

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2021

HUTS ON FIRE



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Govt protecting 'big fish' in Baldia factory fire case: SHC

It seems that the government is protecting the big fish in the Baldia factory fire case, said Sindh High Court (SHC) Justice KK Agha in his remarks on Monday.

A two-member bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Irshad Ali Shah heard the appeals of convicts Zubair Charia, Abdul Rehman Bhola and others who were convicted in the Baldia factory fire case.

At least 264 people were burnt to death in a fire deliberately caused by elements linked with the then Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM) over nonpayment of extortion money.

The bench raised several questions on the prosecution in the Baldia factory tragedy case. SHC sought a reply from the Sindh Rangers prosecutor within three months on the appeal filed against the conviction of Zubair Charia, Abdul Rehman Bhola and others.

While Charaia and Bhola were convicted by an anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Karachi, eight years after the tragedy, and handed death sentences, the top guns of MQM were acquitted in the case, including former Sindh commerce and industries minister Rauf Siddiqui.

"Did you file an appeal against the acquittal of Siddiqui," Justice Agha asked Rangers prosecutor Rana Khalid. The prosecutor said they did not file a plea against the said acquittal, at which the justice said, "it looks like the big fish are being protected."

Justice Agha questioned that if appeals are filed for small cases, then why was no appeal filed in the case involving the painful death of 264 human beings, "action should be taken against you". The court asked Rangers Prosecutor Khalid to gather information and file a reply within three months.

The court also rejected an appeal of the families of the deceased to become a party. The junior counsel stated that Barrister Faisal Siddiqui wanted to appear on behalf of the heirs of the deceased but could not come due to busy schedule. As the counsels were not available, the court rejected the appeal of the families to become party to the case. The court remarked that if Faisal Siddiqui wanted to help the state, he could do so.

Gold heist

The same bench heard a petition of a private bank's branch operation manager, Zulfiqar Junejo, seeking annulment of the case of changing gold jewellery kept in the locker with brass replicas.

The lawyer of the accused stated that Junejo was nominated illegally and urged the court to close the case. The court remarked, "Where is the accused now?" The defense counsel said that Junejo was arrested and a case was registered against him on August 3.

The court remarked, "Did you approach the trial court for bail?" The lawyer of the accused stated that he has filed a bail application in the trial court. The investigating officer said the incident was revealed during an audit of the bank's Gulistan-e-Johar branch. Checking during the audit revealed that the gold jewelry in the lockers was fake.

An inspection of the jewelry revealed that the jewelry was made of brass with gold water on it. The court rejected the plea of accused Junejo. The court directed the trial court to decide on the bail application of the accused within two weeks. The gold jewelry pledged by various consumers was stolen. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 10/08/2021)

Karachi factory blaze

THE lives of working men and women in this country apparently have little value. When lives are lost in industrial accidents there is immediate clamour for accountability and better health and safety regulations. But soon enough, as other events compete for space in the news cycle, these lives are forgotten. It is hoped that this will not be the case with the 16 workers who died in a factory fire in Karachi's Korangi area on Friday. But if the Baldia fire tragedy — Pakistan's worst industrial fire incident and a deliberate act of arson — is anything to go by, we cannot be very hopeful that workers' safety will be on top of the state's agenda, as little has changed since that disaster in 2012. While the factory owners must be penalised — a case has been registered against them — for poor conditions at the luggage factory, the bigger question concerns industrial safety and labour inspectors of the Sindh government. Had they been doing their job, the workers at the Korangi factory might still have been alive, or at least the damage from the blaze could have been minimised.

Clearly, health and safety of workers is not a priority for either the employers or the state in Pakistan. The ILO says that Pakistan has "poor occupational safety and health (OSH) in both formal and informal sectors" while the UN body adds that "most ... enterprises in the organised sectors are not aware of OSH risks and hazards". This is an apt assessment of the situation on the ground. For example, the Korangi factory was located in a congested area while accounts in the media say the unit had only one passage for entry and exit. Conditions in the ill-fated Baldia factory had also been described as prison-like. The unfortunate reality is that most health and safety laws are rarely enforced in Pakistan. Industrial units often operate in residential areas, at times storing hazardous chemicals, while fire drills and safety mechanisms at most units are unheard of. The result is frequent deaths and injuries to working people, with little by way of accountability of employers. If the state values human life, then it should enforce health and safety protocols at industrial units across the country. The process should be transparent so that inspectors cannot let off offenders who often offer bribes, while those guilty of violating safety protocols must face stiff penalties so that human lives are not needlessly lost. (By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 29/08/2021)

Owners granted pre-arrest bail in Mehran Town factory fire case

A district and sessions court has granted interim pre-arrest bail to the owners of a Korangi factory, its building and a supervisor in a case pertaining to the death of 16 workers in a fire in the industrial unit last month.

The fire allegedly caused by an electric short-circuit engulfed the industrial unit, M/s BM Luggage, in Mehran Town on Aug 27 killing the 16 workers.

Police had booked factory owner Hassan Meetha alias Ali Meetha, building owner Faisal Tariq, its three supervisors — Syed Imran Ali Zaidi, Zafar and Rehan — and watchman Syed Zarin over their alleged involvement in the manslaughter case.

Court sources said the factory and building owners and supervisor Zaidi had obtained interim bail on Monday to avoid arrest by the police in the present case.

A court will take up confirmation or otherwise of their bail today

District and Sessions' Judge (East) Khalid Hussain Shahani had granted them interim pre-arrest bail subject to furnishing a surety of Rs500,000 each.

They were directed to cooperate with the police during the investigation process. In the meanwhile, the court had issued a notice to the investigating officer to appear along with an investigation report.

The court is scheduled to take up the confirmation of the suspects' interim pre-arrest bail or otherwise on Saturday (today), judicial staff and lawyers said.

Earlier, defence counsel Haseeb Jamali submitted that his client, Mr Tariq, was only the owner of the property that he had rented out to Mr Meetha over two years ago.

He submitted that Mr Meetha being the factory owner was running his own business on the subject premises and Mr Tariq had nothing to do with the fire incident.

He asked the court to grant the applicant pre-arrest bail since he apprehended his arrest by the police in the present case.

Appearing on behalf of factory owner Meetha, defence counsel Hasan Sabir submitted that his client used to run the factory in Dubai, with the same staff and in 2019 he relocated the factory to Karachi on the call of Prime Minister Imran Khan who had urged businessmen to bring their businesses to the country to boost economy.

The counsel further said that the applicant used to manufacture leather bags with the material provided by his foreign clients to whom the products (bags) were exported.

He said on the day of the incident the factory was being run on power generator because K-Electric had suspended electricity in the area for around 24 hours due to some repair works.

After KE restored supply the factory was switched from the generator and the fire might have been caused during that process, he said.

Advocate Sabir said that none of the factory exits were locked, except one door to the rooftop only for safety reasons. He said none of the workers was present there at the time of the incident.

