

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JANUARY TO JUNE 2019

HUTS ON FIRE



Urban Resource Centre

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Fire hazards

THE number of fire incidents in the country, especially in the cities, appears to be on the rise. A horrific fire in Rawalpindi a few days ago claimed the life of a bride-to-be and four other young women. The tragedy is not an isolated one. Last month, a fire damaged a garment factory in Karachi.



In the aftermath of such incidents, inquiries are ordered. But little is achieved. Homes and production and storage spaces continue to be engulfed by preventable fires. A permanent solution is needed to ensure the safety of human life.

The recent tragedy in Rawalpindi may have been the result of unsafe internal or external wiring, leaking gas or a short circuit. In commercial buildings, warehouses and factory structures, the periodic assessment of the premises, including electricity and gas supply systems, are seldom undertaken. Owners and managers want to spend as little as possible so that they can optimise their returns; workers are asked to continue in the midst of leakages, sparks in wiring or malfunctioning of worn-out conduits.

Many premises — established in commercial or residential areas — do not even bother to acquire power connections commensurate with the actual load of consumption. Similarly, layouts and placement of work stations do not guarantee safe evacuation in case a fire erupts. The absence of exits can cause people to be trapped, or lead to a stampede. Lack of ventilation causes suffocation.

Durable solutions must be worked out to prevent fire tragedies.

Mechanic shops, garment factories and embroidery and stitching outlets abound in Pakistani cities. These enterprises usually function in non-purpose-built accommodation in densely populated commercial and residential areas. With poor wiring and substandard electrical appliances, fire risks increase manifold. It is the responsibility of regulatory bodies to carry out regular checks and ensure compliance with corrective advice.

Fires in our cities should serve as a reminder to plan and implement measures to ensure home and workplace safety. A basic task is to update the data on production, retail and warehousing spaces. The federal and provincial bureaus of statistics have previously carried out several surveys that could serve as baseline studies.

As firefighting is essentially the local government's responsibility, municipalities in cities and towns can build and update a database related to fire prevention. Building information parameters, especially related to safety, is a must. Existing building by-laws and regulations should be revisited. Most have provisions for safety that only need to be effectively applied.

After a long exercise under the supervision of experts, the government of Pakistan notified the Building Code of Pakistan — Fire Safety Provisions, 2016. It contains useful knowledge that can be readily employed by provincial and local agencies. Most building regulations enforced in our cities lay down a basic framework for fighting fires in the building design. The documents also focus on the provision of standpipes, automatic sprinkler systems, manual fire-extinguishing equipment, fire alarms, signal stations, overhead water tanks, protected shafts, fire-resistant doors, etc. Enforcement is needed.

A checklist-based evaluation of existing building stock can help identify inappropriately constructed buildings for the purpose of retrofitting. Specialised teams can be mobilised to design and facilitate these tasks. The cooperation of all stakeholders is necessary. Trade and commerce bodies, political parties, building control authorities, labour unions, technical universities and the media would have to work together.

Complex urban areas such as Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi have many types of buildings that require safety and security audits through the collaboration of state agencies, professionals and even ordinary people. Warehousing and basic manufacturing activities in old town quarters, squatter settlements near railway lines and high-tension wires, manufacturing units, godowns containing hazardous items, petroleum installations, etc are some of the sites where people live and work in precarious conditions. Labourers can be spotted sleeping on pushcarts, pavements, traffic islands and under flyovers, who are all at risk in case of an accidental fire.

In the public sector, national and provincial disaster management authorities must be asked to assist in revamping risky construction. Devices such as surveillance cameras, and control centres, are being set up by different layers of administration with duplicated functions. But basic inventories must also be prepared. A safety survey may be conducted in locations where fire complaints and hazards are rife. Causes of fire and combating capabilities, route planning for hazards and setting up emergency reservoirs of water could be the starting point. Fire departments must be bolstered by adding hardware, rescue equipment and free access to hydrants.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 09, 17/01/2019)

Five Baldia factory fire victims still missing, relatives testify

Six years after the deadly Baldia factory fire, there is still no clue regarding the whereabouts of five factory workers, including a deaf and mute youth, who went missing on the ill-fated day, legal heirs of the victims informed an antiterrorism court.

