

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

*JULY TO DECEMBER 2020*

## HUTS ON FIRE



## Urban Resource Centre

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### Man held for opening fire in Karachi trust office

Police arrested on Thursday a man suspected of opening fire at Sarim Burney Welfare Trust International's office near Old Sabzi Mandi the previous day.

A man had opened fire on the office and attempted to forcefully take away a woman, Bisma, who, according to the trust officials, had sought shelter at the office after leaving her home over domestic issues.

They said that Bisma identified the man as Naveed, her brother-in-law.

When the staff tried to stop Naveed, he abused them, threatening them of serious consequences, fired in the air and fled, said the welfare organisation's founder, Sarim Burney.

A case for the incident was registered after it was reported to the police, following which they arrested Naveed.

According to police, Bisma refused to go with Naveed while he tried to take her away by force, and further investigation of the matter is underway.

"Such incidents are a common occurrence but our team puts their lives at risk to save other lives and continues to work in these dangerous situations," said Burney, pointing out that the cooperation of police and other law enforcement agencies was essential for them to continue to operate.

He demanded immediate action against the man involved in the shooting at the trust's office.  
9By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 10/07/2020)

### Legal heirs of five Baldia factory victims seek retrial of case

The legal heirs of five Baldia factory victims on Monday moved the Sindh High Court (SHC) to challenge the judgement of a trial court in the arson case and sought a retrial to try the "real culprits".

They contended that it was a mistrial since all the culprits, especially the main and real ones, namely the owners and management of the factory and the negligent government officials, were not tried by the antiterrorism court (ATC).

An ATC had sentenced former sector in-charge of then Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) Abdul Rehman aka Bholu and Zubair aka Charya to death for setting the factory ablaze and awarded life terms to three watchmen of the ill-fated industrial unit while four others, including MQM leader Rauf Siddiqui, were exonerated around two months ago.

The convicts have already filed appeals in the SHC against the judgement of the ATC.

The legal heirs of the five deceased workers and an injured person through their counsel Faisal Siddiqui filed an application to become interveners in the appeals in order to assist the court.

They contended that initially, the FIR was lodged against the owners/management of the factory and various government officials.

The investigation reports of police and Federal Investigation Agency said safety and firefighting measures in the factory were highly inadequate. Due to the alleged threat of theft, two exit doors of the second floor were permanently sealed by the factory management, which made it extremely difficult for the workers to find their way in the dark, they added.

They also argued that the factory had employed over 1,500 workers and it was neither registered nor inspected for fire safety purposes by the departments concerned while the social security department had also not registered all the workers. Thus the collusion and negligence of those government departments was clear while the investigation concluded that it was an accidental fire, they said.

The applicants further maintained that the trial court had removed the names of factory owners and government officials from the case and the conviction of the accused persons was based on a mistrial.

Over 260 workers were burnt alive in the multistorey garment factory located in Baldia Town in September 2012.

### SHC orders release of funds for hospital

A divisional bench of the SHC on Monday directed the provincial authorities to ensure that the funds for the Sindh Government Children Hospital in North Karachi should be released within a week.

When a petition about the hospital came up for hearing, an additional advocate general filed a statement signed by the chief secretary in compliance with an earlier order of the bench.

It contended that the summary regarding release of funds to the Poverty Eradication Initiative (PEI) for the hospital in North Karachi had been approved by the chief minister on Nov 10.

The bench took the statement on record and issued direction that after approval of the summary and completion of other requisite formalities, the funds must be released within one week.

The PEI, a non-governmental organisation, is running the hospital under the provincial government's public-private partnership programme.

In the previous hearing, the bench had observed that the main issue was release of funds to make the hospital fully functional and for the chief secretary to expedite the process of approval of a pending summary for grant of the funds for the hospital.  
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 14, 17/11/2020)

### **Huge fire destroys three factories in Landhi's EPZ**

A huge fire that erupted in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) of Landhi on Sunday evening was extinguished on Monday after hours of hectic efforts. However cooling work continued till evening, according to officials.

The fire gutted the three factories and badly damaged the buildings. The incident prompted law enforcers to get the zone vacated from workers to prevent possible loss of life.

SSP Malir Irfan Bahadur said the fire had engulfed three factories. He said the fire initially broke out in a cardboard factory inside the EPZ. It spread and engulfed two other nearby units manufacturing cloth and plastic. The SSP said there was no human casualty in the fire. However, he added that there were substantive damage to the property as the three factories were almost destroyed. Mr Bahadur said that the blaze was controlled by Monday but cooling work continued. He said the exact cause of the fire and estimate of loss would be determined after the cooling process ended.

A fire brigade officer said they were informed about the incident at around 6.13pm on Sunday. He added that the blaze was put out on Monday afternoon by 11 fire tenders. He said four fire tenders were busy in the cooling work.

An Edhi Foundation spokesperson said that their rescue workers and ambulances stayed there to meet any eventuality. A Pakistan Rangers-Sindh spokesperson in a statement said their personnel took part in rescue and firefighting efforts. The Rangers asked the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and the fire brigade to send more water tankers and fire tenders to control the situation.

The Rangers said all people working in the factories of the EPZ were moved to safety.

#### **Probe body**

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah took notice of the fire in the EPZ and directed Commissioner of Karachi Iftikhar Ali Shallwani to conduct a thorough probe into it and submit a report to him.

The commissioner told Dawn that an inquiry committee "has been formed under the Malir deputy commissioner to ascertain the cause of the fire and fix responsibility within 15 days".

#### **Suspect killed in encounter**

A suspected robber was shot dead in an alleged encounter who, along with an accomplice of his, were fleeing after injuring two shopkeepers near Mosamiat Chowk, off University Road in Gulistan-i-Jauhar, on Monday, Sachal police said.

They added that two gunmen riding a motorcycle tried to loot a hairdresser near Jauhar Complex. They shot at and injured the hairdresser, Saleem, as he put up resistance. A nearby milk seller was also fired at and wounded when he tried to chase the suspects.

When the suspects were fleeing, a police party arrived there and with the help of witnesses followed the suspects. In an exchange of fire in Madina Colony, one suspect, identified as Arsalan, 35, was killed but his accomplice escaped.

The dead suspect and the two injured shopkeepers were shifted to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre.  
(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 14, 21/07/2020)

### **Prosecutor's rebuttal to defence arguments recorded in Baldia fire**

An antiterrorism court has recorded rebuttal of the special public prosecutor to the final arguments advanced by the defence counsel for the accused persons in the Baldia factory fire case.

Nine accused — including Muttahida Qaumi Movement leader and then provincial minister for commerce and industries Rauf Siddiqui; then MQM sector in-charge Abdul Rehman, alias Bhola and M. Zubair, alias Chariya — have been charged with setting ablaze the industrial unit with the help of its four gatekeepers — Shahrukh, Fazal Ahmed, Arshad Mehmood and Ali Mohammad. On Thursday, the matter came up before the ATC-VI judge, who is conducting the trial in the judicial complex inside the central prison.