He submitted that soon after the fire broke out an employee had approached two fire tenders stationed at the Brooks Chowrangi and requested firefighters to rush to the factory to put out the fire. But, the fire tenders were without water that caused a delay of around three hours in initiating the rescue work.

The counsel added that the fire had taken place before factory owner Meetha had arrived there, while other staffers, who had luckily survived the fire, were booked by the police in the present case with mala fide intentions.

Maintaining that his client was not responsible for the incident, the counsel asked the court to grant him interim pre-arrest bail to enable him to join the investigation since he apprehended his arrest by the police.

According to the FIR, the deaths took place on the upper portion of the building that allegedly lacked any emergency exit. "The factory building has been constructed in a manner that none can exit in case of emergency while no emergency alarm system was installed in it," added the FIR.

A case was registered under Sections 322 (manslaughter) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code.
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 04/09/2021)

Mehran Town factory owners held after dismissal of pre-arrest bail

Police on Tuesday arrested the owners of a Korangi factory and its building and a supervisor after a district and sessions court revoked their interim pre-arrest bail in a case pertaining to the death of 16 workers in a fire in the industrial unit last month.

The fire allegedly caused by an electric short-circuit engulfed the industrial unit, BM Luggage, in Mehran Town on Aug 27 killing the 16 workers. Police had booked factory owner Hassan Meetha alias Ali Meetha, building owner Faisal Tariq, its three supervisors — Syed Imran Ali Zaidi, Zafar and Rehan — and watchman Syed Zarin over their alleged involvement in the manslaughter case.

Three of them — Meetha, Tariq and Zaidi — had obtained interim pre-arrest bail on Aug 30 and later District and Sessions Judge (East) Khalid Hussain Shahani extended the bail till today.

The judge holds SBCA, labour dept, KDA, Civil Defence responsible for the blaze that killed 16 workers

On Tuesday, the court pronounced its verdict on the interim bail applications of the suspects after hearing arguments from the deputy district public prosecutor and defence counsel.

The judge noted that in view of the facts and circumstances of the case and dictum laid down in the cited case law, prima facie applicants had failed to make out the case for bail. "Accordingly, all three above bail applications being devoid of merits stand dismissed and interim orders recalled," the judge ruled.

Witnesses and judicial staff said that the investigating officer arrested Mr Meetha and Mr Tariq from the courtroom. The third suspect Zaidi immediately left the courtroom and tried to escape, but police chased and arrested him, they added.

Earlier, Advocate Hassan Sabir, the lawyer for the factory owner, had submitted to the court copies of letters addressed to the director of Civil Defence Sindh, a report of the incident issued by the Additional Controller Civil Defence (East), Assistant Director (Mehran Town), Land Department of Karachi Development Authority (KDA), Deputy Director (Korangi) of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), Joint Registrar of Companies, Company Registration Officer, Joint Director Labour (East) Division.

The judge noted that all such correspondence was made after the unfortunate incident and had less significance with the merits of the case.

The court added that perusal of the record suggested that sufficient material was available with the prosecution to link the applicants with the commissioning of the alleged offence.

Defence lawyer Sabir also argued that the offence under Section 322 (manslaughter) of the Pakistan Penal Code only provide for diyat amount as punishment, and there was no imprisonment for such an offence even if proved.

The judge observed that it was an admitted position that the offence under Section 322 of the PPC had been made non-bailable in schedule-II of the criminal procedure code.

Another defence counsel, Mohammad Haseeb Jamali, submitted that his client Faisal Tariq had neither direct nor indirect connection with the crime, the factory and workers, as he was only the owner of the subject property where the factory was running as he had rented out the place to Mr Meetha in 2019.

The judge observed: "The perusal of building code shows that it is the owner who has to obtain permission for establishment of factory, constructed building accordingly with structural requirement and fire resistive system. All these statutory requirements should have been complied with by the owner before renting the building out for running the factory.

"The arguments have no merit in the absence of compliance of statutory requirements and owner would be equally responsible for the causes on his part that added to the incident," the court ruled.

The judge ruled: "From the examination of building code and relevant laws hereinabove, the authorities who failed to discharge their functions, the Sindh Building Control Authority, Labour department and inspectors, concerned Deputy Commissioner, Karachi Development Authority and Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (Civil Defence Department). These all are responsible for the offence and ought to be implicated, investigated and taken to the task for the alleged crime."

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 08/09/2021)

Mehran Town: Factory not registered with any dept

Probe into the Mehran Town factory fire has found that the industrial unit operating in a residential area was not registered with any government department, it emerged on Wednesday.

Reports submitted to the police by the *Sindh* labour department, the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), *Karachi* Development Authority (KDA) and the Security and Exchange Commission of *Pakistan* (SECP) revealed that the factory was not registered with any department nor were the labourers provided any kind of training.

As the Korangi Industrial Area Police continue their investigation into the blaze that killed 16 labourers last month at the factory producing luxury luggage bags they have sought reports from the labour department, SBCA, KDA, SECP, the K-Electric, fire department and the Civil Defence Directorate General.

The reports from the latter three are still awaited.

Findings

The investigation police has found that the factory owner, Ali Hassan Mehta, holds dual nationality of Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK). Report received by the KDA states that the 600 yard plot of land on which the factory was built was allotted to a man named Tariq Faisal.

The factory was operational on a plot listed as a residential site. Besides, as reported by the labour department and the SECP, the factory was not registered with either of the two authorities nor were its workers and employees provided any training. Mehta had rented the premises for Rs300,000 per month from Faisal and the luggage bags manufactured in the factory would be exported to other countries for sale, reveals the investigation thus far.

The investigators learnt that factory was issued a metered electricity connection in 2010. The police, who approached KE on Tuesday, have asked the power utility to confirm details of the power consumption at the factory.

Investigators have asked how much power load was approved for the factory, how much of it was used and how much load the wiring installed in the factory could withstand. The police have also questioned the power utility on the number of times the industrial unit was inspected.

Thus far, KE has confirmed that the metered electric connection was issued in 2010. The other details will be provided after the power utility collects its records, said the police.

Meanwhile, the report of the fire department, which had initially concluded that the fire was sparked by a short circuit, is yet awaited. The FIR lodged at the Korangi Industrial Police Station on behalf of the state notes that the building had a single entry and exit point. There was no emergency exit.

When the fire broke out, workers trapped inside the factory ran up to the roof to save themselves but found the gate at the stairs locked. Witnesses said that a watchman outside was asked to open the gate but he ignored their pleas and was attempting to communicate with Mehta instead.

The building owner, Tariq Faisal, factory owner, Ali Hassan Mehta, factory manager, Imran Zaidi, two supervisors, Zafar and Rehan, and the watchman, Syed Zarin, have been nominated in the FIR lodged under Section 322 read with 34 [pertaining to unintentional murder] of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC).

With no way out, 16 workers suffocated to death in the deadly blaze. The father of one of the young victims also died of a heart attack after seeing his son's body at the hospital, bringing the death toll to 17. Faisal, Mehta and Zaidi were arrested on Tuesday as they attempted to flee the court premises after being denied bail. The watchman Zarin has also been arrested.

