

The Saturday **COVER**

Indians handing death and slavery to Nigerians

By OUR REPORTERS

The forklift lifted tons of iron inside the Indian company—African Wires and Allied Industries Nigeria Limited, Plot No. 4-6, Opic Industrial Estate, Agbara, Ogun State. But two heavy discs of iron hooked, so Tosin Olajide, one of the hundreds of casual workers at the company, went up to free the two irons weighing over 1.5 tons each. Suddenly, one of the irons came down on him, trapping him to the ground. No safety helmet was provided for Tosin by the Indians. It took the same forklift to lift the tonnage of iron before the boy could be pulled out.

But the damage had already been done. The iron had chopped off part of his face and broke his foot! His work mates present at the scene of the accident said blood was pumping out of his nostrils as water would rush out of a tap. "Such accidents occur regularly there," said former safety officer of the company, Mr. Jonathan Abimbola.

Tosin's life could have been saved if the company had been prompt in providing transport and rushing Tosin to the hospital, eyewitnesses insisted. Unable to find a vehicle in a company whose turnover runs into millions of naira, the Indians instructed two Nigerians who they employed for "cleaning up" such messes for them to use the same

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forklift to take the dying Tosin out of the company unto the road leading to a hospital. After some kilometers, they saw a pick-up van and transferred Tosin into it. They drove him to one ill-equipped hospital used by the company. But there was no doctor there to attend to the boy. The nurse advised them to take Tosin to the Badagry General Hospital. On their way to Badagry, the pick-up van carrying Tosin broke down. Tosin gave up the ghost before they could reach the general hospital.

Police connivance

With the assistance of the DPO of Agbara police station, said to be at beck and call of the Indians who own the company, Tosin's body was deposited at the

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Late Tosin Olajide

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Massive exploitation, deadly work conditions

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Badagry general hospital mortuary.

Angered by the negligence with which Tosin was handled by management, his colleagues, on the following morning, Thursday 11 December, 2014, gathered at the entrance of the company, refusing to go in. The Indians swiftly reacted by calling in policemen and MOPOLS from Agbara. The DPO of Agbara police station came personally. Together, the policemen fired tear-gas canisters at the workers, beating them and seizing the mobile phones of those who tried to take pictures of the brutality.

Tosin, Saturday Vanguard learnt, could hardly be up to 23 years old, though Mr. Samuel Ogundimu, the personnel manager and one of the most disgusting Nigerian lapdogs of the Indians, according to sources, told our reporter that Tosin was 28.

Tosin had laboured for years for African Wires and Allied Industries under Parco Group of companies for a paltry N850 a day as casual worker, working from 7am to 7pm. Parco Group of

Companies is owned by the Gupras, one of the richest Indians who have lived and done business in Nigeria for more than 50 years, exploiting the endemic circumstances.

Last year, the company employed Mr. Jonathan

Abimbola, a chemical engineering graduate from a UK university, as a Safety Officer, "not that the company cared about safety," said a company source, "but because they wanted to use him as a shield from the harassment of the officials of the

Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity and Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry."

Massive exploitation, deadly work conditions

The company thought it could use Mr. Jonathan in the usual way it uses other Nigerians, but that was not to be. Mr. Jonathan was shocked at the way the company uses and exploits Nigerians. For instance, people worked more than the number of hours stipulated by labour laws without any payment for overtime. Moreover, there are no safety measures whatsoever in the company. The Indians expose Nigerians who work for them to all manner of dangers, and whenever accidents occur, the victim or the victim's family only get a ridiculous amount as compensation.

Death of Tosin's elder brother

Last year, the chief driver of the company, Tosin Olajide's elder brother, who drives Mr. Narayan (MD), slumped and

died after closing work. Those who should know said "nothing reasonable" was done for the chief driver.

The same year, Onyebuchi, another casual worker, got drowned in a deep reservoir filled with alum water while trying to clean himself up after work. It was not until 12.30 after midnight that Onyebuchi's body was pulled out of the large body of alum water.

At first, the company was said to have offered Onyebuchi's family N150,000 as compensation. However, the fiery safety officer, Mr. Abimbola, demanded N5 million for the family. At last, one of the Nigerian lawyers working for the Indians arm-twisted onyebuchi's family and convinced them to collect N600,000.

Fear of govt agencies

Besides exposing Nigerians who labour for them to danger and making money with their blood and sweat, many don't understand the attitude of the Indians inside the OPIC Estate any time some kind of inspection team comes around. They can't explain the pandemonium that occasionally ensues among the Indians whenever officials of the Nigeria Immigration Services, Standard Organisation of Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, or other government agencies, arrive at the company's gate without prior notice to the Indians.

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What could be happening inside the OPIC Estate? Have the Indians fully declared to regulatory agencies and the Nigerian government, all the business activities engaged by the four companies rolled into one – the acid plant, the silicate plant, the fertilizer section, and the wire section? Although this may not be said of OPIC there are companies owned by Indians which enjoy duty waivers for the importation of certain goods like irons for the purpose of building factories. But when they import the goods they turn back and sell those goods to Nigerians, forcing the country to continue to be a consumer economy dependent on imported goods, while their home country, India, is known for its booming technology, health export and manufacturing. But one may blame this on Nigeria's leaders and government and not those who exploit the circumstances created by Nigeria's failure.

The Indians make the government believe that their businesses in Nigeria are providing employment to Nigerians. This may appear to be true on face value, but in reality, their exploitative tendencies are a sad commentary. For instance, out of hundreds of Nigerians who

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