Special public prosecutor for Rangers Sajid Mehboob Sheikh made rebuttal to the final arguments advanced by Advocate M.T.

Khan and Mansoor Akhtar, defence counsel for Zubair alias Chariya and Abdul Rehman alias Bhola, respectively.

The counsel for both accused and others, in their final arguments, had denied the allegations levelled by the prosecution against their clients, claiming innocence on the part of their clients and pleaded to acquit them.

However, while rebutting the arguments of both the accused persons' defence counsel, prosecutor Shaikh contended that the allegations of the prosecution against the accused persons were fully corroborated with the testimonies of nearly 400 prosecution witnesses by the material evidence, including the reports of the chemical, ballistics, forensic and DNA tests conducted in Punjab and Karachi and the army's laboratory that the incident was allegedly a deliberate act of arson instead of a fire accident caused by a short-circuit.

#### **Fresh FIR**

The prosecutor rebutted that all witnesses and the first investigating officer of the case, then sub-inspector Jahanzeb, were facing life threats, thus there was an 'explained' delay in recording their statements, under Section 161 of the criminal procedure code, by the police.

After constitution of a joint investigation team, suspect Rizwan Qureshi was arrested on June 17, 2013 and interrogated by the JIT on June 22, 2013, and for the first time it was revealed by the JIT in 2015 that the fire in M/s Ali Enterprises garments factory was allegedly an "act of arson" instead of being caused by a "short-circuit".

However, he stated that the whereabouts of Rizwan Qureshi later became unknown after he obtained bail from the court and the IO also visited his residence and produced his surety, but Qureshi was still "untraceable".

He maintained that later all the witnesses turned up before the JIT's investigating officer the then SSP Sajid Sadozai to record their statements after the Rangers provided them protection.

Sajid Mehboob added that the Rangers provided protection to the witnesses, including an electrician at the factory named Arshad, who was an eyewitness to the offence, and Majid Baig, who was a brother of Asghar Baig, the sector in-charge of MQM in Baldia Town before Abdul Rehman replaced him.

Thereafter their statements were recorded before the judicial magistrate under Section 164 of the CrPC, he added.

The prosecutor contended that while the JIT recommended registering a fresh first information report (FIR) in the present case after completing its investigation in 2015, but practically cancelling the initial FIR (No. 343/2012) — registered by the then SHO Inspector Mohammad Nawaz — could damage the case and the new FIR would have no legal authenticity following a delay of almost three years.

The prosecutor further contended that the three witnesses — including the M/s Ali Enterprises factory owner Arshad Bhaila, its then general manager Mansoor and an electrician Arshad — were not associated with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, while all other witnesses were associated with the same political group.

However, the prosecutor clarified that none of the witnesses were relatives of any victim, who perished in the inferno.

The prosecutor further clarified that while all witnesses, except above-mentioned three men, were associated with the MQM, all eyewitnesses impartially recorded their testimonies before the court without any fear or pressure.

#### **Safety exits**

The prosecutor argued that the window grills installed on the upper floors of the multistorey building having iron grills affixed on them did not mean a passage, as a few workers broke the grills and got injured while they attempted to jump out of the burning building from the windows to save their lives.

However, he stated that all the exit doors of the burning industrial unit were open when the fire took place, adding that 700 to 800 workers present inside the building at the time not only exited from the same exit doors, but had also rescued their colleagues trapped inside.

But, the prosecutor argued that the fire was so intense that around 262 people were burnt alive adding that accused persons allegedly used chemical to ignite the fire that caused thick smoke. The people trapped inside could hardly see anything, according to the statements of the survivors.

(By Naeem Sahotara Dawn, 13, 22/08/2020)

### **Baldia factory fire still haunts families**

As the flames soared, ashen-faced Shafiq Ahmed stood stunned, witnessing the tragedy unfold before his eyes. Among those trapped in the unstoppable blaze swallowing the entire building of a garment factory, Ali Enterprises, was his brother.

"It was September 9, 2012, Raees' 27th birthday. He had looked forward to celebrating it in the evening upon returning from work," Shafiq told The Express Tribune.

Raees Ahmed, Shafiq's deceased brother, used to live with the rest of his family in Gujrat Colony. He had been married just four months when the tragedy claimed his life. He had lost his parents at a very young age and was brought up by his elder brothers.

"I saw the inferno and the realisation dawned that my brother was in there," he said, his voice shaking. "I can never forget the scene and each year, as September 11 arrives, old wounds are reopened."

As Shafiq relived the nightmare this year, he narrated that Raees had come home for lunch that fateful day, before going back to work.

News of the blaze spread like wildfire and Shafiq, with other relatives, rushed to the site, hoping against hope that Raees would be safe and sound, returning to celebrate his birthday at home.

"By the time we reached the factory, everything was gone," he recalled.

Shafiq had returned to the site the very next day, but couldn't stay there for long - the heat was too much to bear. Since then, even passing by the site has been difficult for him.

The same rings true for the family of Imran Khan, who was killed in the inferno at the age of 32 years.

He was a machine operator at Ali Enterprises and like Raees, had gone home for lunch on the unfortunate day before leaving again for work.

His brother, Asif Khan told The Express Tribune, "Imran had gone to the factory to collect his wage but was killed in the fire."

It has been eight long years since then, but several despairing families, like those of Raees and Imran, still await closure.

With as many as 260 people burnt alive in the inferno, there were cries for justice - as well as allegations of the factory being ablaze deliberately after the owners refused to pay extortion money.

The factory owners have held the Muttahida Qaumi Movement responsible for the fire killings, with three party members, Rauf Siddiqui, Rehman Bhola and Zubair Charya, indicted in the case in February 2017.

So far, 400 witnesses have testified against the accused before an anti-terrorism court (ATC). The government has paid compensation to the victims' families.

But the grieving families have yet to receive justice.

They don't have high hopes, but with bated breath, they dread the arrival of September 17, when the ATC is expected to announce the verdict.

If the accused are not punished, it will be yet another blow to the helpless families.

"The government may take the compensation back. We want our brother to come home," said Shafiq, in tears. "Words fail to describe my pain."

The fact that it was impossible for his wish to come true remained unsaid.  
(By Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 11/09/2020)

### **Woman, infant daughter among four die in Hijrat Colony building fire**

Four people, including a woman and her infant daughter, were killed in a fire that erupted in a residential building in Hijrat Colony on Saturday morning, officials said.

They said that the blaze erupted in a mattress shop located on the ground floor and it engulfed the first floor of the building. Civil Lines SHO Salahuddin said that eight persons were shifted to hospital. A young man died of burns while three others died of inhaling smoke.

