



# MALL BLAST

> Four hurt in pre-dawn explosion at Empire Shopping Gallery, Subang Jaya

The force of the explosion strewn debris outside the shopping centre. Two parked cars were also damaged.

- ▶ **Two** security guards at the complex and a couple there for supper injured;
- ▶ **More** than 40 shops and several cars parked outside damaged;
- ▶ **About** 300 hotel guests from adjoining Empire Tower hotel evacuated;

- ▶ **Explosion** heard at 3.45am;
- ▶ **Police** say it is not an act of sabotage or linked to terrorists;
- ▶ **Leaking** gas pipeline suspected;
- ▶ **Incident** classified as accident, but possible negligence;

- ▶ **Fire** put out by firefighters at 4.10am;
- ▶ **Shopping** complex, which opened a year ago, closed until further notice.

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# Over 40 shops damaged

> Impact of blast blows out ground floor windows and wooden panels, showering pedestrians

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**PETALING JAYA:** An early morning explosion, believed to have been triggered by a leaking gas line, ripped through more than 40 shops at the Empire Shopping Gallery in SS16, Subang Jaya yesterday, injuring four people and causing extensive damage to the building.

The impact of the blast, which occurred at a restaurant on the lower ground floor at around 3.30am, also blew out ground floor shop windows and wooden panels, showering bystanders and passing pedestrians with debris. Several cars parked in the vicinity were also damaged.

Dozens of police personnel and firemen who arrived at the scene



FIRE & RESCUE DEPT PIX

## I thought I would die: Witness

**PETALING JAYA:** A couple out for a quiet, late night supper had a terrifying experience when they were blown off their feet in an explosion that rocked the Empire Shopping Gallery early yesterday morning.

"I thought I would die when the blast threw my girlfriend and me off our feet. I had to carry her to safety as she had injured her leg," said Chua Chin Hong, 27, who suffered bruises after being showered in debris in the 3.30am incident.

Chua, from Seri Hartamas, and 23-year-old Tan Wern Fang had gone to a restaurant at the mall at around midnight. After their meal, they sat talking near their cars in front of the mall before heading to an automated parking machine to pay the parking fee, when the blast took place. Their cars, a Volkswagen and a Honda City, were damaged.

"The explosion hurled us back. Then I saw fire at several

within minutes of receiving a distress call evacuated about 300 people from the adjoining Empire Tower Hotel and cordoned off the area.

Two Nepalese guards who were trapped on the lower ground floor were rescued by firemen. One suffered a broken leg.

A couple who had just finished supper at a restaurant in the mall were slightly injured in the blast, which witnesses say shook the ground.

All four were sent to the University Malaya Medical Centre for treatment and later released.

Selangor deputy police chief SAC (I) A. Thaiveegan said at a press conference at the scene that the explosion was not an act of sabotage or linked to terrorists.

"We are investigating, but up till now there is no evidence linking the blast to terrorism or sabotage. We consider it an accident, possibly due to negligence," he said.

"We know that there was a pipeline leak in the gas supply, but the Fire and Rescue Department forensics unit is trying to determine what ignited the blast."

Sources involved in the investigations said an industrial LPG gas tank which the leaking pipeline was linked to was found to be empty following the incident, indicating that gas in it may have fully drained due to the faulty pipeline.

Fire and Rescue Department assistant director and head of operations Mohd Sani Harul said firemen who arrived on the scene

ANWAR FAIZ / THE SUN



Clockwise from top: Firemen inspecting the damage inside the building; one of the several cars parked outside; and employees of a pet shop carry the animals out.

within five minutes of receiving a call at 3.45am found only small, scattered fires along the building which were quickly put out. He said 10 sniffer dogs from the department's canine unit were brought in to assist in investigations.

Public Works Department personnel and civil engineers were also seen inspecting the area. Police sealed the building off to the public and shopowners.

A shopowner, who declined to be named and who had opened her new hobbyist store at the mall four days ago, was in the dark about the state of her outlet after police barred her from entering the building.

Selangor Mentri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim, who visited

the scene at around 3pm, said the topmost priority should be the safety of the public.

"Empire should not be opened to the public until the Fire and Rescue Department and police have completed their investigations. The owners of the mall will then conduct checks on the structure of the building to ensure it is safe to resume operations," he said.

Khalid suggested the owners conduct a post mortem of the gas lines to ensure such an incident does not reoccur.

"For now, the mall is closed indefinitely until the fire department and police give the professionals (architects and engineers) clearance to conduct checks," he said.

Mammoth Empire Holding Sdn Bhd group executive director Datuk Danny Cheah said the 170 registered guests of the adjoining boutique hotel were voluntarily evacuated shortly after the blast. The company owns the shopping gallery and adjoining properties.

Cheah said the building structure is intact, and that the damage was localised at the one restaurant at which the blast occurred.

He declined to state whether the leak was the result of negligence or an accident. "We leave it to the fire department to determine," he said.

The road leading into the mall, Jalan SS16/1, was also closed for the day.

The management of Empire

spots in the building. The glass panels of a clothing store shattered and many things came flying out," Chua said. "I was worried that something worse would happen and quickly took Tan away from there. We estimate the damage we sustained at more than RM100,000."

The couple sustained injury to the body, hands and legs and were sent to the University Malaya Medical Centre for treatment.

Two Nepalese guards who were also injured were identified as Surendran Kris Krishnan and Chhring Dawak Sepa. Both also received outpatient treatment at the UMMC.

Shopping Gallery said in a statement that it would take "immediate and proactive measures to minimise any impact to the surrounding environment and property". The management will also assist in investigations into the blast, the statement said.

While earlier reports said the explosion had originated at a Starbucks outlet at the mall, Berjaya Starbucks Coffee Company said the reports were inaccurate. It also said no employees or customers of Starbucks Empire Gallery were injured in the incident and that the company was awaiting a full report from the management of the gallery and the Fire and Rescue Department.