

Tehran fire: Many feared dead as high-rise collapses



Many firefighters are feared dead after a landmark high-rise building in Iran's capital, Tehran, caught fire and collapsed, state media report.

Two hundred had battled the blaze in the 17-storey Plasco building for several hours before it fell to the ground in a matter of seconds.

More than 200 people were also reportedly injured in the incident.

Completed in 1962, the building was once Tehran's tallest and contained a shopping centre and clothing workshops.

The fire reportedly began around 08:00 (04:30 GMT) on Thursday, at a time when many of the shopkeepers were not inside.

Initial photos showed flames and smoke pouring out of the top floors.

Ten fire stations responded to the blaze and state television reported that dozens of firefighters were inside the building when the north wall collapsed, swiftly bringing down the whole structure.

"It was like a horror movie," a local grocery shop owner, who was forced to evacuate the area by police, told the Reuters news agency. "The building collapsed in front of me."

Emergency Medical Services chief Pir-Hossein Kolivand told the official Irna news agency that many firefighters were feared dead but did not give an exact figure.

The state-run English Press TV channel cited an official as saying that between 50 to 100 people were believed to have been trapped under the rubble.

Earlier, fire department spokesman Jalal Maleki said the building had lacked fire extinguishers.

"We had repeatedly warned the building managers about the lack of safety of the building," he was quoted as saying by the AFP news agency.

"Even in the stairwells, a lot of clothing is stored and this is against safety standards. The managers didn't pay attention to the warnings," he added.

The Tasnim news agency reported that the building "had caught fire in the past".

Police have cordoned off Jomhoori avenue, which passes by the building, as well as the nearby British and Turkish embassies,

according to Irna.

Source: BBC