Over 250 workers were killed on the locked premises of the Ali Enterprises when a huge fire mysteriously broke out and engulfed the entire industrial unit on Sept 11, 2012.



As the matter came up for hearing before the ATC-VI judge, 13 prosecution witnesses, including the legal heirs of the victims, six injured victims and a fireman, appeared to record their testimonies on Wednesday.

The prosecution claimed that the suspects acted on instructions of the then head of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Karachi Tanzeemi Committee, Hammad Siddiqui, after the factory owners did not pay protection money.

A red warrant has already been issued for arrest of Hammad Siddiqui.

Five missing victims' legal heirs testified that their relatives, who worked at the factory, had gone to work as usual but have not been seen or heard from again.

Sughra Bibi deposed that her son, Mohammad Hanif, who was aged around 20, went to the factory on the day of the incident. Hanif, who was deaf and mute, was the only child of his parents and the sole breadwinner for his family since his father was sick and bed-ridden, the mother testified.

The mother said that they had not received the body of their son, who was a bachelor, till date despite samples given by the parents for DNA matching. They failed to match with the body of any of the unidentifiable victims.

Second witness Nazia Parveen testified that her husband Riaz Ahmed, believed to be in his 40s and father of four, spoke to her on mobile phone and told her that a fire had broken out on the second floor, where he was working in the stitching department.

Then he hung up, she said, adding that when she tried to call him back he did not pick up and later the phone went off. The witness said his body had not yet been found or identified.

The third witness, Shahid Perveen, testified that her husband Mohammad Akmal also worked in the same factory and went to work on the fateful day, but ever since all efforts to find any clue to his body had proved futile. His body was never identified or found, she added.

The fourth witness, Tabbasum Gohar, said that his brother Mohammad Tufail had gone to Ali Enterprises, was missing since the incident took place at his workplace, and the DNA matching tests and other verifications to find out body had borne no results till date.

The fifth witness, Ghulam Saqlain, deposed that his brother Ghulam Hasnain's body had not yet been found since the fire incident in the factory.

Six other witnesses, who worked at Ali Enterprises, deposed that the fire had erupted all of a sudden in the basement and on the second floor, adding that most of the casualties had taken place on these two floors.

They further deposed that amid chaos they succeeded in jumping off the second floor from windows.

An official witness, Nasir-ud-Din, deposed that he was posted at the SITE fire station as fireman when he received the information about the fire and reached the site at around 6.39pm.

Later, other fire engines also arrived and started efforts to put out the fire, he added. The witness said his shift ended at 8.30pm, thus he left the place of the incident.

After recording statements of all the witnesses, the judge summoned around 69 remaining witnesses to record their statements on the next date.

The judge, who is conducting trial in the judicial complex inside the central prison, fixed the matter for Jan 19.

Nine accused — including Muttahida Qaumi Movement lawmaker Rauf Siddiqui; Abdul Rehman, alias Bhola; and Zubair, alias Chariya — have been charged with setting ablaze the garment factory with the help of its four gatekeepers — Shahrukh, Fazal Ahmed, Arshad Mehmood and Ali Mohammad.

The prosecution had listed around 670 witnesses in the case, but later gave up around 300 of them.

According to the special public prosecutor, some 332 witnesses have been examined by the court so far while 100 remaining are yet to be examined.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 16, 18/01/2019)

300 huts in Karachi destroyed in 'mysterious' fire

A huge fire erupted in Federal B Area Block-9 on Sunday morning destroyed around 300 huts set up there, said Jauharabad police and Fire Brigade officials. No one was injured in the incident.



Around half a dozen fire engines put out the raging fire after hectic efforts lasting over several hours, officials claimed.

