

Plaza death toll jumps to 61 as 30 bodies found in crockery shop

Chemical tests, DNA profiling, structural assessments under way; adjacent Rimpa Plaza declared unsafe; demolition on hold till completion of rescue operations; police recover cash from rubble

By Faraz Khan

KARACHI: During the ongoing search and rescue operation at Gul Plaza, the recovery of 33 more human remains has taken the total number of bodies and remains found so far to 61, while fears persist that more bodies or remains of missing persons may still be recovered.

Of the newly recovered remains, 30 were found in a crockery shop located on the mezzanine floor. The location was identified by shopkeepers of Gul Plaza and mobile phone loca-

tions were also traced to the same spot. When rescue workers managed to reach the crockery shop after removing the debris, they discovered the remains in a cluster. The remains, numbering around 30, were in extremely poor condition. All the victims were badly burnt and found in the form of charred remains. It is believed that the victims had taken shelter inside the crockery shop in an attempt to save themselves but were burnt to ashes. The scope of investigations into the

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Gul Plaza tragedy has been widened and investigations have begun from multiple angles to determine the reasons for the rapid spread of fire. Authorities decided to conduct chemical examinations of the samples taken from the remains to determine whether any chemical substances were present in the building.

The Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) team has conducted an inspection. According to BDS officials, only after the report is completed will the rapid spread of the fire be confirmed. The Urban Search and Rescue team is continuing its search operation at Gul Plaza using thermal cameras which have been deployed at the site to carry out scanning of the affected areas.

The remains recovered from Gul Plaza are in such a terrible condition that even DNA testing has become difficult. The remains were found in fragments, with teeth and bones badly broken. It is also difficult to determine how many individuals the recovered remains belong to.

After the Gul Plaza fire on M.A. Jinnah Road in Karachi, SECA officials declared the adjacent Rimpa Plaza unsafe and sealed it. Notices have been issued to the administration and shop owners.

Following the discovery of 30 bodies and remains, the operation was temporarily suspended to immediately shift the remains to the hospital. After the remains were transported, the rescue operation was resumed with renewed intensity.

"My shop was located on the mezzanine floor and besides my cousins and employees, a large number of women and other people were also inside the shop at the time of the incident," narrated Salman, the owner of the concerned crockery shop in Gul

Plaza.

Earlier in the day, three more remains were recovered from the ground floor and were also shifted to the hospital for DNA analysis.

Prior to this, till Tuesday night, a total of 28 bodies and remains had been recovered. Of these, six were intact bodies that had been identified, while one victim, Tanveer, was later identified with the help of a CNIC. Additionally, three more victims were identified late Tuesday night through DNA matching, while identification of further remains through DNA samples is expected.

"Fifty remains have been processed and 16 have been identified," Police Surgeon Karachi Dr Sunnamiya Syed told The News.

The Urban Search and Rescue team is continuing its search operation at Gul Plaza using thermal cameras. Fire Officer Zafar Khan said that search operations continued on the second and third floors of the collapsed section connected to Rimpa Plaza. Heavy, unnecessary items on the roof were removed to reduce weight and ease the operation.

DIG Zone South Asad Raza said that a total of 85 people were initially reported missing, out of which remains of 33 have been recovered so far, while 53 people are still reported missing. He added that the search operation is still underway and will continue until all missing persons are located.

Deputy Commissioner South Javed Nabi Khoso said the building will be demolished only after the operation is completed, and it cannot be brought down while any person remains missing.

Following the Gul Plaza tragedy, the Deputy Commissioner South Karachi sealed six under-construction buildings in different areas for lacking firefighting equipment. According to district administration, emergency

exits were also missing and work on a total of 43 under-construction buildings in the district has been halted. He added that inspections will be carried out in phases and action will also be taken against old buildings without fire safety systems.

The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) has reportedly submitted seven files to the commissioner Karachi, who heads the inquiry committee. Sources said three of the files relate to pending court cases against Gul Plaza from 1992, 2015, and 2021, while the remaining documents include records of illegal construction, revised proposals and regularisation plans. The SBCA also provided the building approval report. Four days after the incident, the complete record was submitted. The original files were handed over to the Additional Commissioner's office.

Meanwhile, Karachi Commissioner Hasan Naqvi said the investigation into the Gul Plaza incident has become very complex, with multiple angles involved. After visiting the site with Additional IG Karachi, he told the media that responsibility cannot be placed on a single agency. He said the inquiry will also include recommendations for the government to prevent similar incidents in the future.

According to police, while goods and cash were being retrieved from the debris of the affected building, a labourer tried to flee after hiding money. The administration present at the site noticed his suspicious behaviour and immediately apprehended him, after which the police were informed.

Meanwhile, the recovery of cash from the debris of Gul Plaza, which was gutted by fire on Karachi's M.A. Jinnah Road, continues. Chief Fire Officer Humayun Khan said that a large amount of cash found during the search operation has been handed over to the relevant authorities.