

Pakistan army officers among 17 dead in rail mishap,sabotage feared

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Lahore: At least 17 people, including senior officers of Pakistan Army, were killed today when four bogies of a special train carrying troops fell into a canal in Punjab province after the bridge it was passing over collapsed, with top officials describing the incident as an act of "sabotage".

Four bogies of the train fell into the canal near Gujranwala after a section of the Head Chanawa bridge collapsed while the train was passing by the area.

The train was en route from Punno Akal to Kharian Cantt in Gujrat city, some 80 kilometers from Lahore. Pakistan Army Engineering Battalion Unit Commander Lt Col Amir Jadoon, his wife and two kids, Lt Col Rashid, Major Adil, Lieutenant Kashif, Constable Aslam and Lance Naik Zafar are among the dead.

Pakistan Railways Deputy Divisional Superintendent Bilawal Sarwar said that 17 people have been killed in the incident.

"13 bodies have been recovered while search is underway to find the bodies of remaining four," he said. Sarwar has also confirmed that it is a sabotage. "The incident appears to be an outcome of terrorist activity," he said.

He said a total of 183 people were travelling in the train. Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique said the bridge was "strong enough to sustain the weight of train as it apparently it seems some elements are involved in the incident".

"The Railways authorities had inspected the bridge an hour before the crossing of the Pakistan Express," he said, adding "it is a strange incident".

Rafique has not ruled out a terror angle to the accident. "Possibility of sabotage can not be ruled out in the tragedy," he said, adding the preliminary investigation into the incident would be completed in 72 hours.

He said the train driver was also killed in the accident. Lt Gen Asim Bajwa, Director General, Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), tweeted, "4 bogies of special train carrying military troops to Kharian fell over bridge near Jamke Chattha in Canal. Rescue underway. Initial investigation, railway bridge collapsed."

According to a statement issued by the army, 80 passengers have been rescued so far, of which five were injured.

Army rescue teams, Corps Commander and divers have reached the site of the accident, launching a massive rescue operation.

- PTI