The fire department and the police ruled out the possibility of any sabotage behind the incident.

However the residents claimed that a builder mafia might have set the huts on fire to vacate the place, a 'prime land' situated between Gulshan-i-Iqbal and FB Area.

The police claimed the fire engulfed the whole area because of delay in response by the fire officials.

A KMC fire brigade official said that they received information about the fire in the huts in Yasinabad at around 11.35am.

The fire brigade department sent six fire engines to douse the blaze and managed to control it at about 1.10pm. However, cooling work continued till 7pm.

The fire official said that around 300 huts were destroyed in the fire. There were estimated to be around 1,000-1,500 huts on 'Dost Mohammed Goth' near Gulshan-i-Shamim.

The fire official said that the exact cause of the fire and estimation of losses could not be made immediately.

Jauharabad SHO Tahir Husain said that the blaze erupted in a garbage dump, which spread and engulfed the nearby huts. He said the residents used to dump garbage there daily, which was being set on fire. He ruled out any possibility of sabotage and suggested that it was an accidental fire, which spread due to strong winds and destroyed the huts.

He said that the fire had erupted at around 10.30am and the fire engines reached the spot after some delay owing to which the fire spread. However, one resident Mustafa, who claimed to have established 'Dost Mohammed Goth' under the 'Gothabad scheme' told journalists that the builder mafia was 'eyeing the prime land'.

The resident claimed that the builder mafia had also warned them to vacate the area. He demanded a proper inquiry to ascertain the exact cause of the fire.

The residents of huts told the media that they paid Rs2,500 per hut as a 'rent'.

Mostly, beggars, labourers and vegetable and fruit sellers live there and their belongings were destroyed by the fire.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 21/01/2019)

Two killed, 12 injured as fire erupts in Gulshan multistorey building

Two men died while 12 other persons, including a teenage boy and a woman, sustained injuries after a fire broke out in a multistorey commercial building in Gulshan-i-Iqbal on Thursday, officials said.



They said that it was a closed building, which has no balcony or ventilation system owing to which it was filled with smoke, prompting some people to jump from the building. As many as 30 people were rescued.

One man who jumped from the building to escape died while another man died from burns and suffocation, according to hospital officials.

The commercial building was filled with smoke as it has no ventilation system, says city fire chief

The officials said that the fire erupted on upper floors of the 12-storey Noor Trade Centre, housing offices, on University Road near Hasan Square.

Fire tenders were dispatched but apparently they arrived late owing to a traffic jam on the main artery.

People got panicked and at least two of them jumped from the building to save their lives while 12 others suffered burns and smoke inhalation.

They were shifted to different hospitals, where doctors pronounced two of them dead.

According to the Aziz Bhatti SHO Adeel Afzal, the fire erupted on the 11th and 12th floors (top floor) of the building at around 11.30am. It was a commercial building where only offices of different companies were situated.

A fire brigade official said that they were informed about the incident at around 12.07pm.

He said three snorkels, one excavator and seven fire tenders managed to extinguish the blaze at around 3.10pm. However, the cooling work continued till late into the evening.

The official said he believed that short circuit in an outer air-conditioner triggered the fire. Estimates of loss could not be made immediately.

The SHO said that both floors were badly damaged in the fire.

According to chief fire officer Tehseen Siddiqi, it was not a huge fire but the structure of the building was such that it had no balcony or ventilation system.

"It was a completely closed building owing to which it was filled with smoke that prompted some people to jump from it," said the fire chief.

He said they rescued 30 people from the 11th floor.

Police surgeon Dr Qarar Ahmed Abbasi said that one man, Hamza Masood, 27, who was brought dead to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre died from head injuries suffered during the fall while another man, Jehanzeb Sardar, 23, who died during treatment at the Liaquat National Hospital and was later brought to the JPMC to fulfil legal formalities, died from burn wounds.

Dr Seemin Jamali, executive director of the JPMC, also confirmed that they received a man brought dead with serious wounds as he had leaped off the building.