Deadly negligence

Labour leaders and rights activists have highlighted that the authorities failed to learn after the Baldia factory fire in which more than 260 workers were burnt alive in 2012.

At a press conference at the Karachi Press Club last week, they regretted that factory owners, government departments and society at large have failed to ensure safety at workplaces. They pointed out that hazardous workplaces mint money for industrialists at the cost of workers' health and safety but law enforcement agencies and the labour department turn a blind eye.

In its written order on interim bail pleas of the accused, the East district and sessions court also held the relevant government departments responsible for the blaze along with the factory owners. The court noted that no official from the labour department or any other government department inspected the factory, which was operational on a residential plot.

The verdict noted that the industrial unit had no fire safety arrangements and that the single entry and exit point was also barred. It further noted that the fire tenders arrived late with insufficient water to douse the blaze and the civil defence personnel were untrained. It added that the owners have produced letters of correspondence with the relevant departments but they are of no use after such an incident has already occurred.

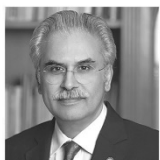
The court added that if they were not other concerns such as the destruction of evidence bail may have been granted.

Separately, the SBCA had earlier suspended three officials posted in Korangi over their failure to inform the higher ups about the factory, the cause of the fire and the status of the plot.

(By Sajid Rauf The Express Tribune, 04, 09/09/2021)

Factory on fire

AT 9:30am, on Aug 27, 2021, a fire erupted in the BM Luggage (bag) Industry (BLI) in Korangi, Karachi. Eighteen workers were burnt to death, with many injured. This is not the first such tragedy in Pakistan and, if things do not change, it will not be the last.



This incident evokes heart-wrenching memories from nine years ago when in September 2012, a fire broke out at the Ali Enterprises factory in Baldia, Karachi; 258 workers including women were burnt to death, some permanently disabled. It was the most tragic industrial accident in Pakistan's history.

What caused the fire in 2012 is what caused the fire and killed workers in 2021. There are many parallels between the two incidents.

A report put together by the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), showed that BLI was not registered with the Sindh Department of Labour; similarly, Ali Enterprises was also unregistered.

Lack of registration meant that the factories were never subjected to any labour or occupational safety inspections and the building designs were never approved by the competent authority.

Additionally, none of the BLI workers were registered with the Sindh Employees Social Security Institution. Ali Enterprises employed more than 1,500 workers and only a small percentage were registered. Unregistered workers are not entitled to basic labour rights, healthcare, minimum wage, or group insurance etc.

What has changed since 2012 in terms of improving safety and occupational health at workplaces?

In terms of workers' safety, the BLI factory did not have emergency exits, only a single point of entry and exit, no fire alarm system and a non-functional fire-extinguishing system. The same was true for Ali Enterprises which had only one entry and exit in the three-storeyed factory. When the fire broke out on the ground floor and quickly spread outwards, workers could not leave the building fast enough because of the lack of emergency exits and the failure of the factory's fire alarm system. Even the windows were blocked with iron grills. Both factories had electric short-circuiting due to substandard and unsafe wiring. Workers in both factories were working in highly dangerous and inhumane conditions.

Both factories were manufacturing textile products for export to big brand companies in the West and had recently been audited by third-party international audit firms and given clean chits for their fitness to function.

What has changed since 2012 in terms of improving safety and occupational health at the workplace? Not much on the ground except for the Sindh Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2017. The law, however, is very far from being implemented. Similarly, Pakistan has signed but not implemented various ILO conventions, and other international labour instruments on occupational safety and health.

Occupational safety and health remains a critically unexamined issue for Pakistan's workers.

These two factories represent the tip of the iceberg. The Sindh Department of Labour has 10,000 registered factories with around 500,000 workers whereas the actual size of the industry in Karachi is much larger. Unregistered (and hence illegal) factories producing exclusively exportable products are effectively death traps for our workers.

Some months after the Ali Enterprises tragedy, Rana Plaza, an eight-storeyed commercial complex building housing five garment factories, collapsed in Bangladesh killing 1,134 people and injuring over 2,500 — the deadliest workplace disaster in the global garment industry.

The Rana Plaza tragedy incited mass worker protests and eventually led to the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety in 2013 (further improved in 2018). Brand firms entered into a legally binding agreement with two global trade unions, UNI Global Union and IndustriALL Global Union, to commit "to the goal of a safe and sustainable ... industry in which no worker needs to fear fires, building collapses, or other accidents that could be prevented with reasonable health and safety measures". The Accord is chaired by the ILO and implemented through a steering committee which provides equal representation to the signatory global brand firms and labour unions. The Accord has made a difference. Over 90 per cent of the safety hazards originally identified by the Accord inspectors could be eliminated from Bangladesh's garment factories.

Conversely, in Pakistan, the aftermath of the factory fires failed to effectuate any systemic changes. For over a year, the affectees of the Ali Enterprises fire ran from pillar to post in search of justice and compensation. Eventually, they formed the Ali Enterprises Factory Fire Affectees Association (AEFFAA) with the support of the National Trade Union Federation and Home-Based Women Workers Federation. PILER played a major role in negotiating with KIK

(the German company buyer of Ali Enterprises) the compensation of \$1 million in immediate relief for workers' families. KiK later also agreed to pay \$5.15m as a result of a transnational lawsuit in Germany.

The global value chain in the garment industry for 'fast fashion' finds cheaper labour in Pakistan and Bangladesh where clever businessmen compete to win foreign orders in a cut-throat environment. To keep production costs low, factory owners do not invest in improving working conditions while poor workers do not protest for want of jobs. In Pakistan, only 1pc of the labour force is unionised.

The Rana Plaza collapse changed things through the development of the Bangladesh Accord. There is now a Bangladesh Accord Foundation with offices in Bangladesh and the Netherlands. More than 190 global brands are members of the Bangladesh Accord and 1,600 factories in Bangladesh have introduced safety and occupational health programmes benefiting more than 2m workers. The Accord is being expanded with more health provisions with the intention to make it international. There have been voices for a 'Pakistan Accord' but to no avail. It is high time Pakistan became part of the international accord.

Saeeda Khatoon lost her son in the Ali Enterprises fire. She later became the president of the AEFFAA to fight for justice and safer working conditions. In her own words; "My child could not come back, but others can be saved."

(By Zafar Mirza Dawn, 06, 10/09/2021)

Civic bodies, labour dept being investigated in Mehran Town factory fire case, court told

Police have launched investigations against certain departments of the provincial government and civic agencies and summoned their officials concerned along with relevant record in the Mehran Town factory fire probe.

The fire had engulfed the industrial unit, BM Luggage, in Mehran Town on Aug 27 killing 16 workers.

Factory's owner Hassan Meetha alias Ali Meetha, its building's owner Faisal Tariq, three supervisors — Syed Imran Ali Zaidi, Zafar and Rehan and watchman Syed Zarin — have been booked for their alleged involvement in the death of the 16 workers.

