

Area boys disrupt rescue activities at collapsed building...as they scramble for victim's money

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LAGOS—RESCUE efforts at the site of the collapsed 4-storey building in Ebute-Metta, Lagos came to an abrupt halt few hours after the incident happened following a scramble by *Area boys* to take possession of wads of naira notes belonging to the victims.

The unfortunate show of insensitivity which led to a stampede took place after rescue workers at the site excavated a polythene bag filled with large sums of naira notes. Few minutes before the strange discovery, the lifeless body of a young man of about thirty years was found in the rubble.

The man was holding tight to a child of about ten who also was discovered stone dead. From all indications, the man may have been trying to find an escape route while clutching the little kid and the polythene bag of money.

No sooner were the dead bodies pulled out of the rubble than some *area boys* who posed as rescuers sighted the polythene bag.

One of them quickly tore it open only to discover huge sums of naira notes in different denominations.

This led to a serious scramble for possession of the money which was estimated to be not less than N100 million. As the struggle degenerated into a free-for-all-fight, some of the notes were torn while officials of road construction giants, Julius Berger, LASTMA, LASAMBUS and even Red Cross who were busy digging deep to rescue people trapped in the debris, stopped work and watched helplessly.

The expectant teeming crowd of sympathisers who thronged the site from all parts of Lagos State and beyond to behold the blood-chilling spectacle, were jolted when they realised that the commotion going on right on top of the collapsed building was a scramble for money belonging to one of the victims.

At this stage, the enraged crowd reacted sharply and started throwing stones at the *Area boys* who were busy fighting over the money.

Events, however, took a different dimension when the *Area boys* suddenly realised that they were under attack. They quickly shared whatever money they were able to get and turned their attention to the crowd who kept on pelting them.

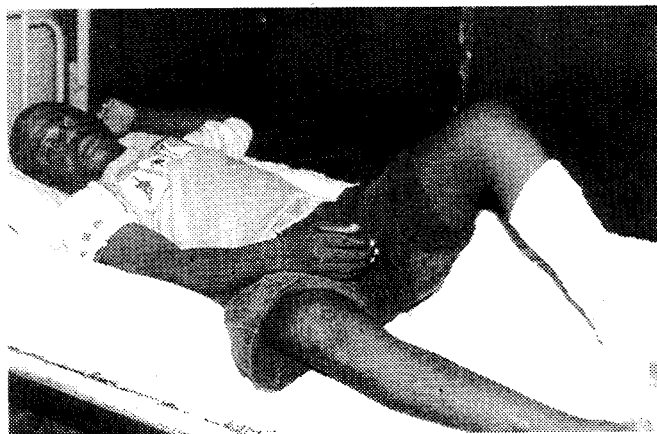
Unfortunately for the crowd, they were easily overpowered by the *Area boys* who used the pebbles and huge stones which were readily available at the site to defend themselves. This led to a stampede which sent the teeming crowd scampering for safety.

Cityscope gathered that during the stampede, many people, especially children sustained injuries and had to be rushed to hospital for treatment. Some vehicles parked close to the site at the adjoining streets were not spared either as their glasses were broken. Many houses also came under serious attack as the pebbles flew at different directions while some of the *Area boys* concentrated on searching for more money inside the debris.

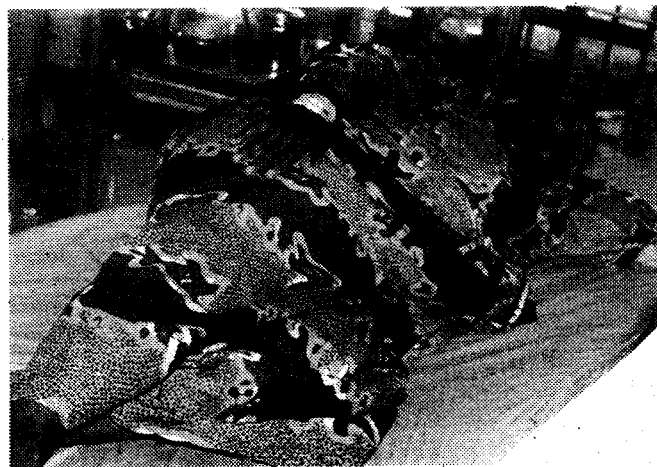
The situation was, however, brought under control by a team of policemen who swiftly succeeded in chasing the *Area boys* away from the site.

One of the policemen who sought for anonymity told *Cityscope*, "I have never seen such insensitivity in my life. I saw those *Area boys* stuffing wads of naira notes into their pockets and laughing as if they won lottery. What type of callousness is this when we were trying to rescue human beings trapped inside the collapsed building?"

The Police image maker in the state, Mr. Bode Ojajuni who was seen at the site of the incident earlier in the day, told *Cityscope* when contacted on the development, "we are not aware of that. Our men who were on standby there maintained law and order. Nobody reported that incident to us. If anybody did that, let his conscience judge him."



*Wasiu Lamidi, a survivor at the General Hospital Ebute-Metta, Lagos



*Mrs Funke Adewara, another survivor on sick bed