

Mamatlakala highway accident

On 28 March 2024, a passenger bus accident in the northern province of Limpopo, South Africa, near Mamatlakala, killed 45 people and seriously injured an eight-year-old girl who was the only survivor.^{[1][2]} The South African Department of Transport said that the driver lost control and drove over a barrier on a bridge over a ravine. The bus, which caught fire, was bringing Easter pilgrims from Gaborone, Botswana, to Moria, South Africa.^{[3][1][2]}

Background

South Africa has one of the most developed road networks in Africa but has one of the worst safety records. During the four-day long Easter weekend in 2023, 207 fatal automobile accidents occurred in South Africa, resulting in 252 fatalities.^[4] Hours before the crash, President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa said in a statement urging South Africans to take caution on the roads during the Easter weekend: "Let's do our best to make this a safe Easter. Easter does not have to be a time where we sit back and wait to see statistics on tragedy or injuries on our roads."^[4]

The Zion Christian Church, the largest denomination in southern Africa, is headquartered in Moria and attracts millions of Christians from South Africa and surrounding countries with its annual Easter pilgrimages.^[5] The 2024 pilgrimage is the first in the town since the COVID-19 pandemic.^{[6][7]}

Accident

The bus had a Botswana license plate and had been carrying pilgrims from the St. Engenas Zion Christian Church in Molepolole, which is around an hour away from Gaborone, who were headed for an Easter church service in Moria.^[5] It had a total of 46 occupants and was traveling along the Kloof Pass, a mountainous path located in northern South Africa which contains tight bends.^[8]

The bus fell off the Mma Matlakala Bridge,^[9] which links two hillsides in Mamatlakala between Mokopane and Marken,^[1] and plunged into a ravine before bursting into flames when it fell onto a rocky surface about 50 metres (160 ft) under the bridge.^[10] The South African Transport Ministry said the driver lost control of the bus, which caused it to collide with barriers and go over the bridge.^{[11][1][12]} It was also pulling a trailer, according to rescue workers, adding additional weight.^[7] The fire involved gas canisters, which many passengers were carrying to use for cooking. Surviving passengers were trapped in the wreckage but could not be reached quickly by rescuers before they were burnt alive.^[13]

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Location of the collision

Date	28 March 2024
Time	<u>South African Standard Time (CET)</u>
Location	<u>Mamatlakala</u> , <u>Limpopo</u> , South Africa
Deaths	45
Non-fatal injuries	1

Rescue operations took place following the accident, and continued until the late hours of the evening.^[14]

Casualties

Forty-five people died in the accident. The sole survivor, an eight-year-old girl, was hospitalized with serious injuries. She was later reported to be in stable condition, with minor lacerations to her arms, legs, head and back. The driver and passengers were all citizens of Botswana.^[5]

Some of the bodies were burned beyond recognition, while others were hard to reach due to debris or scattered over the crash scene.^{[1][11][12]} One woman died after being airlifted from the scene.^[15] As of 29 March, 34 bodies had been recovered from the scene, only nine of them identifiable.^[5]

Responses

President Cyril Ramaphosa sent condolences to Botswanan President Mokgweetsi Masisi^[16] and pledged support to the nation.^[3] South African Transport Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga traveled to the scene of the crash, where she called for responsible driving during the Easter weekend and offered thoughts and prayers for the victims' families. She added that the South African government would assist in repatriating the corpses to Botswana and hold a full inquiry.^{[2][7]} Botswanan Foreign Minister Lemogang Kwape called the incident a catastrophe, and said that he received a call from his South African counterpart Naledi Pandor to update him about the situation.^[5]

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External links

- Bus plunges from bridge into ravine in South Africa – video (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2024/mar/28/bus-plunges-from-bridge-into-ravine-in-south-africa-video>) (video of the aftermath of the crash by *The Guardian*)
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