Workers and tourists among at least 25 dead after fire engulfs nightclub in Goa

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Delhi

At least 25 people were reported to have been killed yesterday in a fire at a nightclub in Goa, an Indian state popular for its nightlife and tourism.

Several tourists were reported to be among the 25 dead in the fire, which broke out at about midnight at Birch by Romeo Lane, a popular restaurant, cocktail bar and club in the Arpora district of north Goa.

"Today is a very painful day for all of us in Goa," said the state's chief minister, Pramod Sawant. "I visited the site and have ordered an inquiry into this incident."

He added: "Those found responsible will face most stringent action under the law. Any negligence will be dealt with firmly."

It has been reported that upwards of 100 people were in the venue when the fire started during a live music performance that included a band and a bellydancer. In a video posted on social media, flames could be seen emerging from behind the stage.

According to officials, the fire started on the first floor and then engulfed the rest of the building. A preliminary inquiry by police suggested most of those who died had been trapped in the basement of the club and suffocated.

Firefighters worked through the night to contain the fire and rescue those trapped. Images from the scene showed flames ripping through the building as it was reduced to a blackened shell, and investigators combed the wreckage yesterday morning.

Most of the dead were workers at the club who had been in the

▲ The charred interior of the Birch by Romeo Lane club. Left, towering flames rise from the building
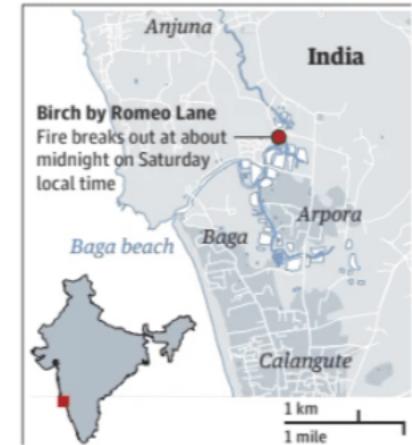PHOTOGRAPH: ATISH NAIK/AFP

basement at the time of the fire, said officials. Sawant told journalists at the scene three to four tourists had died, but the process of identifying the dead was ongoing.

Speaking to the Indian Express newspaper, a Goa police official said many of the guests had been gathered on the first floor when a fire started at about 11.45pm.

They added: "In the ensuing panic and chaos, many guests ran towards the exit and reached safety.

"The staff members working in the basement were effectively trapped because it lacked an exit and was engulfed in smoke. Some guests also seem to have rushed towards the basement and got trapped."

An initial police report said the venue had been operating with proper licences but "did not have an emergency exit door on the ground floor as well as on the deck floor to evacuate in case of emergency".

India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, described the fire as "deeply saddening".

Goa, a former Portuguese colony on the shores of the Arabian Sea, attracts millions of Indian and international tourists every year with its nightlife, sandy beaches and laid-back atmosphere.

According to government data, about 5.5 million tourists visited Goa in the first half of this year, with 270,000 visiting from abroad.

Michael Lobo, a member of the Goa legislative assembly, called for a fire safety audit of all of the state's clubs.

"Tourists have always considered Goa a very safe destination. The fire incident is quite disturbing, and such incidents should not happen in the future," he said.

Deadly fires are common in India because of poor building practices, overcrowding and a lack of adherence to safety regulations. In May at least 17 people died in a fire in a three-storey building in Hyderabad. A month before that a fierce blaze broke out in a hotel in Kolkata, killing at least 15 people. Some people had climbed on to the roof to escape.

In 2024 at least 24 people died after a fire broke out at a packed amusement park arcade in the western state of Gujarat.

Additional reporting
Agence France-Presse

Anjuna
India
Birch by Romeo Lane
Fire breaks out at about midnight on Saturday local time
Arpora
Baga
Baga beach
Calangute
1 km
1 mile