

Conductor in Spain Charged with 79 Train Crash Deaths

Welcome to As It Is, the daily magazine show from VOA Learning English! I'm Mario Ritter.

This week, we get the latest information about the case of Chinese politician Bo Xilai. His fall from power was one of the biggest Chinese political stories in recent years. But first:

"My car came ripped apart from the car next to it..."

We learn about the deadly train accident in Spain's northwest.

Since the Middle Ages, Christian pilgrims have been coming to the beautiful city of Santiago de Compostela. The city is considered a holy place to Christians from all over Europe and around the world. Santiago de Compostela is said to be the final resting place of Saint James, an early follower of Jesus. Some on the train were planning to attend a festival honoring the saint. The event was to take place the next day.

Reports say the train was traveling too fast. It may have been going more than two times the 80-kilometer-per-hour speed limit when it reached a curve near the city and derailed. Cars struck other cars, sending wreckage and bodies through the air. At least 79 people died. About 140 people were injured.

Video from a security camera shows the train striking a concrete wall next to the track. Then its first car overturns violently. One survivor described the damage this way.

"My car came ripped apart from the car next to it, and there was nothing there, just a hole in the end of the train car. I walked through it. Someone was helping me. I have no recollection of who it was. If I did I would give them a big thank you."

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy was born in Santiago de Compostela. Soon after the accident, he returned to the area and visited with some of the injured.

He said, "For a native of Santiago, like me, believe me, this is the saddest saint's day of my entire life."

Prime Minister Rajoy declared three days of national mourning after the crash.

As people began to investigate what happened, the driver of the train came under suspicion. It quickly became known that the train was traveling at a high rate of speed. By Saturday, investigators were questioning the driver, 52-year-old Francisco Jose Garzon. Within days, he had been charged with 79 counts of reckless homicide because of the train's high speed at the time of the accident. Mr. Garzon was released on Sunday to face trial at a later date.

The High Court of Galicia says the judge ordered Mr. Garzon to report to the court every week. The suspect is barred from leaving Spain and not permitted to drive a train for six months.

Officials say they have recovered the train's black box, a device that records speed and other information. Investigators say that the black box shows the driver was on his cellphone at the time of the accident. Spanish officials have opened two investigations of the incident. Judicial officials are carrying out one while the public works department is performing another.

The train accident is one of the deadliest in Spanish history.

China Corruption: Bo Xilai Trial Update

For years, Bo Xilai was one of the 25 members of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo. He was widely expected to become one of China's top leaders. But he left office after his wife was accused of murdering a British businessman.

Last week, Chinese officials brought charges against Bo Xilai. Kelly Jean Kelly has more.

A court in China announced the case against Bo Xilai. Chinese media say he is facing charges of abuse of office, accepting bribes and taking huge amounts of state money.

Bo Xilai is the former Communist Party leader in the southern city of Chongqing. Reports say the charges were sent to Jinan, the capital of the eastern province of Shandong, where the trial will be held. However, it is not clear when he will be tried.

Corruption is a major issue in China. Punishments include execution for cases that are brought to trial. Kerry Brown heads the China Studies Center at the University of Sydney. He tells VOA it is "very unlikely" that government lawyers will ask for a death sentence against the 64-year-old Bo.

"That's a very, very bad precedent for anyone else in this position in the future. So I think a harsh sentence of life (in prison) or even a suspended death, if they really wanted to kind of throw everything at him, is more likely than...a death sentence."

Bo Xilai's fall from power took place last year before the leadership changes in China. He was not seen in public and then ousted from his position as party leader of Chongqing.

His wife, Gu Kailai, was given a suspended death sentence after she admitted to the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood.

The former police chief of Chongqing, Wang Lijun, was close to Bo Xilai. He was sentenced to 15-years in prison for covering up the murder and other crimes.

The case appeared to show division within the top levels of China's leadership. But Kerry Brown says the most recent news reports show that leaders have come to an agreement on the issue.

"They must have, to have gotten it this far. This would have been a consensus decision, it's not something that could have been rammed through by one or two people. And it seems to me that throughout this whole story, the leadership unity has been, basically, maintained."

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

On This Date

"Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men? The Shadow Knows!"

On July 31st, 1930, "The Shadow" was first broadcast in the United States. The show was on CBS radio. It told crime and suspense stories that kept Americans listening carefully to their radios.

At first, the Shadow was simply the program's announcer. But later, he became a character in the series, also known as Lamont Cranston. Who was the first Shadow? A young actor named Orson Wells.

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