

Roundup: Gas blast in Mexico kills 2, rescue continues

MEXICO CITY, Jan. 29 (Xinhua) -- A gas delivery truck explosion early Thursday at a maternity and children's hospital in Mexico City killed two people, including a minor and a woman, and injured 66 others, officials said, correcting the former reported death toll of 7.

Authorities have not identified the exact cause of the blast, which occurred at 7:15 a.m. in the city's western Cuajimalpa district as the truck was supplying the hospital's kitchen, but believe it was due to a leak.

CAUSE OF EXPLOSION

At a press conference, Mexico City Mayor Miguel Angel Mancera said the three truck operators were injured in the blast, two of them seriously and had been consigned to the city's attorney general's office.

The men would be charged if evidence showed their negligence caused the accident, La Jornada daily cited the mayor as saying.

According to testimony from the truck operators, who have been hospitalized, they had tried to control the gas leaking from the truck's hose and notified firefighters of the problem. The blast occurred soon after firefighters arrived on the scene, as people began to leave the building to escape the smell of gas.

At least two firefighters and a policeman were among the injured.

The company that operates the truck, Gas Express Nieto, has a poor safety record, according to Mexican media reports.

Barely six months ago, in July 2014, another of the firm's trucks exploded in the central Mexican city of Queretaro, setting fire to surrounding cars, killing two and injuring two others, while damaging nearby homes.

Gas Express has been in business since 1939, has 35 distribution plants around Mexico and is among the country's four largest gas suppliers.

Mexican news website Animal Politico detailed the company's "history of tragedies," listing a total of seven accidents over the past seven years.

Mancera confirmed that the city's Health Secretariat signed a contract with Gas Express Nieto in 2007 to supply its network of hospitals, and had never had a problem with the service.

"We will have to review the contract to see whether to continue it," Mancera said, according to Animal Politico.

The gas company has made no public statements on the tragedy so far.

RESCUE CONTINUES

Several babies were found still alive under the debris, and the rescue continues hours after the explosion destroyed the hospital.

"There are 66 people injured," said Mancera, "30 percent of them could be discharged at any time today, another 30 percent require more medical attention and the remaining 30 percent have serious injuries."

More than two-thirds of the hospital was leveled by the blast and rescue workers were "combing through the rubble by hand" to find and retrieve victims trapped under the collapsed debris, said Mancera.

The mayor said, the truck "was 88 percent full," which caused a powerful blast that ripped through most of the building. Many of the victims were injured by flying glass.

Local television footage showed that the Mexican Army, the police and staff of the Red Cross were on-site searching for possible survivors.

Ambulances are standing by to treat the survivors and some of the critical injured were transported by helicopter. Police lines were set up around the area hit by the blast.

People began to donate blood in the afternoon after residents in that area came to help put out fire and rescue in the morning.

Mancera said he had spoken with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto, who "reiterated that he would provide the support needed to the (local) government."