Police had arrested Hassan Meetha, Faisal Tariq and Imran Ali Zaidi after District and Sessions Judge (East) Khalid Hussain Shahani had revoked their interim pre-arrest bail.

Magistrate sends factory owners to prison on judicial remand

On Saturday, the investigating officer, Sub-inspector Izzat Khan, produced the held suspects before the judicial magistrate (East) upon expiry of their physical remand in police custody.

The IO submitted that the court had revoked the interim bail of the suspects on Sept 7 after examining building code and relevant laws.

He submitted that the sessions court had observed that "the authorities, who failed to discharge their functions include the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), labour department and inspectors, deputy commissioner concerned, Karachi Development Authority (KDA) and Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC, Civil Defence Department). These all are responsible for the offence and ought to be implicated, investigated and taken to the task for the alleged crime".

In the light of the observations of the court, the IO said he had issued summons to the relevant officers/officials of the K-Electric, SBCA, Sindh Civil Defence, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), KDA, its Anti-Encroachment Cell, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board, the fire brigade and Sui Southern Gas Company Limited.

Issuing letters under Sections 160 (police officer's power to require attendance of witnesses) and 94 (summons to produce documents or other things) of the Criminal Procedure Code, the IO said he had summoned the officers/officials of these departments and agencies along with their respective reports with regard to action, if any, on their part against the owners of BM Luggage for running commercial activity in a structure officially approved for residential usage.

He further informed the magistrate that the fire department had particularly been asked to submit a report, replying to queries about the reporting of the fire incident, timing of their response and whether the blaze was caused by an electric short-circuit or gas leakage, etc.

He submitted that no reply had so far been received from any of these departments and agencies, adding that it was expected that they would respond in the next week.

He informed that the investigation was still under way, as two alleged absconding suspects, Zafar and Rehan, who were working in the factory as supervisors and also eyewitnesses of the incident, were yet to be arrested and interrogated.

The IO submitted that some nine bags containing samples of various burnt articles had been collected from the factory and sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory of the University of Karachi for chemical and forensic analysis and its report was due in a couple of days.

The IO requested the judge to extend physical remand of the suspects in police custody for 14 days to complete the investigation and other legal formalities.

While turning down the IO's request for extension in the suspects' physical remand, the judge remanded them in judicial custody till Sept 18.

The IO was directed to produce them on the next date and also submit a report regarding investigation into the case.

A case was registered under Sections 322 (manslaughter) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code at the Korangi Industrial Area police station on behalf of the state through SHO Mohammad Tariq Arain.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 12/09/2021)

Families, labour leaders remember victims on ninth anniversary of Baldia factory fire

The ninth anniversary of the tragic Baldia factory inferno in which over 260 workers lost their lives was observed here on Saturday.

Jointly organised by the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) and the Home-Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF), the gathering saw the parents, spouses, children, brothers and sisters of the deceased workers all with moist eyes sitting outside the ugly reminder of their loss, the now vacant Ali Enterprises building, a mere cement skeleton. The photographs of their loved ones they held up or close to their hearts.

Nasir Mansoor of the NTUF said that even though nine years had passed after the Baldia factory tragedy, not much had changed at such garment factories.

'Garments factories are still death traps'

"They are still sweatshops, they are still death traps and prisons," he said. "We have gone to every platform to seek justice for the workers who died here, and we have told the world about how factory workers are treated in our country because we are still fighting to get them justice here and internationally. Some 85 per cent of the stuff manufactured here in this factory was for a German brand," he said.

'All factories here are bombs, which can explode anytime'

"We are not concerned about whether the fire was caused or the result of a short-circuit. What we are concerned about is the working conditions in the factory. When the fire broke out, there was nowhere for the workers to exit the building. The extra exit points were blocked by the manufacturing raw material and the main exit points were locked to keep the workers inside until the end of the day when it was time to go. The windows were also sealed with steel bars fitted in them," he said.

"This building also didn't have any fire alarms and the fire extinguishers were either old, expired or the staff didn't know how to use them. The result: almost all of them either suffocated or were burnt alive," he reminded.

"And they didn't even have proper jobs. They were all hired on contracts, which deprived them of their many benefits and funds. What is even worse is that many of them were underage, meaning that the factory owners are also guilty of child labour," he said.

'Nothing has changed'

Zehra Khan of the HBWWF said that they gather here like this every year with the families of the victims to remind the government that there is a need for attention here. "But nothing has changed. All factories here are bombs, which can explode anytime. And this is because the inspectors who are supposed to survey these factories to ensure good working conditions are taking bribes from the owners," she said.

Habibuddin Junaidi of the Peoples Labour Bureau said that the poor and innocent workers had to lose their lives due to someone else's incompetence. "But sadly, the Baldia factory incident was not the last. Similar incidents are still happening, such as the recent Mehran Town factory fire where some [16] workers lost their lives. There is no stop to them," he said.

Karamat Ali of National Labour Council reminded that what happened at the Baldia factory nine years ago was a crime. "But the people who committed the crime never got punished. We need to unite and stand up against such criminals. We need to unite and organise ourselves. Ideally, there should be one such organisation for all garment factory workers and another for all labourers and workers," he said.

Saeeda Khatoon of the Association of Baldia Factory Fire Affectees, who lost her young son in the blaze, said that she still remembered seeing off her son as he left for work on that fateful day nine years ago.

"It was the last time I saw my son's sweet and happy face. Then I heard that there was a huge fire in the factory he worked and then I realised that he was taken from me forever. So today is not just a painful reminder of all that, it is also a reminder of not giving up the struggle, of raising our voices against the injustice and of demanding workers' rights. The loss of our loved ones should not be in vain," she said.

Later, all the family members and rights activists gathered paid tribute to the victims by showering their photographs with rose petals and by holding a vigil in their memory.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 12/09/2021)

SBCA, labour officials chargesheeted in Mehran Town factory fire case

Police on Saturday filed an investigation report before a judicial magistrate and held some officials of civic agencies and the provincial labour department responsible for their alleged negligence in the Mehran Town factory fire case.

The investigating officer also charge sheeted the owners of the factory and building as well as four employees of the ill-fated industrial unit and said that the cause of the fire had not been determined as yet.

The charge sheet was submitted in court of a judicial magistrate (east) after the prosecutors scrutinised it.

Initially, police had booked factory's owner Hassan Meetha alias Ali Meetha, its building's owner Faisal Tariq and three supervisors Syed Imran Ali Zaidi, Zafar and Rehan and watchman Syed Zarin for their alleged involvement in the death of the 16 workers after fire had engulfed the industrial unit in Mehran Town last month.

ATC hands down death sentence to a man for killing a policeman

The IO has nominated a deputy director of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), Abdul Sami, deputy director Karachi Development Authority (KDA-land) Irfan Hussain, deputy controller Civil Defence Shahabuddin and labour officer Mohammad Ali as accused in the charge sheet.

He also recommended invoking Section 119 (public servant concealing design to commit offence which it is his duty to prevent) of the Pakistan Penal Code against them.

