

Subway disaster in Moscow kills 22

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A major disaster occurred in Moscow, Russia on Tuesday morning when a subway train derailed between the stations Park Pobedy and Slavyansky Bulvar on the Arbatsko-Pokrovskaya line. As of midnight Tuesday, the total death count from the disaster had reached 22, while the number of those hospitalized was approximately 130, with 42 in intensive care. Those injured in the accident included citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, in addition to people from various regions of Russia. A Chinese citizen and a Tajik citizen were among those who died.

According to crash survivors interviewed by news network *Life News*, the train suddenly and unexpectedly came to a violent, crashing halt. The first three cars had derailed, causing the rest to jam up in the tunnel. The crash was so intense that passengers standing in the back of a car found themselves in the middle. Others were flung against the front wall, railings, and other objects. All of the deaths occurred in the first two cars.

Although the crash occurred during the morning rush hour, the train had an unusually low number of passengers, most of whom were sitting at the time of the crash. Those who were standing tended to suffer greater injuries. As one crash survivor noted, if there had been the usual larger number of passengers in the train, the number of victims could easily have been much higher.

Most of the surviving passengers were trapped inside the train for approximately half an hour before they were able to evacuate. Afterwards, those who could still walk had to do so for ten or more minutes to get to the next station before rising to the surface. Volunteers who had been in the subway helped carry the wounded up and out to the surface.

The Arbatsko-Pokrovskaya subway line, which ordinarily carries approximately 800,000 passengers

daily, was shut down for the rest of Tuesday. It is expected to remain closed until at least late Wednesday.

Tuesday's disaster is the worst accident to have ever occurred in Moscow's subway system—one of the largest in the world, with a daily passenger flow of approximately nine million. Previously, the worst incidents to occur in the subway had been terrorist incidents, most recently in 2010. After Tuesday's crash, Investigative Committee of Russia representative Vladimir Markin quickly ruled out the possibility of a terror attack.

Russian government authorities initially identified the cause of the accident to be the sudden activation of a fire alarm and the subsequent emergency braking of the train. However, later in the morning, subway power station representatives reported that a new switch that had been installed there within the past five days had malfunctioned and caused the train to derail.

While the particular leg of the railway where the accident occurred had only been completed in 2008, many commentators and opposition politicians have noted the general state of disrepair of Russia's infrastructure, raising the question of whether negligent maintenance and/or misappropriation of funds are to blame for the disaster.

Although the problem of infrastructural decay in Russia is well known, the extent of the problem has received relatively little attention. Institute of Social Design Director Igor Verigin, in an interview with *Kommersant FM*, emphasized that there is very little data available on the degree of wear of existing infrastructure, whether adequate funds are being allocated for the conduct of inspections and maintenance, and whether funds allocated are being properly spent. It is only when disaster strikes, as it did at the Sayano-Shushenskaya Hydroelectric Power Station in Siberia in 2009 in an accident that caused 75 deaths, that the scale of neglect becomes public

information.

The Investigative Committee of Russia has initiated a criminal investigation into violations of transportation safety requirements related to Tuesday's disaster. In addition to the two possible explanations for the disaster indicated above, the committee is also considering the possibility of a broken railway tie, the breaking-off of a car's wheelset, and subsidence of the ground under the rails.

In an effort to deflect blame from the government as a whole, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin has declared that there will be dismissals and criminal prosecutions of those persons deemed immediately responsible. He declared Wednesday to be an official day of mourning in the city, and promised to compensate victims and their families the miserly amount of up to one million rubles (about \$29,000). Claimants may also be eligible to receive two million rubles from the subway system's insurance provider.



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