

Fire ravages many Mahdia businesses

Posted By [Stabroek staff](#) On July 2, 2010 @ 5:17 am In [Local News](#) | [25 Comments](#)

A fire suspected to be electrical in origin last evening reduced more than 20 structures in the commercial area of Mahdia in Region 8 to rubble, leaving behind millions of dollars in losses and dozens homeless.



[1]The fire raging on the evening of July 1, 2010

Up to press time the inferno which started around 6:30 pm was said to be under control after it was contained by a corrugated zinc fence bordering an apartment complex. The Government Information Agency last night said that Prime Minister Sam Hinds will travel to the area today.

Speaking to Stabroek News as the fire raged, a shaken and emotional Region Eight Chairman Senor Bell said via telephone from Mahdia that the “whole arcade in flame”. He said that when he rushed to the area on hearing of the fire about 20 – 25 businesses were already gutted

“We can’t do nothing right now but stand up and look” Bell said adding that the arcade had been in existence for about twenty years. Mahdia had just been recovering from severe flooding.

According to a resident in the area, the fire started at a shopping mall owned by businessman Roger Hinds located in an area called ‘the Arcade’, on the northern side of the main road passing through the community. The fire then spread to other buildings which lie close by, many of which are business places with several dwellings aback the area. These were also reduced to ashes. Persons were able to save some items from the destroyed buildings, particularly electrical appliances.

Meanwhile, in the midst of his fire-fighting efforts, an exhausted Timothy Junior said that they were using trucks to ferry water from a creek located some distance away. Junior, a miner said that persons were also living at their business and when the fire started, there was a mad rush to save valuables. He said that he managed to save items from his business which houses an eatery, a snackette and a spare parts section and while speaking to this newspaper he expressed fear that it would be destroyed. When Stabroek New spoke with him later, around 9:15 pm, the man said that the fire was contained and his business was scorched but not destroyed. He stated that two trucks with water had just arrived from the creek.

The miner had recounted that thick black smoke was seen billowing from a building and since the community is a small one, it was noticed quickly.



[2] This photo taken in February shows a section of the 'Arcade', the commercial district of Mahdia. Some of the buildings on the right were destroyed by the fire last night.

extinguish the flames.

Another resident, while speaking to this newspaper last evening stated that several explosions could be heard as raging flames enveloped the area. All the while, persons including miners residing in mining camps on the outskirts of Mahdia converged on the scene. Road traffic by this time was reduced to trucks making back and forth trips to nearby creeks at the bottom of the hill-top community for water to

The resident noted that the community was caught completely off guard when yesterday's fire started, as the community usually 'comes to life' around twilight. Persons began to run out of their homes as news of the fire spread and regional officials were at the scene providing assistance. There were reports of looting as the fire raged but it was not on a large scale as the police officers at the scene maintained order.

No fire station

Mahdia's population has been growing over the years but it has no fire station or fire engine. Bell told this newspaper that at various meetings there were suggestions for one but the ideas were not taken seriously. He said that last evening's disaster highlights the importance of such a need in the community.

Residents reported that the community had experienced several fires over the years, the last of which reduced a dwelling in the area to ashes on Mashramani day this year. Persons in the community noted that there had been calls for the authorities to equip the community with a fire-fighting unit since the developing mining sector is home to many in the mining industry who store fuel at home to undertake the economic activity.

The mining community, which is bordered by several mountains, is home to the regional administration of Region 8, with a hospital, police station and several other governmental agencies based in the community.



[3] An early morning view of a section of the 'Arcade' in Mahdia. The photo was taken in February. The fire last evening reportedly started at the Hinds mini-mall (left).

The mining community is divided by two roads which pass through the centre of the community. They converge at a cenotaph which was erected at the centre of community several years ago and business places have been positioned on both sides

of the roadway ever since. Most of the businesses are run by coastlanders.

The mining community receives electricity from 6 pm for some 12 hours daily, the electrical power being sourced by a heavy duty generator operated by Hinds. The community is home to some 4000 residents, the figure also includes residents from the nearby Amerindian Village of Campbell Town.

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