

Passengers escape death, injuries in bus bomb blast

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Dozens of passengers escaped death or injuries when they hurriedly got out of a bus minutes before a bomb exploded aboard Saturday morning in South Cotabato.

Chief Insp. Joel Fuerte, town police chief, told MindaNews the bomb went off around 10 a.m. aboard one of the de luxe buses of Yellow Bus Line Inc. (YBL) that was parked at the Sto. Niño town's public terminal. It was bound for Koronadal City.

Fuerte said one of the passengers had noticed an object with an attached cellphone dropping from the seat when the bus made a stop at the terminal.

He said the passenger immediately alerted the bus driver, conductor and other passengers on the suspicious device, which was planted at the fourth seat from the driver's seat.

"The passengers and crew were able to disembark from the bus before it exploded," Fuerte told reporters.

The town police chief said they were still analyzing the components of the explosive but initially noted that it was crudely-made.

Fuerte said the bus slightly damaged from the explosion.

According to Fuerte his men were tracking down three persons believed to have planted the explosive.

He said the suspects boarded the bus in Isulan town in Sultan Kudarat province and alighted before it arrived Sto. Nino town proper.

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“The three suspects were identified by the conductor and some passengers as the ones who were seated at the spot where the explosive was planted,” Fuerte said.

He added that YBL bus company had been the subject of bomb attacks in previous past months believed to have perpetrated by an extortion group operating in the area.

Koronadal, a neighboring city of strife-torn Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces, is currently hosting the culmination of South Cotabato province’s 49th foundation anniversary.