He added that all the eight persons became unconscious after inhaling smoke.

He said that the fire erupted at around 5.45am but according to a fire brigade official they received information about the blaze at around 6.05am.

*Doctors say one victim was burnt to death while three others died of inhaling smoke*

They sent one fire tender initially and later sent another. In the meantime, two more fire tenders of the Karachi Port Trust also arrived there.

The firefighters managed to control the blaze at around 9.40am. They said they faced problem in getting access to the area as the building was located in a congested locality.

The fire official said that nine persons were rescued in an unconscious condition and they were sent to a hospital. Shaharyar Talib, 24, already died of burns before arrival of the fire tenders.

At the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi, three other persons were pronounced dead.

They were identified as Wasila Tauqeer, 30, her daughter one-and-half-year-old daughter, Ayat, and Ishrat Talib, 45.

The officials said that the owner of the building, Mohammad Talib, was the spouse of deceased Ishrat. He was also injured. Most of the victims are said to be his relatives.

The wounded were identified as Talib, 50, Shahzaib, 18, Sumbal Talib, 20, Tauqeer Talib, 35, Awais Talib, Irshad, 50, his children Abdul Qutub, 10, Ms Hoor, 30.

Police Surgeon Qarar Ahmed Abbasi said that the relatives took away the four bodies from the CHK without allowing doctors to complete medico-legal formalities.

He said that only four injured persons were brought to the CHK. They all became unconscious after inhaling smoke and were discharged after first aid.

Constable Naeem Gujjar, posted at Madadgar-15 Civil Lines, fell unconscious due to smoke during the rescue operation. He was shifted to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre from where he was discharged after first aid.

The area SHO opined that some electric short-circuit might have triggered the fire.

However, the fire official said that the exact cause of the blaze was not known.

Regarding damage to property, he said that the mattress shop and two other shops were gutted while the first floor of the building was also damaged.

(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 13/09/2020)

### **Baldia factory fire case hearing adjourned till Sept 22**

An antiterrorism court, which was expected to wrap up the hearing of the high-profile Baldia factory fire case proceedings on Thursday, adjourned the hearing till Sept 22 after parties argued on the important point of award of compensation to legal heirs of the victims, in case of conviction of the accused persons.

The judge of the ATC-VII, who is conducting the trial in the judicial complex inside the central prison, is likely to announce his verdict on the next date after hearing concluding arguments from the special public prosecutor and the defence counsel for the accused.

Over 260 workers were burnt alive when the multistorey Ali Enterprises garments factory was set on fire in Baldia Town on September 11, 2012 in what became the deadliest industrial blaze in Pakistan's history.

Ten accused — then-provincial minister for commerce and industries Rauf Siddiqui, MQM's then Baldia Town sector in-charge Abdul Rehman, alias Bhola; Zubair, alias Charya; Hyderabad-based businessmen Dr Abdul Sattar Khan; Umar Hasan Qadri; Iqbal Adeeb Khanum and the industrial unit's four gatekeepers — Shahrukh, Fazal Ahmed, Arshad Mehmood and Ali Mohammad — were charged with setting ablaze the factory.

On Thursday, the special public prosecutor for Rangers Sajid Mehboob Shaikh and defence counsel for the accused persons argued on the point of fixing fines and awarding of compensation to the legal heirs of the victims, in case of conviction of the accused persons.

*Twenty-four bodies have still not been claimed by anyone*

Prosecutor Shaikh provided additional documents pertaining to the total number of victims and their legal heirs, who are entitled to award of compensation, as per statistics compiled by the judicial commission constituted by the Sindh High Court (SHC) to disburse the amount contributed by the Pakistani government, the factory owners and Germany-based buyer company KiK.

The prosecutor informed that post-mortem examination of total 263 deceased persons was conducted, which include 23 unidentified bodies charred beyond recognition.

One mobile phone has also been counted as a body, taking the total death toll to 264.

However, he said that a judicial commission constituted on the directives of the SHC had disbursed monetary compensation among 240 claimants since 24 bodies still had not been claimed by anyone.

Mr Shaikh argued that the compensation amount disbursed by the judicial commission was given by the factory's owners, their German buyer KiK, some non-governmental organisation as well as the federal and Sindh governments "as separate compensation on sympathetic basis".

The prosecutor said that such compensation had nothing to do with the ongoing criminal case, as it was given by all contributors on voluntary basis, which was clearly mentioned by the SHC as well as the judicial commission in their orders.

Therefore, the prosecutor insisted that the compensation awarded by the judicial commission had no relation to the criminal case. It may be mentioned here that under the law, in most of the cases, the courts imposed fines on the accused persons and also ordered them to compensate legal heirs of the victims in murder cases.

The defence counsel for the accused persons also agreed with the prosecutor on the point of compensation, arguing that the matter pertained to the civil rights of the legal heirs of the victims, thus the compensation disbursed by the judicial commission had nothing to do with the ongoing trial proceedings of the Baldia factory fire case.

After hearing arguments on this point, the judge adjourned hearing till Sept 22 to hear further final arguments from the prosecutor as well as the defence counsel for the parties.

The court is expected to pronounce its judgement in the case on the next date of hearing.

According to the prosecution, the accused persons allegedly acted on the instructions of the then chief of MQM's Karachi Tanzeemi Committee, Hammad Siddiqui, over the non-payment of protection money of Rs250 million by the factory's owners.

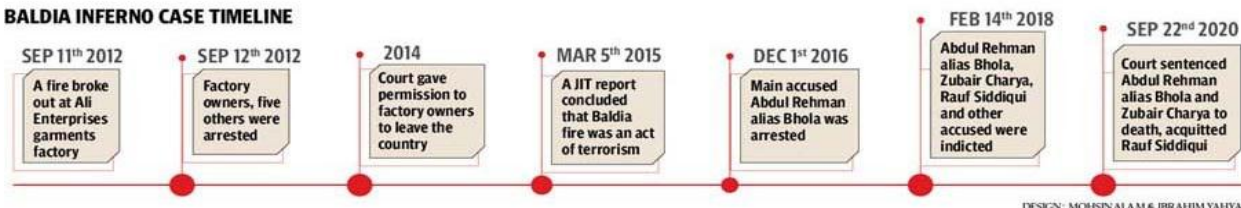
Hammad and businessman Ali Hasan Qadri were declared proclaimed offenders in the case as both were reportedly hiding abroad. The factory's owner Arshad Bhaila had testified in the court that the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) men allegedly asked him to pay Rs250m in extortion or 50 per cent "shares" in the profits. He said he was willing to pay Rs10m.  
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 18/09/2020)

### The day 259 workers were burnt to death

An anti-terrorism court (ATC) announced the verdict of the Baldia Factory Fire on Tuesday sentencing two to death and convicting four others for the deadliest industrial blaze in Pakistan's history. Over 259 workers were burnt alive in the inferno, and yet, the route to yesterday's judgement spanned over eight gruelling years, punctuated with countless delays, interference from political and influential corners, and several investigations. The Express Tribune takes a look back.

