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12 hurt in Sabah train derailment

KOTA KINABALU, Tues. - Twelve people, including eight foreign tourists, were slightly injured when a train engine and a coach derailed on a bridge over a dried-up river near Hulu Gilat-Raya in Tenom, more than 100km from here, yesterday.

Three other coaches carrying 80 passengers were unaffected.

The injured were six Hong Kong nationals, two Japanese, three Malaysians from the peninsula and a local. Two of the injured, both Hong Kong nationals, were women and the rest were men. They were treated as outpatients at the Beaufort Hospital.

The tourists were on their way to Sungai Padas for a white water rafting expedition.

The incident was believed to have occurred about 11am.

A spokesman of the Sabah Railway Department, when contacted today, said the department was still investigating the cause of the derailment, the second in the State this year.

"We have not been able to interview the driver of the train because he is still in a state of shock. We hope to speak to him in the next few days," he said, adding that the driver was an experienced employee.

The railway service came into the public eye when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, during a recent official visit to Tenom, highlighted its potential as a prime tourist attraction for Sabah.

Recently, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik announced that RM28 million would be allocated to the Railway Department to upgrade the tracks and improve its service.

The Transport Ministry is expected to send a team of engineers from KTM Bhd to help the department.

The railway line in Sabah is the only commercial rail service in east Malaysia.

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