Six persons, including a teenager and a woman, were admitted for treatment; four of them had suffered suffocation. Their condition was out of danger, added Dr Jamali. The wounded persons admitted to the JPMC were identified as Mazhar Abbas, 30, Marina Mudassir, 30, Ashraf Ali, 65, Waseem, 16, Basit Pervez, 23, and Syed Salman Raza, 30.

The police surgeon said that six people, all male, were also brought for treatment to the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi. Two of them had sustained burn injuries while the others inhaled smoke and other injuries.

They were identified as Noman Suleman, 24, Hilal Iqbal, 26, Naeem Nasiruddin, 25, Usman Wahid, 30, Mujahid Raza, 30, and Khan Zaib, 37.

Inquiry ordered

Minister for Local Government Saeed Ghani, who visited the spot, told the media that he had ordered an inquiry to ascertain if the upper floors of the building were built legally. They were also assessing if fire-extinguishing equipment was installed and if there were emergency exits in the building.

The minister claimed that after receiving information about the incident, fire tenders were sent out but the firemen probably reached a bit late because of a traffic jam on University Road, where the building is situated.

The provincial minister, while regretting the loss of human lives, promised proper treatment facilities for the injured persons. He urged the citizens to ascertain whether all rules had been followed in the building before sale of units there.
(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 15, 22/03/2019)

Two plunge to death as fire erupts in 12-storey building in Karachi

Two persons were killed and at least nine others sustained burn injuries when a fire broke out on the fourth floor of a high-rise building on main University Road in Gulshan-e-Iqbal on Thursday. Several others were also affected by the smoke and had to be taken to the hospital for first aid.



The fire, which authorities said, erupted on the fourth floor of the 12-storey Noor Trade Centre, caused smoke to quickly spread to the upper floors. Screams of people, trying to attract attention for help, filled the air as fire fighters, aided by other civic and rescue agencies, strove to rescue the trapped persons.

The incident

According to fire officials, the fire erupted at around noon. The occupants, who found themselves trapped, kept calling for help and climbed to the roof of the building to escape the blaze.

Police and Rangers immediately reached the spot after receiving information of the blaze. A large number of citizens had also gathered outside the building at this point.

The one fire brigade that had managed to reach the site tried in vain to contain the fire. However, by the time the backup teams arrived, the situation had grown so dire that it had confined the occupants to the rooftop. It was at this point that two persons jumped from the 10th floor of the building in a bid to save themselves from the fire.

Rescue teams rushed both the victims to the hospital but they couldn't survive their injuries and died during the course of medical treatment.

Rescue efforts

In the meantime, four more fire brigades and two snorkels arrived and joined in the rescue operation. Pakistan Navy's fire tenders and helicopters were also requisitioned by the city administration to rescue the people trapped on the rooftop.

Amid all this, the movement of vehicular traffic was severely affected on University Road, which caused long queues of cars to form. The fire brigade teams faced difficulty in reaching the site due to the traffic jam.

The fire fighters ultimately managed to bring the blaze under control with the help of two snorkels, seven fire tenders and an excavator after frantic efforts of around two hours. The people present on the rooftop eventually climbed down from the stairwell after the fire was extinguished completely.

Cause of fire

Chief Fire Officer Tehseen Ahmed Siddiqui told media personnel that the fire broke out in the outer of an air conditioner on the fourth floor. The smoke quickly spread to other floors and rooms while passing through the duct and people grew frightened.

They tried to save their lives by rushing towards the stairs, causing a stampede. The majority of the victims were injured due to the jostling and pushing.

According to Siddiqui, the fire brigades had difficulty in reaching the spot due to the traffic jam. "The fire brigade team has searched all the floors and declared them clear," he said. "The building has been evacuated and the fire has been completely extinguished," he added. To a query regarding the presence of fire safety arrangements in the building, the official said that the team would inspect the building and then ascertain whether the protocol for high-rise buildings was followed.

