

July 3 2006

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July 03, 2006



Emergency workers ferry seriously injured passengers to hospital after today's subway derailment in Valencia

Spain subway train accident kills 34 people

BY SAM KNIGHT, PHILIPPE NAUGHTON AND AGENCIES

As many as 34 people were killed today when an underground train came off its rails in the Spanish city of Valencia, which is preparing to host a visit by Pope Benedict XVI this weekend.

The fire brigade said that two carriages of the subway train had come off the tracks as it left the Jesus station in the centre of the eastern coastal city shortly after 1pm. Fifteen people are believed to have been seriously injured while a further 150 were evacuated from the scene.

Trapped passengers rang emergency services from mobile phones and 150 people were evacuated from the station platform.

One middle-aged woman, her face blackened by what looked like soot, grimaced with pain as she staggered away from the station, her arm around a police officer.

A senior police officer at the scene said that 34 people had been killed.

Officials ruled out a terror attack in a country still traumatised by the train bombings by Islamist militants that killed 191 people in Madrid in 2004.

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"It seems this unfortunate accident was caused by excess speed and a wheel breaking just before it entered the station," government official Luis Felipe Martinez told Spanish radio, adding that the number of dead was still not confirmed.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said that any terrorist link had been "completely ruled out". He said: "Everything indicates that it was an accident, that the train derailed and was hurled against the walls of a tunnel."

The official spokesman for the Valencian Government, Vicente Rambla, told local journalists that more than 30 people were feared dead. Regional officials put the toll at 34.

Emergency services set up two field hospitals in tents on the street and a judge arrived to supervise the removal of bodies. Hospitals appealed for blood donors.

The train, on the oldest line of Valencia's 18-year-old metro system, came off the tracks on a bend leading out of Jesus station, according to *El Pais*. The first alarm was raised by a passenger calling on a mobile phone - the first of more than 20 emergency calls received from distraught passengers.

Cesar Hernandez, a 21-year-old student who was a passenger, said the train began travelling faster than usual and was shaking from side to side before the train braked suddenly and the carriages derailed.

Senor Hernandez kicked the glass out of a door and walked out into the tunnel.

"There wasn't much light and I couldn't see much of what was on the tracks. I saw people on the ground, but I just ran," he told the newspaper *El Mundo*, adding that he had declined emergency service offers of trauma counselling. "I didn't want psychological help or anything. I just wanted to see my Dad," he said.

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