The fire engulfed the Ali Enterprises garment factory in Baldia Town on September 11, 2012, killing 259 workers. Subsequent DNA and forensic analysis recorded the fatalities at 264, as recounted in the ATC's judgement.

#### BALDIA INFERNO CASE TIMELINE



The next day, factory owners Abdul Aziz Bhaila, Shahid Bhaila and Arshad Bhaila were arrested along with the factory's managing staff.

The case was initially dubbed an accident, and on February 1, 2013, the investigation officer removed the murder clause from the case.

Though, non-governmental organisations, labour rights' groups and civil society exerted pressure, including petitions in court, for a thorough inquiry of the fire.

An interim challan was filed the following October in which the factory owners and the arrested management staff were charged. In 2014, the Bhaila brothers, who had earlier acquired bail, moved to Dubai with the court's permission.

It wasn't until 2015 that the Sindh High Court ordered that the investigation be reopened after allegations of extortion and arson against the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) came to light.

On February 6, 2015, Sindh Rangers submitted a report before the court with regards to Rizwan Qureshi, a man arrested from Clifton in an illegal arms case. According to the report, Qureshi revealed that the blaze was not the result of any technical fault but had instead been intentionally ignited. He told that the factory was set ablaze by workers of the MQM because the factory owners failed to pay Rs200 million as 'protection' money.

To investigate these claims, a joint-investigation team was set up in March 2015.

A year later, in March 2016, the JIT submitted a progress report which recognised the fire as an act of arson and terrorism. The following August, a challan was submitted before the court against former chief of the MQM's Karachi Tanzeemi Committee, Hammad Siddiqui, two party workers Abdul Rehman alias Bhola and Zubair Charya, and others. The businessmen embezzled funds paid by the factory owners intended as compensation for the victims and their families.

On September 5, 2016, the presiding judge of the case transferred it to a special ATC.

Then, on December 1, 2016, Rehman Bhola was arrested in Bangkok by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the Interpol and produced before the court in Pakistan two weeks later.

Bhola recorded his confessional statement before the judicial magistrate later the same month. According to the confessional statement, Bhola was told about Ali Enterprises factory and tasked with asking for the extortion amount. Bhola went to the factory owners and told them Hammad Siddiqui had sent him to collect the money. When the Bhaila brothers said they could not pay more than Rs10 million, Bhola told them they must make him a shareholder of the business or the factory would be set ablaze. Bhola further stated that he contacted Mansoor, and later went to Nine Zero, along with Zubair Charya, and explained that the owners were only paying Rs10m. At this, told Bhola, Siddiqui was enraged and instructed him to set the factory on fire.

Pressured by the uproar in the aftermath of the crime, Rauf Siddiqui filed a case against the factory owners, according to Bhola.

Following Bhola's statement, MQM leader Rauf Siddiqui was included in the ambit of the investigation, and in April 2017 the police filed another challan.

Bhola, Charya and others were nominated in this challan while Hammad Siddiqui was declared wanted. But Rauf Siddiqui's name was absent. The prosecutor objected to this and petitioned the court to direct that Rauf be nominated as well and produced before the court.

The prosecutor's petition was approved and in January 2018, MQM's Rauf Siddiqui was produced before the court. The accused were subsequently indicted in 2018.

The initial witness list submitted by the prosecution named 768 persons but 364 names were subsequently dropped, and 400 witness statements were recorded during the course of the trial. Several reports of witness intimidation and threats also emerged during the trial. Special public prosecutor Sajid Mehboob Sheikh was also reportedly threatened during the trial and attacked on three separate occasions.

After many trials and tribulations the case has finally been concluded with the ATC acquitting Rauf Siddiqui, who was also a provincial minister at the time, and Iqbal Adeel Khanum, Umar Hassan and Dr Abdul Sattar Khan, and sentencing Bhola and Charya to death.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 23/09/2020)

### Baldia fire convictions

EIGHT years ago this month, 264 men and women were burned alive in an inferno that engulfed the garment factory in Karachi where they worked. It is only now that some measure of justice has been done (albeit Dawn is opposed to the death penalty) in that ghastly tragedy which ranks among the world's deadliest industrial disasters.

An antiterrorism court on Tuesday awarded capital punishment to two former MQM activists and sentenced four gatekeepers of the factory to life imprisonment, while acquitting party leader Rauf Siddiqui. It appears the men, acting on the orders of the then chief of MQM's Karachi Tanzeemi Committee Hammad Siddiqui, set the building ablaze after the factory owners did not pay Rs250m extortion or offer a share in their business.

When the crime was committed, the party had a mafia-like grip over much of Karachi. A story was put about that the fire was caused by an electrical short circuit due to poor maintenance and the police filed an FIR against the factory owners. It was in early 2015, by which time the Karachi operation had defanged the MQM, that the case took a dramatic turn. A Rangers report, based on an MQM activist's confession from nearly two years earlier, held the party — then led by Altaf Hussain — as being squarely responsible for the fire.

However, one of the main accused, Hammad Siddiqui, is still ostensibly on the run. A report some three years ago claiming he had been arrested in Dubai was denied by law-enforcement authorities; whether that is true, or whether a 'confessional' video will surface at an opportune time in the future, is difficult to tell. There are always some trump cards that are kept in play by the powers that be — and the ones that have outlived their usefulness are discarded. Saulat Mirza is a case in point.

Nevertheless, the convictions of most of the accused will bring some solace to the victims' families. That said, the Baldia fire stands out because it was an unparalleled atrocity; the thuggish regime on whose watch it took place thrived on criminality as a matter of course. MQM cadres, armed to the teeth, would paralyse the entire city at a moment's notice, disrupting people's lives and livelihoods on the whims of their leader-in-exile in London. The party's network of ruthless sector and unit 'in-charges' in collusion with some of the party's top leaders was involved in multiple rackets including extortion, china-cutting, etc. Those who put up any resistance or simply happened to come in the way, paid the ultimate price.

While the Karachi operation managed to nab several MQM 'assets', those higher up the ladder — including the ones who gave the orders — are now part of the MQM-P and the Pak Sarzameen Party. The politics of expediency has given them a new lease of life.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 24/09/2020)



### **'Each Baldia fire victim's family paid Rs1.8m in compensation so far'**

Each of around 250 Baldia factory inferno victims' families has received approximately Rs1.8 million to Rs1.9 million in compensation so far, according to National Trade Union Federation Pakistan general secretary Nasir Mansoor and Ali Enterprises Factory Fire Affectees Association (AEFFAA) chairperson Saeeda Khatoon.

