

# Japan rail death toll at 89 (Wed 27 Apr, 2005)

## WARM-UPS

**CHAT:** Talk in pairs or groups about: trains / train safety / Japanese trains / bullet trains / rail crashes / human error... For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**BULLET TRAIN:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with bullet trains. Share your words with your partner / group and talk about them.

**TRAINS AND MY LIFE:** Talk with your partner about how important trains are in your life. Do you worry about safety? Does your country have a good rail network / safety record? Is traveling by train the safest mode of transport?

**TWO-MINUTE TRAIN DEBATES:** Face each other in pairs and engage in the following 2-minute debates. Students A take the first argument, students B the second. Rotate pairs to ensure a lively pace and noise level is kept:

- a. Rail is the safest mode of transport. vs. Flying is safer.
- b. Rail operators put safety first. vs. Rail operators put profits first.
- c. Japan's bullet train is the world's greatest train. vs. No. The Oriental Express is.
- d. We shouldn't have to stand on trains. vs. The train ticket isn't for a seat.
- e. Rail travel is nicer than flying. vs. You can't beat flying.
- f. Rail operators should be nationalized. vs. Privatization is best.
- g. Sitting at the back is safest. vs. The middle is safest.
- h. Trains should have safety belts. vs. Too impractical.
- i. A 23-year-old should not drive a train. vs. It's OK if the training is good.
- j. Japan's rail system is the best in the world. vs. I disagree.

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## PRE-READING

**WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... of the words 'rail' and 'crash'.

**TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the headline and guess whether these sentences are true or false:

- a. The number of fatalities in Japan's horrific rail crash has risen. T / F
- b. The rail crash happened on the outskirts of Tokyo. T / F
- c. Two trains collided head-on. T / F
- d. One carriage concertinaed to a fraction of its original width. T / F
- e. Investigators are sifting through evidence to ascertain the disaster's causes. T / F
- f. Faulty signal seems to be the main cause of the crash. T / F
- g. The train driver had over twenty years of experience driving trains. T / F
- h. Japan Railways drivers are punished for being late. T / F

**SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |    |              |               |
|----|--------------|---------------|
| a. | fatalities   | smashed       |
| b. | wreckage     | determine     |
| c. | outskirts    | investigation |
| d. | slammed      | debris        |
| e. | concertinaed | humiliating   |
| f. | sifting      | deaths        |
| g. | ascertain    | punished      |
| h. | scrutiny     | combing       |
| i. | reprimanded  | environs      |
| j. | demeaning    | collapsed     |

**PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |    |                  |                                     |
|----|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. | The number of    | steel                               |
| b. | safety conscious | the wreckage                        |
| c. | pulled from      | error                               |
| d. | twisted          | the evidence                        |
| e. | concertinaed     | reprimanded                         |
| f. | sifting through  | scrutiny                            |
| g. | fatal            | to a fraction of its original width |
| h. | driver           | fatalities                          |
| i. | under            | derailment                          |
| j. | severely         | Japan                               |

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### READING:

**UNSCRAMBLE:** Put the words in the underlined parts of the article back into the correct order:

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**BNE:** The number of fatalities in the horrific rail crash that Japan conscious has shocked safety has risen to 89. More bodies were being pulled from the wreckage nearly 48 hours after the crash. Rescue workers at the scene in Amagasaki, on Osaka outskirts of the, fear the number of dead will rise as they cut further into the wreck of twisted steel. The first carriage slammed into an underground parking area of an apartment building. The second car wrapped itself around the corner of the building and concertinaed to width of a fraction its original. Japanese police said it is highly unlikely anyone else will be found alive and that twenty people are still reported as missing.

Investigators are now to evidence the ascertain through sifting the causes of Japan's worst rail disaster since 1963. It seems a number of factors contributed to the fatal derailment. be one main Driver the error to appears. It has already been confirmed that the driver lied to control center bosses three minutes before the crash, telling them he had overrun the previous station by eight meters, when in fact it was forty metres. He is believed to have been speeding to make up the lost 90 seconds. The management culture of the rail operator, Japan Railways, also is scrutiny under. It has been revealed by ex-workers that drivers are severely reprimanded and subjected to demeaning punishments for being late.

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## DISCUSSION

- a. What did you think of this article?
- b. What were you doing when you first heard about this rail crash?
- c. Has this rail accident made you think twice about traveling by train?
- d. Do you have confidence in the safety of your country's trains?
- e. Do you like rail travel?
- f. Do you ever think about safety or crashing when you get on a train?
- g. How great a priority to you think rail operators make safety?
- h. Have you ever experienced an accident on public transport?
- i. What is the most dangerous public transportation system you've experienced?
- j. What do you know or think of Japan's railways?
- k. Would you like to drive a train?
- l. Should there be a minimum age for train drivers?
- m. Should more computer systems be used to make rail travel safer?
- n. Would you feel comfortable with computer-controlled, driverless trains?
- o. Is it OK for a driver to speed to arrive on time?
- p. Should rail bosses put so much pressure on drivers to arrive on time?
- q. What is your favorite form of travel?
- r. Did you like this discussion?
- s. Teacher / Student additional questions.

## HOMEWORK

- 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information on your country's railways. Share your findings with your class next lesson.
- 3. MY IDEAS:** Write a list of ideas that could make train travel safer. Share your list with your classmates in your next class. They will evaluate your ideas.
- 4. LETTER:** Write a letter to the bosses of a public transportation company telling them of their duties to the rail traveling public.

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## **SPEAKING:**

**RAIL SAFETY ROLE PLAY:** Students A are executives of a rail company that has little money and a poor safety record. To keep your jobs you must improve safety. Students B belong to a commuter's association. You demand safer trains. Students C are top government rail safety politicians. You could win the next election if transport safety is improved but you own 25% of the rail company and profits are important.

Make notes in the following table with your fellow rail executives, commuters or politicians that might help you in the role play.

<b>Possible improvements</b>	<b>Your arguments for or against these improvements</b>
Seat belts	
Double amount of driver training	
All seats facing backwards	
Fully automated, computer controlled trains	
Prison sentences for speeding	
Video cameras at every 100 metres along the rail track	
Train speed and speed limits posted in every car for passengers to see	
Stronger trains	
Two drivers per train	
Brakes in each car for passengers to press if the train is going too fast	

Students A, B and C come together for a rail safety meeting. You must all agree on three changes that must be implemented to ensure greater safety.

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**TEXT:**

### **Japan rail death toll at 89**

**BNE:** The number of fatalities in the horrific rail crash that has shocked safety conscious Japan has risen to 89. More bodies were being pulled from the wreckage nearly 48 hours after the crash. Rescue workers at the scene in Amagasaki, on the outskirts of Osaka, fear the number of dead will rise as they cut further into the wreck of twisted steel. The first carriage slammed into an underground parking area of an apartment building. The second car wrapped itself around the corner of the building and concertinaed to a fraction of its original width. Japanese police said it is highly unlikely anyone else will be found alive and that twenty people are still reported as missing.

Investigators are now sifting through the evidence to ascertain the causes of Japan's worst rail disaster since 1963. It seems a number of factors contributed to the fatal derailment. Driver error appears to be the main one. It has already been confirmed that the driver lied to control center bosses three minutes before the crash, telling them he had overrun the previous station by eight meters, when in fact it was forty metres. He is believed to have been speeding to make up the lost 90 seconds. The management culture of the rail operator, Japan Railways, is also under scrutiny. It has been revealed by ex-workers that drivers are severely reprimanded and subjected to demeaning punishments for being late.