

# 'I just want the body of my child'

After nine days, families of missing persons wait outside Gul Plaza for closure; death toll climbs to 73; six laid to rest

By Imtiaz Ali

KARACHI: As the number of deaths in the tragic Gul Plaza fire reached 73 and the search operation continued for the ninth day, families of many missing persons have been waiting outside the gutted building for closure, as they know there are slim chances that their loved ones were alive.

"I am coming daily to Gul Plaza but am being pushed back. I don't want anything, I just want the body of my child," said the mother of missing Imran Ibrahim.

A resident of Lyari, told the media her son had been working at a crockery shop for the last three years. He had talked with her at around 10pm on Jan 17, saying that he was doing overtime and would come back home at 2am.

The mother said all family members were asleep, assuming that her son might have returned, but in the morning, they came to know that a huge fire had erupted at Gul Plaza.

She said when she visits Civil Hospital Karachi, she is told to go home, and that they would call her. When she comes to Gul Plaza, no one informs her anything about her son.

She added that the shop owner, Sarfaraz, where her son worked, was also among the missing persons.

The father of another missing man told the media that he, along with other family members, had been visiting the plaza for the last nine days but no one responded to their plight. He wondered what the

government was doing.

He recalled that his son, Hafiz Arif who was father of two children including an infant son, had made a last call to him and his mother, saying, "Please Abu, Ami [father, mother] save my life as I cannot understand anything."

The father said they asked their son to recite the *kalima*. "We would leave the place if any sign of our son was given, even his remains," said the grieving father, a resident of Godhra Colony in New Karachi.

## Funeral prayers

Funeral prayers of six victims, including four of a family, were held in Karachi and Sukkur.

In Delhi Colony, a large number of people attended the funeral prayers of four family members — Saad, Kausar, Mariam and Misbah — at the Eidgah ground.

An Edhi Foundation spokesperson said that a total of six members

of the family had gone shopping for a wedding ceremony when the tragedy struck them. Two of them were yet to be identified.

The funeral prayer of Mohammed Shees was held at Kashti Chowk in Garden.

In Sukkur, a number of people including Sukkur Mayor Barrister Arsalam Islam Shaikh attended the funeral of Mohammad Athar, father of four, who lost his life in the incident.

The mayor announced that a special fund has been established to support the bereaved family, providing them with financial assistance.

## 'Search operation in final phase'

The number of deaths in the tragic Gul Plaza fire reached 73 as remains of two more victims were recovered from the debris during the search and rescue operation, officials said.

Rescue-1122 Chief Operating



PEOPLE offer funeral prayers for four of the Gul Plaza fire victims. — Shakil Adil / White Star

Officer (COO) Dr Abid Jalal Shaikh told *Dawn* that the search operation was in the final phase and would likely be completed soon.

He said that only five per cent of the basement area remained for searching, which was under debris.

He said that the operation was halted for a while as the district administration had arranged a visit

for forensic experts.

They visited the spot and collected samples, and after that, the operation was resumed.

The COO said that the district administration had so far recorded 73 casualties, while the total number of missing persons stood at 81.

Police surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed told *Dawn* that out of 73 deceased, 23 have been identified.