Small sums from this amount were given to the affected families at different instances, in line with legal requirements, they told The Express Tribune on Tuesday, adding that the compensation was provided by the federal government, factory's owners and other donors.

Elaborating further, they said that Ali Enterprises garment factory used to produce apparels for a German brand, which has paid Rs540 million in compensation.

However, they had to fight a long legal battle to get the brand to cough up the amount, Mansoor and Khatoon related. Eventually, an agreement was reached between international labour unions and the brand, leading to the payment of compensation, of which Rs7,500 to Rs12,500 is paid to the affected families as monthly pension.

Besides, they said, the Employees Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) has been giving the widows of killed workers Rs8,500 as monthly pension, and the Sindh Employees Social Security Institution Rs3,500. Also, the parents of workers who were killed in inferno and were unmarried are being paid Rs1,000 per month on account of pension, they added. Hence, each of the affected family receives at least Rs10,000 as pension per month.

However, Mansoor said, the parents of the deceased have not been receiving any pension from the EOBI. "But we are corresponding with the EOBI on the matter and if needed, would approach the court," he added.

Mansoor and Khatoon said that labour unions and the AEFFAAA had raised the issue of the provision of compensation to the victims' families at different forums it was and only after that the payment had been made possible.

According to them, a committee oversees the payment of pension to the affected families and the money is transferred directly to their bank accounts.

Speaking about the compensation for the injured workers, Mansoor said each of them had been paid between Rs50,000 to Rs100,000. Moreover, he added, recently 33 workers who were injured in the fire underwent a medical examination and they, too, were likely to be entitled to receiving compensation.

On a different note, Khatoon opined that while two main accused had been convicted in the case, others, including factory owners, responsible for the deaths of the workers also needed to be held accountable.

(By Aamir Khan The Express Tribune, 05, 25/09/2020)

### **Victim families, civil society refuse to accept 'politicised' Baldia factory verdict**

It was painful to watch the affectees of the Baldia factory fire, holding pictures of their lost loved ones, as they arrived to attend and also express their views during a press conference at the Karachi Press Club on Saturday regarding the "politicising" of the case, which, they said, has saved the owners of the factory from being held responsible for criminal negligence.

On Sept 22, an antiterrorism court in Karachi sentenced two ex-Muttahida Qaumi Movement workers to death in the Baldia factory arson case while the factory's four gatekeepers were sentenced to life term. Meanwhile, the factory owners were spared from punishment.

It's been eight years since the terrible tragedy but there was still a glint of tears in their eyes as they shared their suffering of having to lead life without their earning family members, who lost their lives in the inferno on Sept 11, 2012.

Holding tightly to his walking stick to help him sit straight, Aziz Bhai, who lost his son in the fire, said that the court had said that the incident happened as a result of terrorism but he did not accept the decision.

The widowed Saeeda Khatoon, who also lost her only son in the tragedy, said that more than 260 workers, who lost their lives that day, could have been saved had there been any safety measures in place at Ali Enterprises.

*'Declaring the main accused owners of the factory innocent is making a mockery of the justice system'*

#### **'Factory had no escape routes'**

"The factory had no escape routes, and extra or back exits if there were any, were all blocked or locked. Still, if it is being said now that the tragedy was a result of terrorism, then the factory owners are the greatest terrorists here," she said.

"We need laws to make sure that no other factory becomes like Ali Enterprises. The factory was not registered. Its workers were not registered. For a while, from 2012 to 2017 we got some pension as per some pension plan but then it stopped. Isn't pension to be paid for life? We have lost our only earning family member. We demand our pensions be restored," she added.

The affectees were joined by labour and human rights activists, who were also of the opinion that in the case of the Baldia factory incident, the real perpetrators have been allowed to go unscathed while the case has been politicised.

“The bereaved families of martyred workers did not get justice this time. Declaring the main accused owners of the factory ‘innocent’ is like making mockery of the justice system. Due to lack of health and safety facilities, workplaces in Pakistan have become death traps for Pakistani workers. Investigation in the Baldia factory fire case was influenced by making different joint investigation teams [JITs]. The bereaved families were never accepted as a party in the case, which is against the basic principles of law and justice,” said Nasir Mansoor, general secretary, National Trade Union Federation (NTUF).

He explained that the main issue here was not whether it was an arson or accidental fire, but that the factory was not fitted with a proper firefighting system. All exits of the factory including its windows had iron bars. The firefighting equipment present there was not in working condition. The workers were not provided any training or drills to help them face emergencies. Even the factory was working illegally. Its construction design was not approved from the departments concerned, and these were the main reasons that resulted in the death of over 260 innocent workers.

#### **Brands violating labour laws to earn more profits**

“If the factory owners were being blackmailed or if they were receiving threats from extortionists, then they should have contacted the police while also taking safety measures in their factory which they did not do. The government is still a silent spectator to what happened and local and international brands are violating labour laws and standards in a race to earn more profits,” he said.

“Everybody is doing politics on the blood of the poor workers but no one is willing to help them in getting justice that can dress their wounds. It is a shame that Karachi, the largest industrial city of Pakistan, does not have any forensic laboratory even in the 21st century for doing DNA tests. Some 17 dead workers of the Baldia fire incident had to be buried without identification as their families are still waiting for the DNA matching certificate from the laboratory in Lahore,” he said.

Karamat Ali of Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) said that the factory fire happened in 2012 and they filed cases for criminal negligence against the factory owners. But sometime in 2015, the negligence issue was forgotten while terrorism took the main focus.

“There is no implementation of ILO conventions according to which annual inspection of factories is mandatory. International brands, their local suppliers and private social audit companies have made a wrongful alliance against the workers here and, sadly, the government is patronising them. This is tantamount to giving them a licence to kill workers,” he pointed out.

“There is a supposed law of occupational health and safety in Sindh but it is not being implemented. The Sindh government declared the day of Sept 11 as the day of health and safety but strangely no programme or event was held on governmental level on this day. It is almost every week these days that we see an unfortunate factory or mines incident but just like rape cases, injustices against workers are not reported,” he said.

Zehra Akbar Khan, general secretary, Home-Based Women Workers Federation, raised the question that if the factory owners were receiving threats from extortionists then how come they decreased the number of guards at the factory around that time?

Asad Iqbal Butt of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said: “We refuse to accept the politicised court order. This is a failed state if you can’t protect your people, your workers.”  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 15, 27/09/2020)

### **Court admits plea against Baldia factory fire verdict**

The Sindh High Court admitted a plea on Monday challenging the sentences awarded by an anti-terrorism court to the convicts in Baldia factory fire case.

The bench, headed by Justice KK Agha, issued a notice to Sindh prosecutor-general over the convicts’ appeal against their sentences.

Convicts Zubair alias Charya, Rehman alias Bhola, Fazal Ahmed, Hakeem and Arshad Mehmood maintained in the plea that the gates of the Ali Enterprises garment factory were locked on the day of the fire.