The victims

Gulshan SP Tahir Ahmed Noorani said that the two persons who had jumped from the building were identified as 35-year-old Jehanzeb, son of Sardar and 27-year-old Hamza, son of Masood Awan.

SP Noorani explained that offices of various companies were located in the building, which had even developed cracks from the fire and was therefore dangerous to inhabit. The police have sealed the whole building.

Mayor applauds rescue teams

Karachi Mayor Waseem Akhter applauded the Fire Department for taking swift action to control the fire and preventing it from spreading further. "Our fire brigade teams have always performed well despite limited resources," he said, adding that fire fighters have also been martyred during the discharge of their duties but have never showed negligence with their responsibilities.

Chief Fire Officer Siddiqui, briefing the mayor about the incident, said that although the fire was not very big and was controlled immediately, but the structure of the building was such that there is no balcony or duct in it. The structure was completely sealed, which is why the smoke had engulfed the whole building.

(By Sajid Rauf The Express Tribune, 04, 22/03/2019)

Three of a family die in Jahangir Road fire

A woman and her two children died in a fire that broke out in their Jahangir Road home early on Friday morning, police said.

They said that the incident took place owing to some electric short-circuit in a government quarters dating back to the colonial era where houses had old and faulty electric wiring.

Jamshed Quarters SHO Shamshad Chachar said that 35-year-old Shumaila and her son and daughter — eight-year-old Irfan and five-year-old Hunaiza — were sleeping in a small room, which was locked from the inside.

Shumaila lived with her in-laws and other members of her family were sleeping in another room.

He said that the electric board caught fire and the sparks reached the ceiling fan which also caught fire. Some sparks from the fan fell on their bed, which was engulfed in flames.

When other family members and neighbours woke up at around 5.30am, they saw smoke coming from the room. They entered the room and found charred bodies of the woman and her two children, said the officer.

The bodies were shifted to the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi for medico-legal formalities.

The area SHO said that the deceased's husband, Junaid, worked in Malaysia.

Declaring it an accident, he ruled out any possibility of foul play.

Also, he said that no relatives had so far approached the police for lodging any case.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 23/03/2019)

SHC issues notice to Metropolitan Commissioner over building fire

The Sindh High Court (SHC) issued notice to the Metropolitan Commissioner, seeking a reply on Tuesday on a petition pertaining to the fire that broke out in a 12-storey building in Gulshan-e-Iqbal, which claimed the lives of four people and injured several others.

A two-member bench, headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and comprising Justice Agha Faisal, heard the petition filed by Advocate Nadeem Sheikh, accusing the Sindh government of ruining the city. Sheikh said that a Rs500 million snorkel procured by the government was useless. He added that whoever wants to construct high-rise building, they do so in the absence of checks and balances. Building are often constructed without their building plans being approved, he said, adding that there are no emergency exit systems in these buildings.

The petitioner said that had the Pakistan Navy not participated in the rescue efforts, many more lives would have been lost. The petitioner requested that a new fire law be introduced in Sindh, which must be in line with building rules. No law regarding fire has been made after the inception of Pakistan. The absence of a law for the safety of property and lives of the public is a poor example, the petition stated.

Despite diverting the attention of the chief secretary, Karachi commissioner and KMC towards the matter in 2014, no measures were taken to address the issue. The court, issuing notice to Metropolitan Commissioner, sought reply on the petition. The court directed to make the building owner a party in the case as well and adjourned the hearing till April 16.

Universities Amendment Act

The same bench also heard the petition against the Sindh Universities Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 and directed the counsel for Sindh government to submit a response within two weeks.

Justice Mazhar demanded an explanation as to how the law would disturb the education system. Irfan Aziz, the counsel for the petitioner, maintained that the Sindh Governor used to be the chancellor of the public universities in the province. But through the Act, all the authorities have been transferred to the Sindh Chief Minister. The universities and the schools in Sindh will be devastated, said Aziz.

