

Oil tanker fire in Pakistan ship-demolition Gadani Hub : Many workers dead, injured, missing

Sunday 20 November 2016, by [BALOCH Saher](#) (Date first published: 10 November 2016).

Gadani, in south-western Pakistan near Karachi, host the world's third largest ship breaking yard. A gas cylinder exploded when workers were dismantling an oil tanker, causing the ship to catch fire. Some 59 workers were badly burned and many people reportedly jumped overboard to escape the blaze. It is unclear how many people were aboard the ship when the explosion occurred.

Thousands of labourers work in the Pakistani ship-breaking industry under poor conditions and with low safety standards. They are often the victim of deadly accidents.

KARACHI: At least 10 workers have been missing since Gadani ship-breaking yard blast, while 60 others are in critical condition at hospitals as the death toll rose to 28, said National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) deputy secretary general at a press conference on Wednesday.

Accompanied by labour union members from Gadani and Hub, as well as families of the missing workers with an injured worker, NTUF deputy general secretary Nasir Mansoor was speaking at the Karachi Press Club.

Currently no work was under way at the ship-breaking site due to the ban imposed on the assembly of more than four people in the area under Section 144 of the criminal procedure code, he said while pointing out that the move had further put the livelihood of around 12,000 workers of Gadani ship-breaking yard at stake.

Death toll rises to 28 as 60 others in critical condition

Information about the total number of workers is based on estimates because "office-bearer responsible for managing records at the ship-breaking yard is under custody", said Mr Mansoor.

It is estimated that 250 workers were working at the site when a gas cylinder exploded and started a fire inside an oil tanker in the shipyard. As work on the ship was to begin on Nov 1, the NTUF was told by the injured and the workers present at the site that around 150 of them "spent the night at the ship to begin work early in the morning", said Mr Mansoor while speaking to journalists. Visibly shaken the 32-year-old injured worker, Abdur Rehman, couldn't speak much about his ordeal at the press conference. However, he did mention that he was "emptying oil from the vessel through a small bucket when the explosion occurred, throwing me a few feet away. When I came through, I was informed that my family recognised me as I didn't receive burn injuries to my face."

Mansoor, who addressed multiple issues at the presser, said that after exhaustive search across city's hospitals, the families of 10 missing workers recently approached the NTUF. He also requested the media to confirm figures with the union as information about the number of workers at the site was based on estimates.

Also present at the presser, Saira Bano, a resident of New Karachi, is among the families searching hospitals for their family members.

She told Dawn that she received information about her son, Mohammad Shafiq, the same evening. "I was informed by a friend of his that he tried looking for Shafiq after the explosion but couldn't find him. I looked at Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, Civil Hospital Karachi, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital and Edhi Foundation's various centres across Karachi, but couldn't find him," she said, while holding a pile of documents including her son's birth certificate.

What's also causing problems in the search, she adds, is the fact that she doesn't have a picture of her son. As a result, she's carrying all of his documents that have his monochrome picture.

Mr Mansoor lamented the current crop of "speculative stories calling the Gadani tragedy an international conspiracy. It is similar to what happened with the Baldia Town factory fire. It is obvious to anyone who has seen labour conditions in Gadani that the incident occurred due to lack of safety conditions. Reducing such an incident to a conspiracy of a neighbouring country is shameful."

He said that the workers, mostly hailing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and a minority of Burmese and Bengalis, were working on daily wages at the ship-breaking compound "and most of them did not leave the vicinity around holidays, as they had nowhere else to go".

SAHER BALOCH

P.S.

* "10 workers missing since Gadani ship blast, says labour leader". Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2016. UPDATED Nov 10, 2016 09:58am:

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1295332>