A prosecutor at the district courts east said that the IO would file a supplementary charge sheet regarding the cause of the fire in the light of forensic reports after receiving them.

The IO stated that during the investigation sufficient evidence were collected against the officials of civic bodies and labour department for committing negligence. He placed 64 prosecution witnesses in the charge sheet.

It may be recalled that while dismissing the interim bail of owners of building and factory and its employees a sessions court in its order had observed that the SBCA, KDA, civil defence and labour department had failed to discharge their functions and apparently responsible for the offence and should to be investigated. Thereafter, the IO had asked the officials concerned of such departments to join the investigation.

A case was registered under Sections 322 (manslaughter) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code at the Korangi Industrial Area police station on behalf of the state through SHO Mohammad Tariq Arain.

Man gets death sentence

An antiterrorism court has sentenced a man to death and handed down two-year imprisonment to a police inspector in a policeman murder case.

The ATC-III judge found Imtiaz Hussain guilty of escaping from custody after killing Constable Rafiq and wounding Constable Daim Khan at Korangi Causeway in September 2016 when they along with Inspector Abdul Wasay Jokhio were bringing the accused and his accomplice back to a police station in a private car after obtaining their remand from court in a murder case.

The court also handed down two-year term to Inspector Jokhio, the then station investigating officer (SIO) of Korangi, under Section 223 (escape from confinement or custody negligently suffered by public servant) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 16, 26/09/2021)

Fire erupts at tuition centre in Gulshan

A fire broke out in a famous tuition centre in Gulshan-i-Iqbal on Sunday evening, according to police and Fire Brigade officials.

They said they were informed about the blaze on the roof of the building that houses 'Practical Coaching Centre' in Gulshan-i-Iqbal near Mochii Mor at around 5:50pm. Two fire tenders managed to control the fire at 7:10 pm. No casualty was reported.

The Fire Brigade official said the centre's building spread over an area of over 400 square yards. The centre's canteen and generator room were located on the roof, which had a 'fiber shade'.

The fire badly destroyed the canteen, generator room and the shade. The building had no fire exit. The exact cause of the fire and estimation of financial loss could not be made till late in the night.

A fire official said they had reports that some students were present but they immediately left the premises.

The area SHO said that apparently a short-circuit in the generator room triggered the fire.

Four 'robbers' held in Surjani

The Anti-Violent Crime Cell (AVCC) of police claimed on Sunday to have busted a gang of house robbers in the city.

"The AVCC/CIA achieved a breakthrough by arresting four members of the gang involved in house robberies from Surjani Town," said a cell official.

The held suspects were identified as Abdul Aleem, Mohammed Shaukat, Ghulam Murtaza and Abdul Qadir.

The AVCC man said four pistols, four hand grenades, one car with number plate of Islamabad and other tools used to commit house robberies were seized from them.

During interrogation, the suspects 'confessed' to committing house robberies and looting citizens at gunpoint in different parts of the metropolis. The AVCC has obtained their criminal record from different police stations.

The AVCC official said Abdul Aleem was involved in 25 house robberies and street crimes in various localities while there was one FIR registered against Mohammed Shaukat in the Landhi area.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 25/10/2021)

35 shops gutted in Saddar cloth market blaze

Around 35 shops in the Saddar Cooperative Market were gutted when a huge fire broke out on Sunday, according to officials and witnesses.

They said the fire erupted in a shop located on the ground floor and it rapidly spread to the first floor. The fire engulfed several cloths and other items shops, but no one was hurt in the incident as the famous market was closed on account of weekend.

Commissioner of Karachi Iqbal Memon told *Dawn* that the blaze started around 6.45pm and he reached there in 10 minutes to supervise the whole operation. "It's a cloths market and the fire reached third category within a few minutes," he said.

He said that he called the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation to send more fire engines as initially there were only a few.

Mr Memon said that realising the gravity of the situation he also spoke to officials of Pakistan Navy and Karachi Port Trust to send more fire engines to put out the fire.

The officials of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board were directed to send more bowsers while the DIG-traffic was asked to divert the traffic.

"Within one hour, fire was under control," claimed the commissioner. However, the 'cooling work' continued till late in the night.

He said that there were estimated to be over 300 shops in the market and the fire staff reported that about 35 shops caught fire and suffered damages.

The exact cause of the fire and estimation of financial loss could not be made immediately.

DIG-South Javed Akbar Riaz said that as the blaze was categorised as a third-degree fire, the police cordoned off the Cooperative Market in Saddar to prevent theft or damage to property.

He said that no one was hurt in the fire. He also said that the cause of the fire was not known yet.

Preedy SHO Sajjad Khan said that around 18-20 fire engines belonging to the fire brigade department of the KMC and other institutions managed to control the blaze.

Some shopkeepers alleged that the fire engines reached the scene about one-hour late.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 13, 15/11/2021)

Karachi market fire

A devastating fire engulfed a major market in Karachi's Saddar area late on Sunday night when the market was closed. Traders claim that 90% of the shops and warehouses have been completely destroyed leaving them financially shattered. Describing their condition as calamitous, they say the fire was so ferocious that it continued till Monday morning. Most shops and godowns in the market dealt in readymade garments and clothes. The KMC fire brigade, assisted by firefighters and vehicles from the navy, personnel from the civil administration and other rescue services put out the fire after several hours. The KMC administrator and the Karachi commissioner had been present during the firefighting and rescue operation.

The commissioner has said the cause of the fire can only be ascertained after investigations. He has also mentioned reports that an explosion preceded the fire. The affected traders have urged the government to help them financially in order to enable them to resume their businesses. The KMC administrator has expressed the suspicion that the fire might have been caused by electricity short circuiting, emphasising the need for securing electric fittings and ensuring fire safety measures in business establishments and other places, basing his assumptions that lack of proper safety equipment too were the reasons of fire. The Sindh chief minister has said a survey to evaluate the extent of damage and losses is being carried out, indicating that the provincial government intends to help the traders.

Fire in markets, shopping malls, commercial establishments and residences occur in all parts of the country causing huge losses. Given that prevention is better than cure, it is necessary to ensure that markets and buildings have proper fire-safety arrangements. There is also the need to make fire brigades and rescue services diverse in terms of gender so that women can be helped properly in emergency situations. Best fire-fighting practices should be adopted.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 17/11/2021)

Sabotage can't be ruled out, say officials about Saddar market fire

As a committee formed by the Sindh government to investigate the incident of fire that broke out in the Saddar Cooperative Market on Sunday and destroyed dozens of shops formally began its work on Tuesday, traders, their leaders and even fire officials were not ready to rule out the possibility of sabotage behind the blaze.

Chief Fire Officer Mubin Ahmed, who witnessed a few 'strange' things during the firefighting operation, said that the things observed made the whole episode mysterious and suspicious and needed to be investigated.

However, he avoided sharing details, but said that one could not rule out the possibility of 'sabotage' until a proper investigation into the incident was carried out with all available technologies being used for such incidents.

"The key factor of the whole finding so far is the behaviour of the fire and the way it travelled," he said.

