

89 dead, over 100 injured in explosion in Jhabua

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Jhabua (MP): At least 89 people were killed and nearly 100 injured today after a massive blast caused by mining explosives stored in a building ripped through a crowded area in Petlwad town here.

The blast occurred at 8.30 AM, completely destroying at least two buildings—one in which explosive material for digging wells was stored and an adjacent restaurant, and damaging several houses, officials said. “89 people have been killed in the explosion,” Block Medical Officer Urmila Choyal told PTI.

The explosion took place in the building of Rajendra Kasawa who has a licence to use explosive material for digging wells in rocky areas.

Kasawa stored the explosive material including gelatin sticks in huge quantity in the residential building having two shops in it and situated close to the busy Sethia Restaurant in new bus stand area, a police official said. “In the vicinity of the restaurant, a large number of daily wage labourers were sitting when the explosion occurred.”

Besides many persons were there inside the restaurant which is a major eatery in the area, an eyewitness said. “One of the injured, Narsingh (42), said body parts were strewn in the area after the blast.

“We have seen them flying and falling on the ground.” Vehicles specially two-wheelers were badly damaged and lying on the road,” he said.

Due to the impact of the explosion, the double-story house in which explosive material were stored collapsed trapping a number of persons, he said. “State Home Minister Babulal Gaur said a high-level inquiry has been ordered into the incident. Expressing anguish over the loss of lives, Chief

Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for those injured. “We have performed autopsy so far on 60 bodies. Rest are lying in the premises for post-mortem,” Chief Medical Officer Arun Sharma said.

Among the victims were a large number of labourers who were waiting in area for their daily work. Besides some people going to Gujarat were also standing near the hotel for tea and snacks and majority of them were either killed or injured in the blast, a police official said.

“Initially we heard the sound of crackers from a house that also has two shops on the ground floor. Later, when someone opened its shutter, a huge explosion took place forcing people to run for cover,” Balram, an injured labourer, told PTI in Jhabua district hospital.

“Only those people survived who ran away from the spot but they too suffered injuries,” Narsingh said and claimed nearly 150 people were injured.

A large number of people were also trapped in the restaurant located in an adjacent three-storey building, he said.

Earlier, police had said that the explosion was caused by a cooking gas cylinder kept in the hotel restaurant. “Nearly 100 people were injured in the explosion, a police official said.

“I am in constant touch with officials. The incident is sad and has left me shaken. The reasons for the blast will be investigated,” the Chief Minister said. Senior officials from Jhabua including Superintendent of Police G G Pandey besides State Tribal Welfare Minister Antar Singh Arya had rushed to the spot.

A team of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was dispatched to help in the salvage operations. A team equipped with gadgets to operate in collapsed structures has been sent to the accident site in Jhabua from Vadodara in Gujarat.

The team will assist local administration in retrieval operations,” NDRF Director General O P Singh told PTI in Delhi.

- PTI