According to them, the gates, which were the only way out of the building, were locked on the orders of the factory owners. There was no emergency exit for the factory workers to leave the premises, they added.

The petitioners argued that innocent lives were lost due to the negligence and mala fide intent of the factory owners and the authorities. They further asserted that the police had initially declared the factory owners responsible but the owners were later declared innocent in the joint investigation team’s (JIT) report.

According to the convicts, the ATC’s verdict is against the rule of law for the trial court did not analyse the evidence thoroughly. No CCTV footage was provided as evidence and no witnesses were produced before the court regarding the charges of extortion, argued the petitioners.

The convicts prayed the court to annul the ATC’s verdict.

The SHC bench sought a copy of the ATC verdict as well as case records from the parties within four months.

On September 11, 2012, at least 264 workers were killed in the inferno at the garment factory in Baldia Town. After trials dragging on over eight long years, it was concluded that the factory was set ablaze by workers of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement over the owners' refusal to pay extortion money.

The ATC's trial concluded with death sentences awarded to Zubair alias Charya, Rehman alias Bhola, as well as the convictions of Fazal Ahmed, Hakeem and Arshad Mehmood and one other accused.

The court acquitted other accused including Rauf Siddiqui, Iqbal Adeel Khanum, Umar Hassan and Dr Abdul Sattar Khan due to lack of evidence against them. The incident and subsequent inquiries also shed light on hazardous working conditions for labourers.

#### **Missing persons**

Separately, the SHC issued notices to the Sindh home department, Sindh IGP and other parties over pleas seeking recovery of missing persons.

The petitioners' counsels maintained that Mehboob Ali, Amin and other citizens were picked up by individuals dressed in police uniforms and plain clothes. The authorities did not make the detention of these citizens public nor did they produce them before any court, maintained the counsels.

Arguing that the lives of missing persons were in danger, the counsels prayed the court to direct authorities to recover said persons immediately.

The court issued notices to the parties and sought replies on November 10.

#### **Prisoner verification**

Meanwhile, a two-member bench headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar directed authorities to submit a detailed report on biometric identification of prisoners in Sindh's jails. The court was hearing a plea seeking biometric identification of prisoners in the province.

This case has been facing delays since 2013, maintained the petitioner. He contended that jail authorities conspired to imprison individuals who are the namesakes of suspects in exchange of money instead of arresting and imprisoning the actual accused suspects.

According to the petitioner, investigations show that in 41 cases, persons who have the same name as the nominated accused have been imprisoned instead of the actual accused. The SHC had directed authorities to identify and imprison prisoners using a biometric verification system, maintained the petitioner.

The additional advocate-general told the court that the biometric identification process has been initiated for prisoners in Karachi Central Jail and district jails in Malir and Hyderabad.

The bench expressed annoyance at the relevant authorities for continuous delays in the matter.

It directed jail authorities to make the required arrangements with the assistance of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and submit a detailed report in court by November 3.  
(By Nasir Butt The Express Tribune, 04, 13/10/2020)

### **Two minor sisters die in house fire**

Two minor sisters died in a fire that erupted in a home in Buffer Zone on Thursday afternoon, said police and fire brigade officials. They added that the house caught fire in Sector 15-B of Buffer Zone apparently due to a short circuit in a UPS that resulted in burn injuries and suffocation of seven-year-old Humaima and six-year-old Humna.

Gabol Town SHO Roshan Agha said that the parents had gone somewhere to purchase something and had locked both the children in a room where a UPS was kept that caught fire due to a short circuit.

The officer added that the police, Rangers and firefighters reached the spot, but they faced difficulty in getting access to the room. It was a small house with two rooms from where huge flames were billowing and it was not possible for the firemen to go inside the room and save the children.

The children's father, Syed Haris Ali, was also present there, Mr Agha said and added that they broke the wall of an adjacent home but by the time, both the sisters had died due to suffocation.

He added that there were also burn wounds on their hands and feet. The bodies were taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital to fulfill medico-legal formalities.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 16/10/2020)

### **Six labourers suffocate to death at Karachi factory**

Six labourers died while cleaning a chemical tank in a garment factory near Nauras Chowrangi in SITE in the wee hours of Saturday.

Police and rescue workers shifted the bodies to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for medico-legal formalities. They were later shifted to a morgue in Lines Area, before being handed over to their families.

The deceased were identified as Kashan, 22, Boora, 22, Gard Hari, 23, Naseeb, 25, Ramesh, 26 and Shahbaz, 28, he apprised. According to SITE B SHO Muhammad Ayaz, the labourers were cleaning the tank when their condition deteriorated and they suffocated to death.

The police stated that the tank, which was around 50 feet deep, was partly filled with chemicals, adding that one worker initially entered it for cleaning but fell unconscious, while the others were affected while trying to rescue him. Further investigation is underway to confirm how the incident took place

According to the law enforcers, the families were only informed of the incident when they came to the factory to inquire about their loved ones after they failed to return home after work.

The deceased's families staged a protest against the incident, claiming that a case should be registered against the factory administration and adding that their negligence had caused the deaths. They further pointed out that machines were now available for cleaning chemical tanks with poisonous gases, but factory owners used workers for this purpose in order to save money.

They demanded that the government ensure effective labour inspection mechanisms to address the lack of occupational health and safety standards in the industrial sector.

The SHO said that the statements of the factory owner, management and witnesses were being recorded. He added that a case would be registered if the factory administration was found guilty of negligence or the deceased's families approached the police to file a complaint.

Meanwhile, Sindh Industries and Commerce Minister Jam Ikramullah Dharejo took notice of the incident, ordering the SITE managing director to inspect the location and submit a report.

He further directed the relevant officials to identify those responsible for the negligence and take action against them according to the law.

Moreover, the minister ordered the factory owners to take necessary measures to avoid such incidents in the future.

This is not the first time workers have lost their lives in such an incident. In 2016, five workers died of suffocation at a factory in Korangi Industrial Area, while in 2015, a factory owner and seven workers died after falling into a chemical tank at a pickle factory in Korangi. Three workers also died of suffocation while cleaning a tank at an oil company in Bin Qasim in 2015. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 18/10/2020)

### **Fire hits two factories in Korangi**

A fire broke out in a coconut oil factory and engulfed the adjacent bulb factory in the Korangi Industrial Area on Sunday, said police and fire brigade officials.

They added that the oil factory in Sector-16 near Chamra Chowrangi caught fire at around 9:30am.

Fire brigade official said that many fire engines from four stations were called in and they put it out by the evening. However, he added, four fire engines were still there for cooling work.

Area SHO Khusnood Javed said the fire was apparently caused by an electrical short circuit.