Traders warn of strong reaction if proper investigation is not carried out

"We deal with fire incidents almost daily. The accidental fire doesn't spread like this one did. There was no single triggering point of the fire as it was moving from all directions and engulfing things all around the market. This is quite mysterious and needed to be probed by the committee. We would compile our initial report by Wednesday (today)."

FIR lodged on trader's complaint

An FIR was lodged on Tuesday night under Section 436 (Mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house), 437 (Mischief with intent to destroy or make unsafe a decked vessel or one of twenty tons burden) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code on the complaint of the president of market association Shaikh Mohammad Feroz. He alleged in the FIR that it was a deliberate act of arson.

Meanwhile, the traders, who lost their businesses in the fire, continued to question the role of authorities and demanded immediate compensation, proper registration of an FIR and rehabilitation of their shops.

The affected traders formally joined hands with their city body that warned that if the Sindh government continued to ignore the situation of their fellow businessmen, they would come up with a collective and much stronger strategy.

The leaders of the All City Tajir Ittehad — an umbrella association of some 300 markets across Karachi — visited the affected market, met the shopkeepers, who lost their businesses and made a joint demand for a proper investigation and immediate compensation.

"It's so unfortunate that the police are using delaying tactics and not registering the case," said Muhammad Ahmed Shamsi of the All City Tajir Ittehad.

"Similarly, none of the provincial government key persons or ministers visited the traders who have lost their businesses. No assurance has come from the government so far. The most important thing is the investigation into the incident. The traders who have lost their businesses are convinced that this is sabotage and they have reasons for that. They must be heard and investigation should be completed immediately," he said.

Sources said that the probe team announced by the Sindh government started its work on Tuesday and visited the market to investigate the incident.

No FIR lodged

The traders failed again to get an FIR registered for the suspected foul play behind the fire as they criticised the role of police authorities accusing them of using delaying tactics.

The fire department and the city administration formally moved its machinery and other stuff from the main road on Tuesday to clear it for vehicular traffic after more than 48 hours.

The fire department said it was in final stages of compiling its initial report, which was expected to be ready by Wednesday.
(By Imran Tahir Dawn, 13, 17/11/2021)

Blaze decimates another market in Karachi three days after cloth centre inferno

Four warehouses and around 45 shops were gutted when a huge fire broke out in another famous market of Saddar, the Victoria Market, adjacent to the Zainab Market on Wednesday, officials and witnesses said.

This is the second major fire incident in less than a week as on Nov 14 hundreds of shops were gutted in the [Saddar Cooperative Market fire](#).

The blaze that erupted on the top floor (fifth) of the Victoria Market on Abdullah Haroon Road at around 11.30am was put out after hectic efforts lasting for several hours. The cooling process, however, continued till late in the night.

Deputy Commissioner-South Irshad Sodhar told *Dawn* that almost the entire top floor of the multi-storey shopping centre had been destroyed in the fire.

45 shops on building's fifth floor gutted; CM takes notice of two similar incidents

He said that the floor mainly comprised of warehouses, where winter clothes were stocked. Since there was no other activity, the DC said that an electric short-circuit might have started the fire.

South SSP Zubair Nazeer Sheikh said that no one was injured in the fire.

He said that they were waiting for firemen's report to initiate legal proceedings.

Karachi Administrator Barrister Murtaza Wahab said an investigation would be carried out to ascertain the exact cause of the fire.

Building lacks 'proper' fire safety system

Chief Fire Officer Mubeen Ahmed told *Dawn* that around 12-13 fire engines and two snorkels took part in the firefighting efforts. He said that four warehouses located on the top floor of the building were destroyed. He said that the shopkeepers claimed that their 40-45 shops were gutted.

The chief fire officer said that they faced difficulties in controlling the fire as clothes mostly jackets and sweaters were stored in the market and even placed on stairs of the building, which did not have a proper fire safety system.

He said that there was also no fire alarm system in the busy market and shopkeepers become aware of the fire when huge flames were leaping into the sky and thick smoke was billowing from the building.

He suggested that modern devices, breakers, etc, had been installed in the electric system to prevent short circuits and shopping centres should also introduced these devices to avoid such incidents.

He said that the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board provided them uninterrupted water supply due to which they did not face any difficulty in getting water.

A visit to the fire location showed that thick smoke was emanating from the top floor of the building and enveloped the whole area.

A portion of Zainab Market and other adjacent centres were closed while the busy part of the Abdullah Haroon Road was also closed for vehicular traffic.

Some shopkeepers told *Dawn* that some silk clothes were also kept there. Some complained that firemen were not equipped with 'modern' equipment to prevent the fire from spreading and controlling it.

Murad takes notice of two fires

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah took notice of the fire incident in Victoria Market and sought a detailed inquiry report about the two fire incidents that occurred within a week in the main downtown area of Saddar.

Traders at the Cooperative Market had suspected sabotage behind the fire and lodged an FIR at the Preedy police station against unidentified suspects.

Meanwhile, the SSP-South told *Dawn* that they had launched an investigation into the Cooperative Market fire incident but they were still waiting for the final report of fire brigade about the exact cause of the fire to initiate legal proceedings.

The chief fire officer said he could not compile the final report about the earlier fire incident as he was busy in Wednesday's firefighting operation.
(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 18/11/2021)

Fire at another market in a week

Millions of rupees worth of garments, cloth and other articles were burnt to ashes as a result of a blaze which erupted on the fifth floor of Victoria Shopping Center on Abdullah Haroon Road in Saddar area on Wednesday.

The fire destroyed warehouses and shops on the fifth floor. However, the fire brigade managed to contain the blaze to only one floor. Fortunately, no casualties were reported.

Police, Rangers and rescue volunteers rushed to the spot as soon as the incident was reported.

The fire broke out at Victoria Shopping Center, located between Madina Shopping Mall and Zainab Market, at around 11:30am which soon intensified.

Flames and smoke billowed from the windows of the fifth floor of the building.

Firefighters were on the scene with snorkels while some even went inside the burning building to check if there were any people trapped.

Chief Fire Officer Mubeen Ahmed said that the fire was reported to the fire brigade at 12 noon following which the fire brigade personnel reached the spot along with fire tenders and snorkel and started efforts to control the blaze.

He said that the fire brigade personnel with the help of snorkel started the process of extinguishing the fire by breaking the windows of the 5th floor whereas the personnel faced difficulties in going upstairs to the shopping center as goods were also found stacked on the staircase.

Refuting the rumors of shortage of water, he said that water was being supplied continuously by the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board through water tankers.

According to reports, the warehouses contained a large number of warm clothes which were stored for sale at the onset of winter. There were also leather jackets, sweaters, clothes and other items stored in the warehouses.

Upon receiving the report of fire, the traffic police closed the said road and diverted the traffic to alternative routes. Karachi Police Chief Imran Yaqub Minhas directed SSP South Zubair Nawaz to immediately reach the spot and monitor the rescue operations.

