

Beat: Miscellaneous

Train fire in southern India kills 26, injures 15

-, 29.12.2013, 01:29 Time

USPA News - An express train packed with sleeping passengers caught fire in southern India on early Saturday, killing 26 people and injuring more than a dozen, police and railway officials said. It is believed an electrical short circuit caused the deadly fire.

The incident happened at approximately 3:30 a.m. local time when the Bangalore City-Nanded Express was traveling just outside the small town of Puttaparthi in Anantapur district, located in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. The screams of a woman who first noticed the fire woke up other passengers, after which a railway employee pulled an emergency cord to stop the train. The first rescue workers arrived at the scene within 10 minutes, but locked doors and windows covered with bars left many people trapped inside as the fire spread through one of the carriages. South Western Railway confirmed 26 bodies had been recovered, many of which were charred beyond recognition. At least fifteen passengers were rescued and taken to area hospitals, where some of them remained in a critical condition, indicating the death toll could increase further. A railways ministry official said approximately 65 passengers were inside the carriage when the fire broke out. The investigation was still in its early stages on late Saturday, but police indicated that the fire was likely caused by an electrical short circuit near the air conditioning unit inside the carriage. Other railway officials disagreed with the initial assessment, but government officials pledged a thorough investigation to prevent similar incidents in the future. In a statement released by his office, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed his shock and grief over the loss of life in Saturday's fire. He conveyed his condolences and sympathies to the relatives of the victims and instructed Railway Minister Mallikarjuna Kharge to render all possible assistance to the victims and their families. The train fire comes only 18 months after a similar incident in the same region. At least 35 people were killed and 25 others were injured in July 2012 when a Chennai-bound express train caught fire near the city of Nellore, also in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Many of the victims were killed in their sleep as the fire was not discovered until it passed through a train station. India's railroad network is the fourth largest in the world and carries more than 14 million passengers and over a million tonnes of freight daily. But accidents are common, mainly as a result of poor maintenance and human error. In July 2011, a total of 70 people were killed and more than 300 others were injured when a passenger train bound for the Indian capital of New Delhi derailed in Uttar Pradesh state. Just hours later, another passenger train derailed in western Assam state, injuring around 50 people.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1700/train-fire-in-southern-india-kills-26-injures-15.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619