He said no one was hurt in the incident.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 19/10/2020)

### **Five die, 23 hurt as gas leak explosion rocks Gulshan building**

Five people were killed and around two dozen injured in a huge explosion inside a private bank situated in a multistorey residential building in Gulshan-i-Iqbal on Wednesday morning, officials and witnesses said.

The bomb disposal squad in its report concluded that the blast was due to the "leakage of natural gas" inside the bank located on the first floor of the building near Maskan Chowrangi. The explosion also caused substantive damage to the property.

The blast was so powerful that it destroyed some of the pillars of the four-storey building and four apartments.

Gulshan-i-Iqbal SHO Safdar Mashwani said that two branches of as many private banks were located in the building. The Meezan Bank was on the ground floor but it also possessed a first-floor apartment.

He said that the blast occurred on the first floor which had four apartments. The floor was completely destroyed in the blast.

*The blast destroys first floor of the residential-cum-commercial building near Maskan Chowrangi*

#### **Gas leakage caused blast**

The area SHO said that BDS officials inspected the place and found no signs of a bomb or improvised explosive device blast.

They concluded that a gas leakage caused the blast inside the bank.

SHO Mashwani said one of the bank guards told the police that they had lodged several complaints with the Sui Southern Gas Company about the leakage but the problem was allegedly not rectified.

A bank guard told the media that he was inside his bunker when at around 9.20am a huge explosion occurred and when he came out from the bunker, he saw huge destruction.

The guard said the explosion took place in the kitchen.

Syed Khalid Sultan, who lived in another apartment on the first floor, suffered serious injuries as a result of the explosion and died on the spot.

He had come back home after dropping off his teacher wife and four children to school.

Four others died during treatment at different hospitals. Two of them were identified as Mohammed Amir, 28 and Yasir Siddiq, 18.

Dr Seemin Jamali, executive director of the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, said that five wounded victims were brought to the hospital.

#### **Affected building being razed**

Karachi Commissioner Sohail Rajput told [Dawn](#) that “a free-of-cost treatment is being provided to all 23 injured.”

He said that the affected building was being demolished and the debris was being removed.

Initially, it was not clear whether it was an act of terrorism or some other incident. Only a day before, five people were injured in an [IED explosion](#) near Shireen Jinnah bus terminal.

The director general of Rangers, Major General Omer Ahmed Bukhari, who also visited the spot earlier in the day, told reporters that the blast in Shireen Jinnah Colony and today's explosion were being probed.

When asked whether it was an act of terrorism, he said it was too early to comment on the nature of the blast. However, he said the people of Karachi should not fear.

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani along with the city commissioner and Administrator Iftikhar Shallwani also visited the spot. He said that the building was being demolished because it was not safe for people to live here.

He said that the government would provide relief to the victims and those who have been displaced due to the blast.

Meanwhile, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah sought a detailed report from the commissioner.

Separately, Inspector General of Police Mushtaq Ahmed Mahar directed the SSP East to submit a report about the incident. (By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 22/10/2020)

### **Five killed in ‘gas leak’ blast**

At least five people were killed and 29 others injured in a blast - reportedly caused by a gas leak - which ripped through a four-storey residential building near Maskan Chowrangi in Gulshan-e-Iqbal on Wednesday morning.

The wounded were initially taken to a private hospital in Gulshan-e-Iqbal, where two succumbed to their injuries. Some of the injured were later referred to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, where three others died. Three of the injured were also shifted to Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre.

The deceased include Muhammad Amir, 28, Yasir, 18, Syed Khalid, security guard Mohib Khan and bank employee Nek Alam. The condition of several injured is critical.

According to law enforcement officials, all the injured were shifted to the hospital within an hour of the blast.

**The nightmare**

Rocking Allah Noor Apartments, the explosion resulted in the complete destruction of the first and second floor, as well as the ground floor that housed a private bank's office.

According to eyewitnesses and area residents, the blast, occurring around 9.15am, shattered the building's concrete pillars and iron sheets, with debris spreading far and wide. Broken glass from nearby buildings carpeted the main road, while vehicles outside it were badly damaged and a massive cloud of smoke and dust engulfed the site.

Meanwhile, some vehicles travelling on Abul Hasan Ispahani Road, Gulshan-e-Iqbal Road and near Maskan Chowrangi collided with each other due to the blast's impact.

Salesman Abdullah, 17, who witnessed the incident, told to The Express Tribune, "I was in the shop when I felt a cloud of dust rising. It was a massive explosion and at first I thought it was an earthquake."

He said soon after the blast, people rushed to the site to help those trapped in the rubble and lying injured on the road.

Imran, a shopkeeper who lives nearby, recounted a similar experience. "I was shaken awake by the explosion," he said, still reeling from the shock. "At first, it felt like an earthquake but I quickly realised it was a blast." Pointing to the broken concrete pillars, he said many passerbys were hit by the debris, as well as signboards, iron rods and other structures.

A security guard at the destroyed bank said he felt the ground shaking due to the blast's intensity and, flustered, he dropped his weapon. "There was smoke and cries and I saw people running to save their lives."

Trying to keep people away from the site, a police official said law enforcers had reached the spot within minutes of the blast. "There were injured people on the road, inside the bank and in its surroundings. I even saw a body on the first floor."

**Rescue efforts**

The Rangers, police, fire department officials and rescue workers started rescue work with the help of heavy machinery.

Waqar Ahmed, an area resident, said rescue workers arrived 20 minutes after the explosion. "By then, people had started rescuing the injured and transporting them to the hospital on their own."

The officials declared the affected building dangerous after the blast and evacuated it.

Later, K-Electric and Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) teams suspended electricity and gas connections in the locality.

According to Karachi commissioner Dr Sohail Rajput, the building will be demolished.

**A disputed cause**

According to Ahmed, "Initially, we all thought it [the explosion] was a bomb blast." This also included law enforcers, deceived by its intensity.

Later, a bomb disposal squad concluded the blast occurred due to a natural gas leak, adding that they couldn't find any traces of explosive material. The squad ruled out the possibility of terrorist activity.

According to Imran, though, some residents have reservations over law enforcers dubbing it a gas explosion.

Others claimed that they had, in fact, apprised the SSGC of the gas leak multiple times, but to no avail. Yet others added that residents and those running businesses in the area could smell the gas but paid no heed to the impending danger.

However, a SSGC spokesperson held residents and shop-owners responsible for the gas leak, attributing it to house lines in the apartments and claiming the SSGC was not responsible.

He said that according to Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority laws, customers were responsible for the upkeep and repair of house lines. He further denied any complaint of a gas leak being lodged on the SSGC helpline from the building.

Sindh IGP Mushtaq Mahar has sought a report on the incident from the East SSP.  
(By Sajid Rauf & Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 22/10/2020)

**Fire breaks out in SITE textile mill**

A huge fire broke out in a textile mill in SITE on Monday evening, according to fire brigade officials. They said the blaze erupted in the factory located near Valika Hospital.