Justice Mazhar asked the counsel what he thinks should now be done. We will take actions if the amendment violates the basic rights.

Sindh Additional Advocate-General Shabbir Shah maintained that the Act was not illegal. The court asked him to submit his statement in writing.

The petitioner, Pasban President Altaf Shakoor, had argued that 24 varsities have been made subordinate to the CM for political gains. He claimed that attempts were being made to close the doors of education on people living in urban areas.

The varsities hve been deprived of their autonomy. The bureaucrats will be appointed on eight out of 10 seats of syndicates. The educational environment will be devastated and the varsities will turn into a hub of politics, he added.

Safoora Goth incident

Another two-member bench of SHC, comprising Justice Aftab and Justice Amjad Ali, heard the appeals against the death sentences awarded by the military courts in Safoora Goth incident. The court sought response from the additional attorney-general on April 29.

Hashmat Habib, the counsel for the petitioners argued that the military courts had submitted response on Saad Aziz's application, but the responses for other applicants was still pending.

Each page of the military's answer has confidential written on it. According to the Army Rules, confidential documents cannot be used for general comprehension. "Either directives to remove the word confidential be issued or we will be allowed to submit a reply," maintained the counsel.

The military court had awarded death sentences against Aziz, Tahir Minhas, Azhar Ishrat, Hafiz Nasir and Asadur Rehman in several cases of terrorism including Safoora Goth tragedy.

The petition maintained that based on several allegations, the military court has awarded the death sentence to the petitioners. The details of the cases are not being shared with the families of the accused, it further read. The counsel appealed that a meeting of the families with the accused be arranged and implementation on the punishment be suspended. He also requested for giving a chance to the accused to file an appeal in light of the Supreme Court judgement.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 27/03/2019)

Minor girl burns to death in Gulshan hut fire

A minor girl burnt to death while two other children were injured when a fire broke out in huts in Gulshan-i-Iqbal on Thursday afternoon, officials said.

Gulshan police said the blaze erupted in the huts located in Block 13-C near the Nipa traffic intersection in which four-year-old Fatima Yusuf died from burns. Her body was shifted to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre to fulfil legal formalities.

A fire brigade official said that two other children also sustained minor burn injuries. He said that the fire erupted in the huts at around 2.45pm. Four fire tenders extinguished the blaze after hectic efforts of more than one hour.

The fire brigade official said that around eight huts were destroyed in the fire but they helped save about 80 others.

The cause of the fire and estimate of losses could not be made immediately.

Tableeghi Jamaat man shot dead

A man was shot dead in a suspected targeted attack in Federal B Area late on Wednesday night, Yusuf Plaza police said on Thursday.

They added that gunmen riding a motorcycle opened fire on Shahzad Qureshi, 46, near Anarkali Bazaar in FB Area and fled. He sustained a single bullet wound on his head and died on the spot. The body was taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for legal formalities. The victim was a vendor and resident of a New Karachi locality.

Yusuf Plaza SHO Anila Qadir told Dawn that it appeared to be a targeted killing incident prompted by sectarianism.

She said two years ago, the victim started sporting beard and joined the Tableeghi Jamaat. He had recently spent four months in preaching. His brother is also a follower of the same religious group.

As no other elder male member of the family was present here, the police were waiting for the deceased's brother to come back and lodge an FIR to initiate formal investigation to ascertain the possible identity and motive of the killers.

Young man gunned down

A young man was gunned down in Machhar Colony early on Thursday morning, Docks police said.

They added that Saleem, 25, was gunned down outside his home located in a congested street near Al-Habib Masjid.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 29/03/2019)

Another eyewitness testifies in Baldia factory fire case

A prosecution witness has recorded his statement before an antiterrorism court in a case pertaining to the Baldia factory fire and deposed against one of the held accused, Zubair alias Chariya.

