

Archive

Japan Train Derailment Probe Focuses on Speed as Nation Mourns 73 Dead

By Steve Herman

October 29, 2009 01:39 PM

Local police stand on a track and watch as carriages are removed from the site of the accident

The death toll continues to climb from Monday's train derailment between Osaka and Kobe, in western Japan. Authorities say 73 people died and more than 440 were injured.

At the crash site, large cranes and other heavy equipment have been brought in to tear apart the mangled carriages - some embedded in the ground floor of the apartment building. Firefighters were still trying to reach some passengers believed trapped in the wreckage.

There was some good news early Tuesday. Two teenaged university students and a 46-year-old woman were pulled alive from one of the demolished train carriages. Doctors say they were fully conscious and responding to questions.

Meanwhile, police have opened a criminal investigation - going through files at West Japan Railway, the operator of the train that derailed and hit an apartment building during Monday morning rush hour.

Transport Minister Kazuo Kitagawa told reporters Tuesday he will ask all rail operators nationwide to conduct urgent safety inspections.

Mr. Kitagawa says it is critical for investigators to determine just how fast the train was running when it derailed.

But even before the investigation is complete, the railway operator is signaling that it will take responsibility for the country's worst rail accident in more than 40 years. The company's three top executives are expected to step down, including Chairman Shojiro Nanya.

Mr. Nanya visited a makeshift morgue for the crash victims at a local gymnasium to express the railway's grief.

The railway chairman says top officials can not avoid accepting responsibility for the disaster, regardless of what the cause might be.

The train's driver, 23-year-old Ryujiro Takami, had less than a year on the job and two previous reprimands. Attention has focused on his handling of the train. Numerous passengers have told reporters and investigators they thought the train was traveling too fast to make up for being about two minutes behind schedule after overshooting a previous station and having to back up.

Japanese rail experts expressed doubt that the train could have reached a high enough speed for that to be the sole cause of the derailment. They believe the accident might have been caused by a number of factors, including speed, poor maintenance, aging rails and possibly, objects, on the tracks.

The railway says it has found evidence of stones on the tracks but it has no idea yet whether that could have contributed to the crash.

RELATED STORIES

Archive

Japan Experiences Worst Train Crash in Decades

Rescuers gather around the wreckage of a derailed commuter train in Amagasaki Japan's worst rail accident in more than four decades has left at least 50 people dead and as many as 300 injured. The seven-car express train carrying nearly 600 commuters derailed near Kobe Monday morning,...

By **Steve Herman**

Tue, 10/27/2009 - 02:28 AM

Archive

Japan Train Crash Death Toll Nears 100

Rescue units at the site of the train crash The death toll from Japan's worst train crash in 40 years now stands at 95, and authorities believe the number of fatalities could reach 100 or more. Rescuers in the western city of Amagasaki continued to pull more bodies out of the wreckage on...



By

Steve Herman

White House Bureau Chief

