

Government echoe similar sentiment last Wednesday.

Doesn't it sound laughable and embarrassing that a country like Nigeria, especially in the 21st century, does not have a national-building code? Doesn't it look shameful that since 1978 when the idea of a national building code was jettisoned, no government, until recently, has contemplated another initiative? Why waiting until many of our compatriots had been consumed by the Tsunami called building collapse?

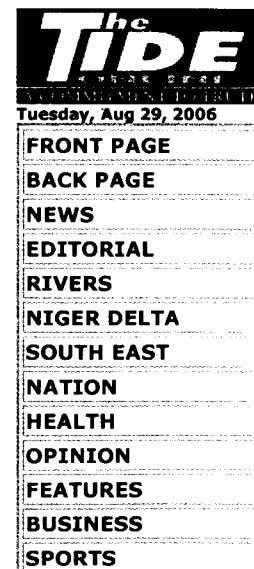
It does seem we have not outgrown the habit of seeking a hackneyed rationalisation of our national incompetence. If not, why do we always seek a fire brigade approach to our national problems?

Building regulations and laws, to the best of my knowledge, are not in short supply in this country. I dare to be contradicted. What is rather in short supply is the honesty and transparency of those who operate the laws. For instance, it is sad, embarrassing and self-indicting to hear the officials of the Lagos State Government say the approved plan for the collapsed building in Ebute-Meta was actually a two-storey building, against the four-storey structure erected. If this is anything to go by, who then gave the post-building approval of the building?

There is no doubt that the minimum standards required for building construction are usually adhered to in their breach by the engineers and contractors who want to maximize profit. But to tie the problem of collapsed buildings only around the neck of crooked and inefficient developers is to be clever by half. What about the corrupt government officials who watch builders flout existing building regulations?

Doesn't it sound strange that despite several cases of collapsed buildings in the country and the official threats that usually follow them, no known person has been prosecuted or brought to book, either for error of omission or commission? It does suggest that the value we hold dear in this nation is not that of honesty and transparency.

I am afraid there may not be an end to this problem unless the nation takes up the challenge of punishing not just engineers and contractors whose projects collapse, but also government officials who connived with them.



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Blame operators, not laws

• Monday, Aug 7, 2006

For quite sometime now, there have been a litany of collapsed building cases across the country. The latest of such incidents was the collapse of a massive four-storey building in Ebute-Meta, Lagos two weeks ago. The building housing 52 one-bedroom flats and 32 shops reportedly trapped over 100 people in the rubble.

The Ebute-Meta incident is just one of the several cases of collapsed buildings in the country. In Lagos State, there have been at least three reported cases in the last one year. In Amukoko, Amuwo-Odofin Local Government area of the state, a three-storey complex caved in, in January, while another one crumbled in Orile-Iganmu, killing two people. There were similar occurrences in Ojuelegba and Computer village, Ikeja late last year.

It was the same gory tales in Port Harcourt where two structures on Sani Abacha and Bank roads collapsed in quick succession last year. The story was not different in Oyo, Enugu and other parts of the country including Abuja where a two-storey building under construction on Aminu Kano Crescent, Wuse II gave way recently.

In all of these, official corruption, professional incompetence, quackery and get-rich-quick syndrome stand out as chief causes of the disasters. Despite the fact that the causes of these building collapse are not unknown to many of us, there is still no end in sight to the problem. The best we have heard are tough words tumbling forth from government officials, including state governors and ministers against such calamities and their perpetrators. Never mind that such blabbings and threats die natural death even before they were pronounced, while the culprits walk free even with the stain of the victims' blood.

It beats my imagination to hear the Director-General of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Air-Vice Marshal M. Audu-Bida (rtd) talk about the absence of a national code for building engineers and contractors in the country, and that this has accounted for more than 80 percent of collapsed building cases in the country. It is particularly embarrassing to hear the Federal

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The approval of a national building code may just be one of those solutions to this Tsunami called building collapse, but it is certainly not the absolute solution. The main solution lies in its enforcement.

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