Nine accused — including Muttahida Qaumi Movement lawmaker Rauf Siddiqui, Abdul Rehman alias Bhola and Zubair alias Chariya — have been charged with setting ablaze a garments factory in Baldia Town with the help of its four gatekeepers — Shahrukh, Fazal Ahmed, Arshad Mehmood and Ali Mohammad — on Sept 11, 2012.

On Monday, the investigating officer of the case produced a witness before the ATC-VI judge for recording his statement.

The witness deposed that he used to work in the M/s Ali Enterprises and he went to the factory as usual on the day of the incident. He stated that five men came to the factory to meet Zubair, who also worked in the factory.

He said Zubair asked him to take his "guests" to a washroom, where they smoked hashish.

The witness testified that later the five men went to the mezzanine floor and sprinkled some powder that caused fire, adding that they repeated the same on the second floor.

As the workers struggling to escape tried to catch Zubair and his men, they fled the factory, he added.

Advocate Tamaz Khan, counsel for Zubair, cross-examined the prosecution witness for around two hours.

He submitted that there were glaring contradictions in the statement of the witness as he mentioned two different places from where he claimed to have seen the five men who allegedly caused fire in the factory.

He said that the testimony of the witness as an "eyewitness" could not be considered since he and the accused worked together in the same factory for a long time and they knew each other very well.

The defence counsel for accused Rehman alias Bhola also cross-examined the witness.

The court summoned three more prosecution witnesses to record their statements for April 3 (today).

According to the prosecution, the suspects acted on the instruction of the then head of the MQM Karachi Tanzeemi Committee, Hammad Siddiqui, after the factory owners did not pay protection money. A red warrant has already been issued for the arrest of Mr Siddiqui.

Initially, the police had released accused Zubair citing lack of evidence against him. However, he was once again detained after key suspect Rehman Bhola in his statement recorded before a joint investigation team implicated him, disclosing that he carried out the task of setting ablaze the factory through Zubair and some others.

Over 250 factory workers were burnt alive in the worst industrial fire in the country in several decades.
(The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 03/04/2019)

ATC summons more witnesses to testify in Baldia factory fire case on 11th

An antiterrorism court on Tuesday allowed the prosecution's request to summon more witnesses, including forensic and technical experts, to record their testimonies in a case pertaining to the Baldia factory fire.

Nine accused — including Muttahida Qaumi Movement lawmaker Rauf Siddiqui, Abdul Rehman, alias Bhola; and M. Zubair, alias Chariya — have been charged with setting ablaze a garments factory in Baldia Town with the help of its four gatekeepers — Shahrukh, Fazal Ahmed, Arshad Mehmood and Ali Mohammad — on Sept 11, 2012.

On Tuesday, the judge of the ATC-VI took up an application moved by Rangers special public prosecutor Sajid Mehboob Shaikh pleading to the court to summon the 47 remaining witnesses to testify before the court in the case.

Factory manager says MQM activist Bhola insisted on payment of Rs250m, not less, as extortion money

The prosecutor said that 377 witnesses had been examined by the court and the remaining 47 also be summoned since their evidence was important and relevant to the case.

According to the prosecutor, the remaining witnesses, including experts from the Punjab Forensic Science Agency, the faculty of science of the University of Karachi, an electrical inspector, and the head of a joint investigation team constituted in the case, should testify.

After hearing arguments from the defence counsel, the judge allowed the application and summoned more witnesses to record their statements on April 11.

Witnesses record statements

The judge, who is conducting trial in the judicial complex inside the central prison, also recorded statements of two prosecution witnesses.

The first witness testified that he worked as a manager at Ali Enterprises where in July 2012 the then in-charge of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement's Baldia sector Abdul Rehman, alias Rehman Bhola, and Majid Baig allegedly met its owners.

He said the factory owners later told him that Bhola had demanded Rs250 million extortion and also a share in the business allegedly on behalf of the then head of MQM's Karachi Tanzeemi Committee Hammad Siddiqui.

The witnesses said that since he used to handle the matters related to the MQM, as most of the factory workers were the party's activists, the owners asked him to settle the matter with Bhola and offered to pay Rs10m as extortion.

