

'Hell' of Japan fire that killed dozens



Firefighters inspect the scene where over 30 people died in a fire at an animation company building in Kyoto



Residents pray for victims



People walk past images of anime characters in the Akihabara district in Tokyo

● **Raging inferno left those outside unable to even help people**

● **A 41-year-old suspect is in custody**

● **The man believed the company had stolen his work**

● **An online fundraiser had raised over nearly \$1.3 million by Friday afternoon.**

Kyoto, Japan

Details emerged yesterday of the horrifying blaze that ripped through a Japanese anime firm, killing dozens including people who tried in vain to reach the roof, but the motive for the suspected arson remained unclear.

Eyewitnesses described a fire that was like "looking at hell", after a man apparently doused

the production company office in the city of Kyoto with flammable liquid and set it alight.

Experts and firefighters said the blaze would have raged uncontrollably throughout the structure almost instantly, leaving the dozens of people inside with almost no chance of escape.

That was borne out by the grim toll: 33 dead, with dozens more injured, including several in critical condition.

The attack appeared to be among the worst violent crimes in decades in famously safe Japan.

It sparked an outpouring of grief in Japan and beyond, as fans of the country's famed anime industry expressed horror at the enormous loss.

On Friday people were laid flowers and said prayers at the charred Kyoto Animation building.

"These young people were the age of my grandchildren," 78-year-old Sachiko Konishi said of those killed in the attack, most of whom are presumed to be young employees of the company.

"If my grandchildren died under circumstances like this, I



These young people were the age of my grandchildren. If my grandchildren died under circumstances like this, I wouldn't want to go on living

78-YEAR-OLD SACHIKO KONISHI SAID OF THOSE KILLED IN THE ATTACK

wouldn't want to go on living."

Yasuko Tomita, 59, was offering prayers near the building, which was still cordoned off.

"I'm praying to help the souls of those killed find release," she said.

'Like looking at hell'

Eyewitnesses described a raging inferno that left those outside unable to even approach to help people trying to escape.

"There was a person who jumped from the second floor... but we couldn't rush to help because the fire was so strong,"

one local woman told an online affiliate of the Asahi Shimbun daily.

"People with severe burns were crying uncontrollably, just completely dazed," she added. "It was like I was looking at hell."

Police investigators were on the scene Friday taking pictures and examining the devastated building, but the motive for the attack remained unclear.

A 41-year-old suspect is in custody, but the investigation has been hampered by the fact that the man suffered serious burns. He has been hospitalised and was reportedly unconscious on Friday.

Only sketchy details have emerged about the man, who reportedly shouted "drop dead" before starting the fire.

Local media said he did not appear to have any ties to Kyoto Animation. He had reportedly also brought knives and a hammer to the building.

Some reports suggested the man believed the company had stolen his work, with the local Kyoto Shimbun newspaper reporting that he told police: "I set the fire because they stole

novels."

Public broadcaster NHK said the man, who suffers from a mental illness, had served three and a half years in prison after stealing cash from a convenience store.

On Thursday, Kyoto Animation president Hideaki Hatta said the firm had received emailed death threats in the past but gave no further details.

The company founded by a husband and wife couple is known for its skilful animations of manga works, and has a reputation as a generous employer in an industry rife with exploitation of artists.

There was still little information on the victims of the blaze. Local police said 12 men and 20 women were among the dead, with one victim not yet identified.

Local restaurant owner Tomoyo Kamada said company employees had often come to her "Cafe Lapin" for lunch.

"They were serious and polite women who gave the impression of loving their work and giving it their heart and soul," she said.

"I still can't believe it. I can't understand why people like them had to suffer such a fate."

'Incredibly dark time'

Many of the bodies were found on a stairwell leading to the roof, suggesting people were trying to escape the flames when they were overcome.

A local fire department official said the building was in compliance with fire safety rules.

But he said a gasoline-fuelled fire would have burned too quickly for people to outrun it, with a spiral staircase connecting the floors of the building likely helping the blaze spread faster.

"If a large quantity of gasoline was poured, it must have turned into gas very quickly, causing explosions," he said.

"Smoke and flames would have risen up instantaneously."

The blaze hit hard in Japan's anime industry, one of the country's best known cultural products.

An online fundraiser organised by an American anime licensing firm had raised over nearly \$1.3 million by Friday afternoon.

15 killed in dark day for Mumbai daily train commute

Mumbai, India

Fifteen people were killed in separate train accidents in a single day in Mumbai, police said yesterday.

Some of the victims were hit while trying to cross the tracks illegally while others fell from packed trains on Thursday, police spokesman S.R. Gandhi said. At least 13 others suffered injuries, with police blaming the deaths on people attempting to take short cuts in the monsoon rains battering India's financial capital.

"Too many people prefer to take shortcuts," said Gandhi.



Indian residents walk past a special train of 50 wagons carrying litres of water at Villivakkam railway station in Chennai (file)

About 7.5 million passengers use the overcrowded trains daily on Mumbai's colonial-era rail network, a lifeline for the city's 20 million residents.

Huge blast rocks gas plant in China, casualties unknown

Beijing, China

A huge explosion ripped through a gas plant in central China yesterday, shattering windows and doors of buildings in a three-kilometre (1.9-mile) radius, state media said.

The number of casualties was not immediately known following the blast in Sanmenxia city in Henan province, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

The explosion rocked the Yima gasification plant at 5:50 pm local time (0950 GMT).

"Many windows and doors

within a three-kilometre radius were shattered, and some interior doors were also blown out by the blast," CCTV said on its Twitter-like Weibo social media account.

In March, an explosion at a chemical plant in eastern Jiangsu province killed 78 people and injured hundreds, blowing out windows of nearby residential buildings.

In 2015, China suffered one of its worst industrial accidents when giant chemical blasts in the northern port city of Tianjin killed at least 165 people.

Russian plane evacuated due to 'smell', two hospitalised

Moscow, Russia

Two people were hospitalised yesterday after an Armenia-bound plane was evacuated in Moscow following a strange smell and smoke in the cabin, the airline and airport officials said.

The early morning flight operated by Russia's Nordwind Airlines had to be aborted during takeoff after a "foreign smell" on board the Boeing 737, the company said.

The crew used emergency slides to evacuate the passengers -- 162 adults and 11 children.



Representative picture

Citing the plane's commander, Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport where the incident took place, said there was smoke in the cabin but no fire.

Five passengers sought medical help and two were hospitalised, Sheremetyevo said.

The plane was replaced but 28 passengers refused to continue their journey.