According to the fire brigade, a total of 12 fire tenders and two snorkels took part in controlling the fire. Chief Fire Officer Ahmed said that the fire was brought under control by the personnel after a struggle by 4pm. However, the cooling process was still underway to put out the fire completely and it was not possible to say exactly how much longer it would take because garments can catch fire again.

Official response

South District Deputy Commissioner Irshad Sodhar talking to the media at the site said all the rescue and law enforcing agencies were on ground within seven minutes of the fire complaint. DC Sodhar said fire and rescue services major challenge is traffic jams, encroached roads and streets which obstruct their way.

Sodhar said that Karachi commissioner reviewed the whole process of extinguishing the fire in the commercial hub of the city.

While the government is held responsible for the blaze, he urged the traders to think about fire safety measures.

Jl demands probe

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Karachi Chief Engr Hafiz Naeemur Rehman has demanded of the Sindh government to launch a probe into the multiple incidents of inferno at markets in Karachi.

The JI leader said that a thorough probe into incidents was a must as it could be episodes of a designed conspiracy against the trade and industry sector of Karachi.

They JI leader also demanded of the government to pay compensation to the affected shopkeepers.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 18/11/2021)

Dozens of shanties gutted

Several shanties were burnt to ashes during an intensive blaze which broke out in a temporary settlement under Teen Hatti bridge. Ten fire brigade vehicles put out the blaze after an hour-long struggle. No casualties were reported in the incident.

Sources said the fire was so intense that it soon all the shanties close to the source. The fire brigade department was informed and it dispatched three vehicles. Due to the severity of the fire, the number of vehicles increased from time to time. The blaze also reached the lower part of the nearby Lyari Expressway flyover. However, it was immediately put out.

Fire brigade officials said a total of ten vehicles took part in the rescue operation and the blaze was brought under control after an hour-long struggle, following which the cooling process was started.

The cause of the fire was not immediately known. Dozens of huts were reduced to ashes due to the fire.

Not the first time

In January of 2020, many residing in shanties located under the Teen Hatti Bridge were roused from sleep to witness the harrowing sight of roaring flames sweeping through their rundown abodes, swallowing their minimal belongings and leaving behind a trail of ash and smoke.

However, despite being surrounded by the fast-spreading blaze, the dwellers were quick to vacate the shanties. As a result, no casualties were reported in the incident.

Speaking to *The Express Tribune* at the time, Central district chairperson Rehan Hashmi estimated that the inferno burned down around 200 shanties, and according to the district administration, the massive fire left 450 to 500 people homeless.

In the port city, there is one fire station for every 100,000 citizens, equipped with four fire tenders and staffed with just over 50 operational personnel, working round-the-clock in shifts.

Each shift will have at least 16 firefighters, eight drivers, four leading firemen, two sub-fire officers and one station officer.

If the city of 20 million people was to comply with international standards, it would have had 200 fully functioning fire brigade stations, staffed with more than 10,000 personnel.

The dilapidated state of Karachi's firefighting mechanism is especially alarming considering the city's urban landscape. With two ports, seven industrial zones and several densely packed residential areas and slums, fire hazards in the metropolis are manifold.

The absence of a fire safety code means many buildings operate without fire escapes and basic fire-extinguishing apparatus. As a result, an effective fire brigade is the only other option for the city to ward off a massive fire disaster.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 21/11/2021)

Scores of huts destroyed in Karachi's Teen Hatti blaze

A huge fire destroyed at least 100 huts in the Teen Hatti area along the Lyari Expressway while a tanker carrying thousands of litre oil caught fire at a fuel station in Saddar on Saturday.

However, no loss of life was reported in the two incidents, police and fire officials said.

In the first incident, the fire left a large number of people, including women and children, living along the Lyari river shelterless.

Chief Fire Officer Mubeen Ahmed said they received information about the fire at around 8.15am. Initially, three fire engines were sent from the nearby Nazimabad fire station. Later, realising the intensity of the fire, seven more fire engines were despatched, which managed to douse the fire.

He said the huts were built with cloths or tents and all the huts were connected with each other with piece of cloths. Therefore, when the fire erupted in one hut, it rapidly spread and engulfed 10-12 other huts, he said.

Another big tragedy averted as oil tanker fire at Saddar fuel station put out

The fire chief estimated that around 100 huts were destroyed.

He said the area residents immediately left the place and also save their children. They tried to save their utensils and other valuable. He said that this was the second fire incident at the same place as a fire had also erupted there last year destroying 150 huts.

Oil tanker fire at fuel station

In the second incident that took place at around 11.15am, an oil tanker caught fire at a PSO petrol pump, opposite the Parking Plaza, near Saddar. Three employees of the fuel station suffered burn injuries, police and firemen said.

The chief fire officer said that as they had just extinguished an earlier fire erupted in huts at Teen Hatti on Saturday and fire machines had just arrived their stations, they received information about another fire at a petrol pump.

He said several fire engines, including one snorkel, were refilled with water immediately and brought from different fire stations in the metropolis to meet any eventuality. "The fire in oil works like a bomb and it is not easy to control it," he said, adding that they used foam as the fire was sliding and had spread on the road and firemen put their life in danger to control it.

Brigade Police SHO Khaliq Rafiq said that the blaze erupted in the oil truck belonging to the PSO, which was delivering oil to the fuel station.

While the SHO said the fire had erupted due to a short circuit in the driver's cabin, the fire chief said that it needed to be investigated.

The fire chief said the fire erupted in the tanker when it was transferring oil to an underground tank. He asked why the valve of the oil tank was not closed immediately.

There were fire extinguishers at the petrol pump, but they were not used to put out the fire. And when the fire broke out, the employees just ran away.

Delivery rules violation

Moreover, the fire chief said under the rules concerned and the policy of the government, oil trucks were supposed to deliver oil at fuel stations after the midnight. He asked as to why the PSO's oil truck was delivering petrol in the daytime.

He described it as 'negligence' on the part of the quarters concerned.

The area SHO said the tank was filled with oil and estimated 21,000 litres of oil was burnt.

(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 21/11/2021)

500 shops gutted in Karachi's Cooperative Market blaze: fire chief

A report about the Nov 14 fire that broke out in the Saddar Cooperative Market has said that 500 shops situated on the ground floor were gutted in the blaze.

Talking to *Dawn*, Chief Fire Officer of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) Mubeen Ahmed said that the report had been submitted to Karachi Administrator Murtaza Wahab.

He said since criminal investigation of the incident was already under way the fire department did not ascertain the cause of the blaze. He said that the shopkeepers claimed that 600 shops were destroyed, but the actual number was 500.

He said shops on the ground floor were completely destroyed but those on the first floor and basement remained safe.

He claimed that the fire brigade did not get information about the fire from any watchmen or the market association, as it was a fireman who had gone to Bohri Bazaar for shopping and when he saw smoke billowing from the cooperative market he immediately informed the nearby fire station at around 5.45pm.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 22/11/2021)

Heirs of Mehran Town factory fire victims accept blood money

A district and sessions judge on Monday granted bail to interned owners and four officials of a Mehran Town factory after they reached an out-of-court settlement with families of 16 workers, who died in a fire in the industrial unit in August, against payment of around Rs67,200,000 diyat (blood money).

