

Toxic liquor kills 41 in India's Mumbai

June 19 2015

Forty-one people have died in Mumbai and 12 others are fighting for their lives after drinking toxic home-made liquor, police said Friday, in the latest incident of alcohol poisoning in India.

Dhananjay Kulkarni, Mumbai police deputy commissioner, said the victims had started to fall ill on Wednesday morning after consuming the illicit moonshine.

"Forty-one people have died and 24 are receiving treatment in hospital after they consumed spurious liquor," the commissioner told AFP, raising an earlier death toll from 33.

"More than 12 of those are in a critical condition so the death toll may rise. Crime branch is investigating and three suspects are being held in custody," Kulkarni added.

The three men, aged 30, 47, and 50, were arrested on Thursday night, he said.

The commissioner also said eight police officers have been suspended for a "negligent approach while discharging their duty" for failing to stop production and sale of the liquor on their beat.

Bootleg liquor is widely consumed across India where it is sometimes sold for less than a dollar for a 25cl bottle, with deaths frequently reported.

It is rare however for such incidents to occur in a major city like Mumbai, with most cases taking place in poor, rural villages.

Kulkarni said it was the worst case of its kind to be recorded in the western Indian city in more than a decade.

"Such a tragedy happened in 2004 when more than 100 deaths took place," he explained, referring to the "Vikhroli hooch tragedy", named by the local press after the suburb where the victims lived.

The victims of the latest incident were residents of a slum in the suburb of Malad West, in the north of the city.

Devendra Fadnavis, chief minister of Maharashtra state of which Mumbai is the capital, ordered an immediate inquiry.

In January, more than 31 people died near Lucknow in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh after drinking a lethal batch of home-brew.

Police arrested 12 people in October 2013 after more than three dozen villagers died from toxic liquor also in Uttar Pradesh.

In 2011 nearly 170 people died in the eastern state of West Bengal after drinking moonshine.

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