

# Before Another Building Collapses

Last week, a four-storey building containing about 36 flats and 25 shops and 500 residents collapsed in Ebute Metta, Lagos. After four days of rescue work, about 50 people had died, close to 39 are said to be in intensive care in different hospitals in Lagos while several others were treated for minor injuries. Since then the injured have been nursing their pains, physical and psychological. Friends and families of the deceased have been mourning their loved ones. The Lagos State government has been talking tough even as the developer is said to be on the run. But after the cries of sorrow and tears of joy, after the burial of the dead and the revival of the injured, after the mourning and the celebrations, the tendency is to forget the tragedy of Ebute Metta and move on with our lives until another building collapses in yet another town, another neighbourhood.



## MONDAY

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Indeed the frequency of collapsed buildings across the country has been disturbing lately. Only recently one building caved in somewhere in Amukoko, a suburb of Lagos, killing seven people. Last March two buildings collapsed in Aba, Abia State, causing

the death of several construction workers. In Port Harcourt, Rivers State about 20 people lost their lives when three buildings, including a hotel under construction collapsed. Earlier in the year, four pupils died in Benin, Edo State when a primary school collapsed. In Abuja last month, it was a three-storey glasshouse. The sad thing is that after every incident nothing is done to prevent a similar thing from happening, aside from top government officials making symbolic noises.

Since last week's incident in Ebute Metta, the Lagos State government has declared the

contractor wanted. There is no likelihood he would ever be apprehended. However, those who should be declared wanted are the officials of the Physical Planning and Urban Development Ministry, those men and women who are paid to ensure that no building is put to use of any kind without the ministry's certification. But these people either do not care to do their job or look the other way after collecting bribe from unscrupulous contractors and developers. That is why an approved bungalow becomes a four-storey building overnight. That is also why a residential area in the city's development plan could become a commercial avenue with no questions asked. That is equally why there are all kinds of bent and bowing and wobbly buildings in the nation's urban centres. In Isale Eko, Ebute Metta, Makoko and other seedy areas of Lagos, there are many buildings waiting to collapse, tragedies waiting to happen.

Unfortunately, with the growing increase in the prices of cement, things can only get worse. Contractors and developers would only be forced to further cut corners so that insensitive landlords could quickly recoup their money. Of course, nothing would be done until another building collapses!