The fire allegedly caused by an electric short-circuit had engulfed the industrial unit, BM Luggage, on Aug 27 killing the 16 workers.

Factory's owner Hassan Meetha alias Ali Meetha, its building's owner Faisal Tariq, manager Syed Imran Ali Zaidi, supervisors Zafar and Rehan and watchman Syed Zarin have been booked for their alleged involvement in the incident.

Police had arrested the watchman and later arrested Meetha, Tariq and Zaidi after the court revoked their interim pre-arrest bail on Aug 30.

Court grants bail to owners and four employees

Later, they moved applications seeking grant of post-arrest bail and the District and Sessions Judge (East) Khalid Hussain Shahani had reserved his order on the bail pleas on Oct 19.

While pronouncing the order on Monday, the court allowed the pleas in view of an out-of-court settlement reached by the applicants with the legal heirs of the 16 deceased factory workers.

According to the terms and conditions of the agreement, both the factory owners would pay Rs4.2 million to legal heirs of each victim. Meetha will contribute 60 per cent of the total amount while Tariq would pay remaining 40pc.

Initially, the factory owners handed over cheques for Rs1m to each family of the victims. They also agreed to pay the remaining amount of Rs3.2m to each family in instalments after every three month.

The court granted each applicant bail in the sum of Rs100,000 surety each.

Defence counsel Hassan Sabir said the court directed prison authorities to release the held factory owners and officials forthwith if their custody was not required in any other case.

Earlier, the suspects were produced from prison while the legal heirs of the deceased were also present.

The legal heirs submitted applications supported by their personal affidavits stating that they had agreed to accept diyat offered by the suspects, adding that the agreement in this regard was signed in the office of the Korangi deputy commissioner.

They submitted that they had no objection if the suspects were granted bail and released from prison in the present case.

The matter was fixed for Nov 27 when the factory owners would submit the schedule of the remaining payment to the court.

In the meanwhile, the court also confirmed interim pre-arrest bail granted to six officers of the provincial government, civic agencies and utilities, who were nominated in the case for their alleged 'negligence' towards conducting inspections to ensure safety of the workers at their workplace and failure in initiating timely rescue operation.

A case was registered under Sections 322 (manslaughter) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code at the Korangi Industrial Area police station on behalf of the state.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 23/11/2021)

50 huts gutted in North Karachi fire

Around 50 huts were destroyed when a huge fire erupted in a North Karachi area near Nagan Chowrangi on Monday evening, police, rescue and fire officials said.

Chief Fire Officer Mubeen Ahmed said that the blaze erupted in the huts near Maria Apartments and six fire engines managed to put out the fire. However, the cooling work remained continued till late in the night.

Sharea Noor Jehan SHO Aftab Abbasi said that the fire broke out when a gas cylinder exploded inside one of the huts. While those living in the huts left in a hurry, three to four more gas cylinders exploded due to which the fire spread to other huts.

He said around 40-50 huts were destroyed in the fire, but luckily no one was hurt in the incident.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 30/11/2021)

Another fire ravages shanty settlement

A fire broke out in shanties situated on an empty plot near Bab-e-Rehmat Masjid in Shaman Town and the blaze quickly intensified to engulf 45 huts.

Police said the fire was caused by an exploding gas cylinder while created a domino effect and caused several other such installations to also explode.

The fire caused panic among the residents of the shanties as they ran for their lives. The fire was so intense that its flames could be seen from afar.

However, no casualties were reported. Due to the fire, household items in the huts were burnt to ashes.

As soon as the blaze was reported, the fire brigade reached the spot. Police, Rangers and relief volunteers also reached the scene.

Police and Rangers cordoned off the area and removed unauthorised persons from the scene so that relief work could continue uninterrupted.

According to the fire brigade, four fire engines and a bowser were dispatched to the spot as soon as the fire was reported. The fire fighters doused the flames after hectic struggle.

SHO Shara-e-Noor Jahan Aftab Abbasi said that when he reached the spot, the residents of nearby Maria Apartments said that the fire started due to the explosion of a gas cylinder which they heard before the fire.

During the fire, three more cylinders kept in the huts also exploded. He said that about 45 shanties, household items and a motorbike were also burnt to ashes as a result of the fire.

PTCL equipment, pipes, cables gutted in fire

Highly valuable cables, PVC pipes and other equipment were burnt during a blaze at a vacant plot behind the telephone exchange on II Chundrigar Road on Tuesday. No casualties were reported during the blaze.

Police, Rangers and other rescue agencies rushed to the spot and firefighters were called immediately. Meanwhile, the buildings and offices around the telephone exchange were also evacuated.

Three fire tenders reached the spot and later two more joined the firefighting personnel started immediate rescue operations.

According to the fire brigade officials, PTCL telephone exchange equipment were reduced to ashes. The cause of fire was not immediately known. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 01/12/2021)

City witnesses over 2,300 fire incidents

This year, there were more than 2,300 fire incidents in different parts of the city, in which precious lives were lost while heavy financial losses were incurred.

Most of the incidents were blamed on faulty wiring. Many questions were raised on fire safety and availability of fire exits that could have helped save human lives.

The most dangerous fire of this year broke out at a travel-bag making factory in Mehran Town, Korangi Industrial Area in which 16 people died.

The factory owner and the landlord were arrested by police, and later acquired bail following compensation agreement with the heirs. The Sindh government made a separate announcement of paying a million rupees to heirs of each victim.

The fire at the Cooperative Market and Victoria Center in Saddar resulted in the burning of garments, cloth, shops, warehouses and other goods worth millions of rupees.

The highest incidents of 258 fires this year were reported within the limits of Saddar Fire Station, while the highest number of 273 fires occurred in November.

According to the fire brigade, 224 fires were reported in January this year, 200 in February, 179 in March, 197 in April, 165 in May, 196 in June and 161 in July, 136 in August, 141 in September, 188 in October, 273 in November and about 270 in December.

Dr Farhat Hussain Mirza, a forensic medicine specialist and former police surgeon, and five other people including his elder brother and two sisters, were killed during a fire which erupted on the ground floor and first floor of his bungalow on Tipu Sultan Road on August 12 this year.

On August 27 this year, a fire broke out in a factory in Korangi's Mehran Town. At least 16 people died in the factory, which was locked up like a prison.

More than 450 shops and their garments, clothes and other items were burnt to ashes in a horrific fire at Saddar's Cooperative Market on November 14 this year. The shopkeepers said that billions of rupees were lost as a result of the fire.

A few days after the incident, on November 17, shops and warehouses on the fifth floor of the Victoria Center on Abdullah Haroon Road, Zainab Market, Saddar caught fire, burning clothes and other goods worth millions of rupees to ashes.

While the fire department blames the people for ignoring faulty wirings, people allege that the fire tenders never come on time. (By Munawwar Ali Khan The Express Tribune, 04, 31/12/2021)