

## **Fire continues to rage in China as death toll mounts to 56**

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**Tianjin:** Over 1,000 firefighters aided by military experts trained in nuclear and biological warfare today battled to put out flares emitting toxic fumes in north China as two fresh explosions struck this major port city after two massive blasts killed at least 56 people.

Fires are still burning at the site of the two massive explosions some 36 hours after the blasts as another 6,200 people were evacuated to prevent further casualties.

Around 10,000 people were evacuated after the Wednesday blasts in a warehouse storing hazardous chemicals that sent fireballs, cars and containers shooting in the sky.

Smoke continued to billow out from the massive pile of hundreds of twisted and damaged containers as well as areas where large quantity of deadly toxic chemicals were piled up for exports before they were caught up in the explosions.

Officials said while they are using water to douse the fires in areas where hundreds of cars and large amount of tyres and plastic materials were stored, sand in large quantities is being used to put out the fires in places where chemicals were stored.

However, two minor explosions apparently caused by toxic materials today occurred in the area where containers were piled up and authorities might also use sand to douse the fire in that area.

The death toll today rose to 56, including 21 firemen, local officials said, adding that as many as 721 injured have been hospitalised, of whom 58 have sustained critical injuries.

The condition of 33 of them was serious, rescue headquarters said.

In a silver lining to an otherwise grim day, a 19-year-old firefighter, Zhou Ti, was pulled out over 32 hours after blasts ravaged the areas.

More than 1,020 firefighters and 140 fire engines are still battling the raging fire, Zhou Tian, head of Tianjin's fire department at a press conference today.

"When the blast occurred, several firefighters were working to put out the fire, and backup forces had just arrived. They were caught off guard, so the casualties are grave," he said.

He did not specify the number of missing firemen. However, Beijing News reported that 36 fire fighters are still missing.

"Forces from all sides are searching for the missing firefighters," he added.

So far, 33 people were rescued from the nearby areas, Zhou said, adding that firefighters have been directed to guard their own safety.

Besides trying to take control of the area, Chinese officials also battled speculation that foul air emanating from the contaminated area around the blast site is spreading into the Tianjin city, which has about 7.5 million pollution and also to Beijing as it is located just about 115 km close to the capital.

- PTI