Shoe Factory Fire In Pakistan Kills 25 People

Zaheer Babar, Associated Press

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — A fire that broke out in a factory in eastern Pakistan on Tuesday killed 25 people when sparks from a generator hit chemicals used to make shoes, a Pakistani police officer said.

Senior police officer Multan Khan said three people were also injured in the blaze at the factory in Lahore, the capital of Punjab province. Some of the people died from suffocation while others burned alive when the flames ripped through the chemicals, he said.

The fire erupted when people in the building were trying to start their generator after the electricity went out. Sparks from the generator made contact with the chemicals, igniting the blaze.

Pakistan faces widespread blackouts, and many people use generators to provide electricity for their houses or to run businesses. The fire is likely to add to public outrage over the government's failure to provide sufficient power.

Firefighters broke holes in the solid brick walled buildings to reach victims inside. At the morgue, bodies were lined up on a hallway floor, covered with white sheets.

One of the workers, Muhammad Shabbir, said he had been working at the factory for six months along with his cousin. He said all the chemicals and the generator were located in the garage, which was also the only way out of the building. When the fire ignited, there was no way out. Shabbir said he had just gone outside the factory when the fire started but his cousin was severely burned and died at the hospital.

Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf in a statement expressed his shock and grief over the deaths.

Many people in Lahore have set up shoe factories at homes and in residential areas. Many of the factories are ill-equipped and often lack modern fire safety equipment such as fire extinguishers or sprinklers.

In another fire in the southern port city of Karachi, 24 people were injured when a blaze broke out in a garment factory, said Dr. Karar Abbasi at the Civilian Hospital of Karachi. Some of the workers were injured when they jumped from the burning building, he said.

Pakistani television showed pictures of what appeared to be a three-story building in Karachi with flames leaping from the top-floor windows and smoke billowing into the night sky.

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Associated Press writer Adil Jawad in Karachi contributed to this report.

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