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ANKARA: Firefighters and medics try to rescue victims after a high-speed train crashed into a locomotive in Ankara. — AFP

Ankara train crash leaves 9 dead

High-speed train crashes into a locomotive; 86 injured

ANKARA: Nine people were killed and nearly 90 injured after a high-speed train crashed into a locomotive in the Turkish capital yesterday, officials said, becoming the latest rail disaster to hit the country. The accident comes less than six months after 24 people were killed in a train crash in northwestern Turkey in a series of several fatal accidents in recent years. Transport Minister Cahit Turhan told reporters that three of those killed were operators of the train. One of the victims died in hospital, he added.

Among those killed was a German citizen, a source in the Ankara governor's office said, confirming reports in German media. The Ankara public prosecutor said 86 people were injured. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca earlier said 34 of those injured were still in hospital for treatment. Two were in a serious condition, Koca added on Twitter. The fast train had been on its way from Ankara's main station to the central province of Konya. According to *Hurriyet* daily, there were

206 passengers on board. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said three people had been detained. In a speech in Ankara, he vowed those responsible would be held to account. The three were employees of the Turkish state railways agency who were detained over suspected negligence, according to state news agency Anadolu. Ankara governor Vasip Sahin said the accident happened "after the 6.30 high-speed train to Konya hit a locomotive tasked with checking rails on the same route."

Debris scattered on tracks

Turhan said the accident took place six minutes after the train left Ankara as it entered the Marsandiz station. The governor said "technical investigations" were under way to find out exactly what caused the crash in Yenimahalle district. The capital's chief prosecutor launched an investigation into the crash, Anadolu said. Images published by Turkish media showed some wag-

ons had derailed and debris from the train scattered on the track, which was covered in snow.

The windows of one wagon were completely broken while another wagon had been smashed after hitting the footbridge, which also collapsed, an AFP correspondent at the scene said. The correspondent saw at least seven bodies taken away as rescue workers searched the blue and white wagons covered with debris. Turkish Red Crescent relief workers distributed blankets and tea to the survivors, who were gathered on a road near the scene that had been blocked to traffic.

A female witness whose name was not given told NTV broadcaster that the passenger train had not yet increased its speed when the crash happened. A relative of one of those aboard the train told the channel that some passengers had broken windows and then safely exited the wagons. One of those killed was Berahitdin Albayrak, a science lecturer and former vice-chancellor at Ankara University, the institution said on Twitter.

Later trains from Konya to Ankara and vice versa were cancelled.

Recent rail disasters

The Ankara to Konya high-speed route was launched in 2011 and was followed in 2014 with a high-speed link between Ankara and Istanbul. In July 24 people were killed and hundreds more injured after a train derailed in Tekirdag province, northwest Turkey, due to ground erosion following heavy rains. In March 2014, a commuter train smashed into a minibus on a railway track in the southern Turkish province of Mersin, which left 10 dead. In January 2008, nine people were killed when a train derailed in the Kutahya region south of Istanbul because of faulty tracks. Turkey's worst rail disaster in recent history was in July 2004 when 41 people were killed and 80 injured after a high-speed train derailed in the northwestern province of Sakarya. — AFP