

Cabinet task force to probe derailment

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An aerial photograph taken yesterday shows carriages of the Puyuma Express train that derailed on Sunday afternoon in Yilan County.

Photo: Daniel Shih, AFP

The Cabinet yesterday established a task force to investigate Sunday's deadly train accident in Yilan County.

The 15-member task force is led by Minister Without Portfolio Wu Tze-cheng (吳澤生), while Bureau of High Speed Rail Director-General Allen Hu (胡盛雄) serves as executive secretary and spokesman, Cabinet spokeswoman Kolas Yotaka said.

The task force yesterday visited the accident site and held its first meeting to establish the direction of the investigation, she said, adding that in keeping with a directive from Premier William Lai (賴清德), it would check all Puyuma Express trains to determine whether the service should be suspended.

The Taiwan Railways Administration's (TRA) Safety and Investigation Committee and the Ministry of Transportation and Communications' Railway Bureau are also investigating.

The TRA yesterday clarified that 190 passengers had been injured in the derailment of Puyuma Express No. 6432 on Sunday afternoon, but three later died in hospital.

TRA Chief Secretary Dennis Ju (居正) told a news conference at Taipei Railway Station that 18 passengers were killed and 190 were injured, and the TRA has offered NT\$100,000

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(US\$3,234) to the families of the deceased and NT\$5,000 to those who were injured as comfort funds.

Families of the deceased would also receive compensation of up to NT\$5.3 million per person, while passengers who sustained serious injuries would receive up to NT\$2.4 million in compensation, Ju said.

Passengers who suffered more minor injuries would be compensated up to NT\$600,000, he said.

Two-way operations were resumed along the east coast at 5:12am yesterday using one railway track, the agency said, adding that trains passing the section of track where the derailment occurred would have to reduce their speed to 40kph.

The agency is aiming to resume normal operations within three days, as instructed by President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), Ju said.

However, repairing the damage caused by the accident would take time, as electric cables and utility poles at Sinma Train Station (新馬車站) were damaged.

Local media yesterday said surveillance camera images showed the train appeared to be traveling at a high speed on Sunday, and some questioned whether the Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system — which should be activated when a train is moving too fast — was working.

Questions have also been raised about whether the train driver, surnamed You (游), had enough experience to handle an emergency situation, but Ju said You was an experienced driver with five years experience and was deputy head of the Cidu (池都) operation section.

No driver would be promoted to such a post without extensive experience and a good

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performance record, he said.

A train driver can decide if the ATP on the train should be turned off, but they must inform the TRA's dispatch and distribution office in advance so that all train stations could be notified, he said.

Prosecutors have the ATP and the TRA has been instructed not to tamper with evidence, Ju said.

TRA Rolling Stock Department Deputy Director Lai Suei-chin (賴錫欽) said that You had reported several times on Sunday that the air compressor for the air brake was not always producing enough air pressure.

However, reduced air pressure should cause a train to slow down or stop, not speed up, and it would also not lead a driver to deactivate the ATP, Lai said.

A Puyuma Express train can operate at speeds from 75kph to 85kph when passing through a curve, he said.

The TRA inspected the ATP on trains every day, and the one on No. 6432 was working properly before the train departed from Shulin (樹林) on Sunday, he said.

TRA Director-General Jason Lu (盧金堂) said the agency suspects that the derailment was caused by the ATP being shut down, but it has yet to verify that idea by examining the communication records between the driver and the dispatch and distribution office, and the ATP data.

Lu said he submitted his resignation to Minister of Transportation and Communications Wu Hong-mo (吳宏謀), but he said his current task is to finish handling the accident.

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