

Collapsing crane kills 32 people on train in Thailand

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A large construction crane collapsed onto a passenger train in Thailand on Wednesday, killing at least 32 people and injuring 66 others, with at least seven in critical condition. Three people are listed as missing. The collapse of the crane demonstrates starkly the lack of safety measures throughout the country's construction industry.

The crane, a launching gantry hoisting a concrete segment for a new elevated China-Thailand high-speed rail line, collapsed around 9:00 a.m. in the Sikhio district of Nakhon Ratchasima province. The crane operator, who was injured but survived, stated that he heard the sound of uneven concrete joints sliding against one another shortly before the collapse and had ordered workers off the platform.

The crane struck the second carriage of the express train traveling from Bangkok to Ubon Ratchathani carrying 171 passengers and traveling at 120 km/h. The impact cut the carriage in half while derailing the other cars. Train conductors and people nearby the accident site initially rushed to help victims before rescue personnel arrived.

One eyewitness, Maliwan Nakthon, described the crash to BBC Thai: "There were small pieces like fragments of concrete that started falling. After those fell, the crane slowly slid down and hit. It struck hard, and then it came down and crushed the train. The whole incident took less than one minute."

The line under construction was being built through the joint collaboration of the Italian-Thai Development (ITD) company, one of the largest construction companies in Thailand, and the China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC). It is meant to connect Thailand and China via Laos as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

The exact cause of the accident is still under

investigation. According to Pichet Kunadhamraks, the director-general of the Department of Rail Transport, ITD violated a Ministry of Transport safety regulation that requires construction on high-speed rail lines to halt when a train is passing underneath.

Pichet stated, "The Department of Rail Transport will urgently investigate the true cause, whether it is due to equipment failure or human error, in order to determine penalties and establish preventive measures to ensure that such a tragedy does not happen again."

ITD expressed regret over Wednesday's accident and pledged to compensate the families of the dead and those injured. However, ITD has a long and notorious record of disregarding safety and causing workplace deaths. For big business, such payouts are the cost of doing business to keep costs low at the expense of safety.

This was driven home on Thursday when another crane operated by the same company collapsed on Rama II Road in Samut Sakhon striking two vehicles, killing two people, and injuring five more. The crane was being used for the construction of an expressway bridge. Rama II Road is the main route connecting Bangkok with the southern regions of Thailand and is known for frequent accidents related to construction.

ITD was also involved in the construction of the state audit building that collapsed in Bangkok as a result of the March 28 earthquake in Myanmar. The accident resulted in the deaths of 95 people, mostly workers. Authorities indicted 23 suspects as a result including Premchai Karnasuta, the president of ITD. A probe released in December found that the company had used substandard concrete and a building design that did not meet legal requirements, among other problems.

In March 2025, five people were killed at a highway construction site in Bangkok when another ITD crane

collapsed. In August 2024, a tunnel collapsed during railway construction being carried out by ITD that killed three workers, two from China and the third from Myanmar, which took place in the same province as Wednesday's accident. In 2017, an ITD crane collapsed during the construction of an elevated railway in Bangkok that killed three workers. The list of such tragedies could go on.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul of the ruling Bhumjaithai Party (BJT) and other government officials have ordered official probes into the exact causes of Wednesday's accident, including the creation of a 15-day fact-finding committee. Anutin called on Wednesday for somebody to "be punished and held accountable."

Anutin stated, "Accidents like this can only happen due to negligence, skipped steps, deviations from the design, or the use of incorrect materials." He pointed out that "this kind of incident happens very regularly." Anutin was attempting to deflect public anger and give the impression that the government will act to prevent such accidents in the future.

Yet Anutin has occupied leading positions within different governments for years. Beginning in 2019 under Prayut Chan-o-cha, he served as both one of the deputy prime ministers and the minister of public health. When Pheu Thai took control of the government in 2023, Anutin continued as a deputy prime minister while becoming the interior minister, a portfolio he holds to this day. He took office as prime minister last September with the backing of the phony "progressive" People's Party.

None of these governments or their coalition partners have taken steps to address workplace safety despite accidents that "happen very regularly." Only now as outrage grows over the disastrous safety record of the ITD construction company and in the lead-up to the February 8 general election has Anutin declared that he will take legal action against the company and improve regulatory laws.

However, even if any new laws are passed, they will do little more than paper over conditions that are not the result of one company or one government, but the capitalist system as a whole that places profits before people's lives.

It is the same system that has made Thailand one of the most economically unequal countries in the world.

The World Bank has reported that as of 2021, the richest ten percent in Thailand controls 74.2 percent of the wealth in the country. Under such conditions, big business openly flouts safety and the minimal regulatory laws as well as the needs of the public as a whole.

This therefore is another factor behind the government's claims that it will address safety, keenly aware that it is sitting on a social powder keg as the working class's economic conditions decline. The World Bank predicts that the Thai economy will have grown by only two percent last year and will slow to 1.6 percent in 2026. In 2025, prices for household essentials such as food, transportation, and utilities rose by 15.3 percent over the previous year, driving concerns over rising prices among workers.

Under Anutin and the BJT or whichever party takes power after February 8, this subordination of safety and lives will not change as all the parties in Thailand's political establishment uphold the capitalist system.



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