The witness said that he met Bhola and made the factory owner's offer, who said that Hammad Siddiqui had tasked him to collect Rs250m extortion from the factory owners. Bhola allegedly said that he would not accept an amount less than Rs250m otherwise the factory owners would face the consequences, the witness added.

Another witness, a judicial magistrate, also recorded his statement before the court.

The witness deposed that he was posted as a judicial magistrate and had recorded the statement of two prosecution witnesses in the present case — the factory manager and another witness Majid Baig — under sections 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code on a request of the investigating officer of the case.

Later, the defence counsel for accused Rehman Bhola, Zubair Chariya and others cross-examined both the witnesses.

Advocate M. Tamaz Khan for Bhola contended that there were glaring contradictions in the statements of the factory manager recorded under sections 161 and then 164 of the CrPC.

He further contended that the testimony of the factory manager could not be considered under the law since he himself was arrested in the present case and had remained in jail for months until he was released on bail. He said the statement of the judicial magistrate was being recorded for a second time in the case, while he had not even mentioned the number of the FIR and other basic information related to the case in his statement.

The counsel further argued that the testimony of another prosecution witness, Majid Baig, could also not be used as evidence because he himself had admitted that he used to collect extortion and fitra amount from the factory owners on behalf of the then Baldia sector's in-charge, who was his brother. He added that Baig himself was arrested in the present case and later released under Section 169 of the CrPC.

According to the prosecution, the suspects acted on the instruction of Hammad Siddiqui after the factory owners did not pay protection money. A red warrant has already been issued for arrest of Mr Siddiqui.

Initially, the police had released Zubair Chariya citing lack of evidence against him. However, he was once again detained after the key suspect, Rehman Bhola, in his statement recorded before a joint investigation team implicated him, alleging that he carried out the task of setting ablaze the factory with the help of Chariya and some others.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 15, 10/04/2019)

Chemical used in Baldia factory fire was 'highly' inflammable, says researcher

A special anti-terrorism court (ATC) summoned more witnesses in Baldia factory case after completion of arguments of accused's counsel on statements given by research officer.

The hearing was held at Karachi Central Jail on Monday in which the jail officials presented accused Zubair Charya, Rehman alias Bhola before the court, while special public prosecutor Mehbood Shaikh presented senior research officer of University of Karachi (KU)'s Chemistry Department to record his statement.

According to the witness, the chemical used to set the factory on fire was examined and the findings revealed that the material was highly flammable in presence of oxygen. The fire lit from the chemical becomes stronger when water is sprayed on it, he said.

The counsel for the accused completed their arguments on the statement. The court, summoning more witnesses, adjourned the hearing till May 2.

Meanwhile, the joint investigation team (JIT) probing the Baldia fire incident submitted a report to an ATC on Monday which revealed the names of 40 members of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)'s team of target killers.

The names were revealed by Rizwan Qureshi, one of the prime accused of the case and the first to expose MQM's involvement in the incident and threats to factory owners.

The JIT report was submitted at the ATC at Karachi Central Jail by Deputy Inspector-General (DIG) Nasir Aftab, which included the names of Ubaid K2, Rais Mama, Saulat Mirza and others.

According to the report, Saulat Mirza has been given death penalty after his conviction in the case involving murder of former Karachi Electric Supply Corporation (KESC) [Now K-Electric] managing director Shahid Hamid.

Rizwan Qureshi, according to the report, was in-charge of MQM target killers for Landhi, Malir and Korangi areas and, with the support of Saulat Mirza, he targeted many political rivals and police officers. Qureshi had also admitted that the top leadership of MQM had demanded Rs200 million in ransom from Ali Enterprises. All these activities were handled by MQM organising committee in-charge Hammad Siddiqui and Farooq Salim.

The JIT report was submitted in response to the application filed on April 20 by the prosecutor. The court has admitted the report as part of its record.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 30/04/2019)