

42 Dead in Ukrainian Collision

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Policemen inspecting the wreckage of a bus after a train collision in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region Tuesday.

At least 42 people were killed when a freight locomotive plowed into a commuter bus whose driver ignored warning signals at a railroad crossing in eastern Ukraine on Tuesday, officials said.

Some news reports said the driver actually waited for the locomotive to approach and then drove onto the tracks, paying no attention to the frightened cries of passengers who realized what was about to happen.

The bus, carrying 49 passengers and the driver, was thrust 30 meters along the track after the crash, which occurred outside the small industrial town of Marhanets near Dnipropetrovsk at about 9 a.m.

The crumpled hulk of the bus was still trapped under the front of the locomotive several hours after the accident. Television footage showed bodies of victims laid out under blankets alongside the track.

Ukrainian railroad officials said the driver ignored red lights and a siren that indicated an oncoming locomotive, which was not pulling any wagons.

Local news reports, citing survivors, said the driver acted oddly in the moments before the collision, stopping the bus at the crossing, getting out and standing there. Then as the locomotive approached, he got back behind the wheel and drove across the tracks.

President Viktor Yanukovych, who was visiting the region at the time, traveled to the scene of the accident and promised a thorough investigation.

"If a driver goes through the red signal, he should go in for a psychiatric evaluation," he told reporters in Dnipropetrovsk, Interfax reported.

He declared Wednesday a day of national mourning.

Police said the driver, who died in the crash, had 36 years of driving experience, including 20 years on buses, Interfax reported.

The bus was traveling from Marhanets to another nearby town, Gorodishche, police added.

Of those who were killed, most died at the scene, but at least three in the hospital from their injuries, news reports said.

Emergency officials said two children were among the dead, while the police put the figure at three, Interfax reported.

Eight other people were hospitalized, some in serious condition.

The 35-year-old train engineer was not injured.

President Dmitry Medvedev sent his condolences to Yanukovych and offered to assist in any way possible.

(MT, Reuters)

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