

# Karachi blaze sparks fiery slugfest in NA

- MQM, PPP and PTI clash over fire response
- Lawmakers debate negligence, chemical use
- Minister links disaster to governance issues

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The National Assembly on Tuesday witnessed a fiery session as government allies clashed over the fire at Karachi's Gul Plaza, exchanging sharp accusations and verbal barbs while pointing fingers over institutional failures, governance, and past policies.

The session, chaired by Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, saw Defence Minister Khawaja Asif raise two points for the next constitutional amendment: the need for a uniform curriculum and a functional local government system.

Tensions flared quickly between parties. Members of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) exchanged pointed remarks during the debate on the tragedy. Allied parties also



**LIFE AMIDST RUBBLES:** Rescue workers search amid the debris using excavators after a massive fire at a shopping mall in Karachi. PHOTO: AFP

took aim at the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), intensifying the confrontation. MQM lawmakers sought permission to discuss the Gul Plaza fire, insisting

that regular proceedings be suspended for a focused debate. Initially, the government resisted, but protests from MQM and PTI members forced the suspension

of the regular agenda.

Opening the discussion, MQM lawmaker Dr Farooq Sattar sharply criticised the handling of the fire. **KARACHI BLAZE, PAGE 6**

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highlighting institutional failures and the PPP-led provincial government's inadequate response. In turn, PPP members countered the criticism.

Shehla Raza questioned why multiple locations in the plaza caught fire and why chemicals were reportedly used that hindered fire-fighting efforts. She added that such incidents often reveal underlying frustrations, exposing weaknesses in the local governance system.

PPP member Abdul Qadir Patel accused MQM founder Altaf Hussain's bodyguard, Goga, of overseeing the unauthorised construction of Gul Plaza. MQM's Wasim Hussain countered the claim, asserting that Patel had previously been involved in the plaza's construction.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif framed the debate in the context of broader governance issues, noting that past military governments had strengthened local government systems, while political administrations historically avoided them.

He stressed that for the National Assembly to function effectively, representation must extend to neighbourhoods, and local governance must be fully operational. Without this, he argued, the 18th Amendment remained largely symbolic. He added that the next constitutional amendment must guarantee a uniform curriculum and a functioning local government system nationwide.

Turning to the situation in the former tribal areas, PTI lawmakers, including Iqbal Afridi, called for a debate on the displacement of people in Khyber, Bajaur, and Mohmand districts due to ongoing operations. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) supported this demand.

Afridi alleged that internally displaced persons (IDPs) were being left without adequate support, with the federal government failing to monitor the situation properly, while provincial authorities attempted to manage the crisis.

Former National Assembly speaker and senior PTI member Asad Qaiser highlighted a recent jirga held by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) Assembly, whose declaration was signed by 21 parties, including PPP, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Awami National Party (ANP). Qaiser proposed that the provincial assembly be consulted on the province's issues and called for a joint parliamentary session to formulate a national strategy against terrorism.

State Minister for Interior Talal Chaudhry defended the operations in K-P, noting that the National Action Plan (NAP), formulated during the previous PTI government, was being implemented. He claimed the K-P chief minister was politicising the operations.

As the heated debate continued, the National Assembly proceedings were adjourned and postponed until 11 am on Wednesday (today).