# China shopping centre fire kills 16

AFP- A fire that tore through a shopping centre in southwestern China has killed 16 people, state media reported Thursday.
Rescue operations concluded at around 3:00 am on Thursday (1900 GMT Wednesday), according to the local fire and rescue services cited by state news agency Xinhua.

Video broadcast by state media CCTV and shared on social media Wednesday night showed thick black smoke billowing out of the 14-storey tower in Zigong, Sichuan province.

The blaze started in the early evening in a shopping centre at the foot of the building, the channel said.

Around 30 people were rescued from the complex, with the fire extinguished by rescuers around 8:20 pm on Wednesday, CCTV said.

Later footage provided by a drone operator to AFP showed firetrucks and other first responders blocking off the road late at night, continuing to spray down the charred building.

As of 3:00 am Thursday, the death toll stood at 16 with no individuals left trapped inside, according to Xinhua.

Zigong's emergency services department received news about the fire at around 6:10 pm and immediately dispatched firefighters to extinguish the blaze, the broadcaster said.

Other images shared on social media – which AFP could not immediately verify – show people gathered in front of the burning building.

The emergency department has called on the public to "not to believe or amplify rumours" about the fire.

Zigong, around 1,900 kilometres (1,200 miles) from the capital Beijing, is home to nearly 2.5 million people.

– Lax safety –

Fires are common in China due to lax safety standards and poor enforcement.

In January, dozens died after a fire broke out at a store in the central city of Xinyu, with Xinhua reporting the blaze had been caused by the “illegal” use of fire by workers in the store’s basement.

The same month, a fire in a residential building killed at least 15 people.

That fire came just days after a late-evening blaze at a school in central China’s Henan province killed 13 children as they slept in a dormitory.

In June last year, an explosion at a barbecue restaurant in the northwest of the country left 31 dead and prompted official pledges of a nationwide campaign to promote workplace safety.

And in April 2023, a fire in a Beijing hospital claimed 29 lives and forced desperate patients to jump from windows to escape.

AFP