The Moscow Times
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Five Dead, 25 Missing After Kazan Shopping Mall Goes Up in Flames

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March 12, 2015



Firefighters extinguishing a blaze that tore through one of Kazan's largest shopping malls Wednesday afternoon.

Five lives were lost as a fire tore through a Kazan shopping mall, and the whereabouts of some 25 other individuals remain unknown, the Interfax news agency reported Thursday.

The fire broke out Wednesday afternoon in a first-story cafe at Kazan's "Admiral" shopping center just before 1 p.m., local media reported, killing five and injuring dozens.

Igor Panshin, head of the regional branch of the Emergency Situations Ministry, said Thursday morning that some 25 people thought to have been in the mall at the time of the incident had not since been in touch with their relatives, Interfax reported.

Some 12,000 square meters of the shopping center were engulfed in the flames before the fire was extinguished at 9:30 p.m. that evening, Interfax reported. The Emergency Situations

center of the Volga Federal District said around 650 people had been evacuated from the building in Kazan, the capital of Russia's Tatarstan republic.

Tatarstan Health Minister Adel Vafin told Interfax on Thursday morning that 16 people had been hospitalized and 55 treated for injuries on-site.

A representative of Tajikistan's Labor, Migration and Occupation Ministry said four of the five victims were Tajik nationals, the RIA Novosti news agency reported. The youngest victim, whose identity has not been released, was 18 years old, according to the Investigative Committee's Tatarstan branch.

Panshin said the security guard on duty at the cafe had tried to extinguish the fire himself before calling emergency services, leaving time for the flames to spread more quickly. He added that numerous fire safety violations had been recorded at the shopping center.

Tatarstan President Rustam Minnikhanov has ordered that the families of the Russian nationals killed in the fire receive 1 million rubles ($16,000) in financial compensation, according to a statement on his website.

The bodies of the foreign victims will be transported home at no expense to their families, the statement read.

Russian citizens injured in the incident will receive between 200,000 and 400,000 rubles ($3,300-$6,500), depending on the severity of their conditions. Foreign nationals injured in the fire will receive free medical care.

Regional prosecutors have ordered the detention of the shopping mall's manager over his alleged failure to organize a prompt evacuation. A representative of the Investigative Committee identified the man as Gusein Gakhramanov, Interfax reported.

Prosecutors also ordered that the mall's security personnel — who reportedly prioritized salvaging goods over ensuring safe exits for people — should be taken into custody.

Issues with electrical wiring are being explored as a potential cause of the fire, a representative of the Investigative Committee said, Interfax reported.

More than 300 emergency workers were initially dispatched onto the scene, according to Interfax. As of Thursday morning, some 800 workers had joined the rescue efforts to clear the rubble. A lieutenant colonel of the Emergency Situations Ministry also went missing during the rescue operations, Interfax quoted Panshin as saying on Thursday.

Rescue operations were interrupted at 10 p.m. last night because of the onset of darkness and the threat that the walls of the shopping center could collapse, the regional branch of the Emergency Situations Ministry said in a statement Thursday. Rescue efforts resumed at 7 a.m.

A criminal case has been launched in response to the incident, investigators said in a statement on Thursday. Investigators will probe the cause of the fire and assess the legal responsibility of those in charge of fire safety at the shopping center, the statement said.

Under Russian law, violating fire safety codes in such a way that leads to casualties can

warrant a sentence of up to five years in prison.

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