP Sunday Awoke, the station officer.



•L-R: Yomi Obaditan, Mrs. Demuren representing the Lagos State governor, Mrs. Tinu Balogun, representing Commissioner for Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Mrs. Joke Orelope Adefulure, at the public presentation of 21 Principles of Dynamic Leaders, a book written by Obaditan recently.