They declared it a 'third-degree' fire and said fire tenders were called from across the metropolis.

The fire was not controlled till late in the evening. No casualties were reported.

The Karachi Water and Sewerage Board declared a state of emergency at all hydrants.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 27/10/2020)

### Fire destroys towel factory's godown in Korangi

A big fire broke out in a towel manufacturing factory in Korangi industrial area on Tuesday afternoon which continued to rage into the night before firemen managed to put it out after more than five hours' struggle, officials said.

They said that half a dozen fire tenders took part in the firefighting operation in which firemen faced immense difficulties in reaching the place where the blaze had erupted due to lack of proper access and the building being full of smoke.

A fireman of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) fire brigade said that they had received information about the fire in the factory at around 3.30pm. Initially, a couple of fire tenders were sent to extinguish the blaze but then additional fire tenders had to be called from across the metropolis after realising the gravity of the situation, he said.

"The factory is situated in Sector 31-G of the Korangi Industrial Area. Exact cause of fire cannot be known immediately but history of fires in the area suggests that poor wiring causes short circuit which leads to eruption of blazes. Secondly, the facilities with wooden stuff are always at high risk of fire amid current cold and dry weather conditions and low humidity," he said.

He said that factory was a huge one where clothes were kept in a haphazard manner, which further hindered firefighting operation.

The blaze caused heavy losses as almost all raw materials of the unit stored in a godown were destroyed. However, timely evacuation of people prevented any loss of life or injuries to any worker, he added.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 25/11/2020)

### Four injured, shanties gutted in blazes

Four people were injured and several shanties were gutted in separate blazes in the city on Sunday night. All four members of a family sustained burn injuries when a fire broke out in a house in the residential area near Baba Morh in Surjani Town.

The injured, identified as Jamal Azeem, 59, his wife Shabana, 45, and their daughters, Ambreen, 30, and Ramsha, 22, were shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital and to the burns ward at Dr Ruth Pfau's Civil Hospital. According to people in the neighbourhood, the fire was a result of a gas cylinder explosion.

Household goods were gutted in the blaze, which spread as fire officials did not arrive in time, they claimed. Wehn contacted, Mangophir SHO Adnan Siddiqui said he was unaware of the incident. Separately, six shanties were reduced to ashes when a fire broke out in a settlement behind Aziz Bhatti Park in Gulshan-e-Iqbal.

At least 10 other shanties were also damaged in the blaze before fire officials arrived and managed to douse it. It took half an hour for fire officials to keep the flames from spreading to other shanties but all goods in the affected shanties were gutted. Fire officials said their team faced difficulties navigating through the narrow pathways to enter the shanty settlement. The cause behind the fire could not be ascertained till the filing of this report.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 01/12/2020)

### Karachi sees over 2,000 fires in 2020

In summers, Karachi swelters under the scorching sun, and in winters, the megalopolis finds itself in the midst of roaring flames, erupting across it frequently. Such was also the case in 2020, when the city saw an increase in fire incidents at the beginning of the year and towards the end, marking the end and the onset of the winter seasons.

Of over 2,000 fire incidents reported in the city during 2020, most, numbering 260, were reported in February and least, adding up to 115, were reported in May, when Karachi's temperatures peaks.

Besides, 246 fires erupted in Karachi in January this year, 210 in March, 119 in April, 177 in June, 159 in July, 132 in August, 124 in September, 228 in October, 212 in November and around 140 in December.

Of these, five were declared third-degree blazes and nearly 200 broke out in factories.

Most fire incidents, total 247 in number, were reported at the Saddar fire station during the year, while none were reported at truck-stand fire brigade station, SITE Super Highway-I fire station, Gulshan-e-Maymar fire station and Hawkes Bay fire station throughout the year.

Besides, 175 fire incidents were reported at Central fire station, 217 at Sohrab Goth fire station, 211 at Nazimabad fire station, 199 at SITE Industrial Area fire station, 155 at North Karachi fire station, 151 at Korangi fire station, 128 at Lyari fire station, 124 at Landhi fire station, 101 at Manzoor Colony fire station, 74 at Gulistan-e-Johar fire station, 73 at Gulshan-e-Iqbal fire station, 71 at Bolton Market fire station, 48 at Shah Faisal Colony fire station, 42 at Civic Center fire station, 39 at Orangi Town fire station, 38 at SITE Super Highway-II fire station, 12 at Malir fire station and four at Baldia Town and Bhain Colony fire stations each.

#### Third-degree fires

Five third-degree fires were reported in Karachi during 2020.

Third-degree fires are blazes of large magnitudes and difficult to control.

The first incident of a third-degree in Karachi during 2020 was reported on June 11, when an intense blaze gutted the sixth and seventh floors of a textile factory in SITE Industrial Area.

Given the high intensity and magnitude of the blaze, the fire department had to seek the Karachi Port Trust and Pakistan Navy's assistance to douse the roaring flames.

The fire left the structure of the building badly damaged.

It was preceded by another third-degree fire that broke out in a packaging factory in Landhi Export Processing Zone on July 19, 2020 and engulfed two other nearby factories.

Another third-degree fire was reported on October 6, 2020, as a factory went up in flames in SITE Industrial Area. The next day, a fire broke out in another factory in the area and intensified overtime, turning into a third-degree blaze.

On October 17, yet another third-degree fire erupted in a paint factory in the same area.

#### **Occupational hazards**

Around 200 fires broke out in the city's factories, of more than 2,000 reported from Karachi.

Most factory units, 33 to be exact, were gutted in fires in November and least, numbering five, in May.

According to data shared by the fire department, fires broke out in 20 factories in January this year, 26 in February, 21 in March, 12 in April, 10 in June, 14 in July, 11 in August, 14 in September, 26 in October and 33 in November.

#### **Of fire safety and late arrivals**

Amid the increasing numbers of fires in November, the Karachi chief fire officer had informed the Sindh High Court that 30 fire tenders of the fire department were out of order at present and the department had been managing operations with just 14 fire tenders. "And 14 fire tenders are not enough for the city," he had admitted, adding that each fire station needed at least four fire tenders.

While this explains the fire department's ineptness, as citizens continue to decry the late arrival of firefighting staff in cases of fire emergencies, fire department officials point out that people, too, do not implement fire safety measures at their houses and workplaces.

Multiple fire department officials told The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity that over 95 persons affected by fires had answered in negative when they asked them whether they knew the fire helpline.

"And then we get to hear that we reached the place of the incident after a delay of two hours," said one among them.

Maintaining that they receive information about a fires breaking out late, they further pointed out that narrow streets and haphazard constructions posed difficulties in the way of firefighting operations, especially at commercial and industrial units.

Building codes pertaining to fire safety too are ignored most times, they added.  
(By Raheel Salman The Express Tribune, 04, 31/12/2020)