

SATURDAY | JANUARY 27, 2018

12

MRT seat catches fire

By **ROBERTZON RAMIREZ**

Hundreds of commuters were forced to walk along the tracks of the Metro Rail Transit 3 yesterday after the southbound commuter train emitted thick smoke, forcing limited operations in Metro Manila's busiest rail line.

Michael Capati, operations director of MRT-3, said smoke emitted from underneath the seat of the southbound train where the regulator board is located.

He said the regulator board suffered an electrical failure caused by worn out spare parts.

Capati said their initial findings showed a "filter under voltage" triggered the smoke.

Passengers were offloaded near the Cubao station as firefighters sprayed water on the rail car emitting smoke.

Capati said train operations were shortened from Shaw Boulevard in Mandaluyong City to Taft

Avenue station in Pasay City while firemen were trying to suppress the smoke.

Normal operations resumed at around 2:46 p.m., over an hour after the incident.

Capati said they will conduct an investigation as to the cause of the smoke in coordination with the Bureau of Fire Protection.

Asked how dangerous the incident was, Capati gave assurance it was not life threatening, saying

commuters were just overreacting when they saw the smoke and forcibly opened the train doors.

"We assure the public that riding the MRT is safe. Nothing to worry about... we ask for understanding from the public for the inconvenience," he said.

A commuter, Mariz Reyes said she rode the MRT from North Avenue to Ayala station in Makati City when she heard a loud noise from the train before it slowed down just after it passed the GMA-

Kamuning station.

"There was this sort of explosion or something, perhaps a short circuit and then thick smoke came out. So all of us decided to do a walkathon along the train's railway," Reyes said.

Reyes said they were clueless as the train operator did not explain what was happening until some commuters pressed the emergency button, informing the operator of the situation.

Another passenger Kiel Basinal Ferdinez said all of the people inside the affected train started to panic and tried to force open the doors when they smelled something burning.

He said there was no fire, but the train smelled something burning. Ferdinez said his companion suffered minor bruises after she fell into the rail tracks as some commuters started to shove each other.

The MRT-3 blamed its former service provider Busan Universal

Rail Inc. (BURI) for the daily operational glitches after it allegedly failed to procure the spare parts needed for the train.

The MRT-3 terminated its contract with BURI November last year. It said commuters can expect better service and more trains as they are expecting the arrival of the first batch of spare parts in February.

BURI, on the other hand, called on the Department of Transportation (DOTr) to stop passing the blame on them.

BURI's legal counsel Maricris Pahati said the DOTr should hold itself accountable for the problems of the MRT-3's operations at present.

"Since BURI's termination late last year, we have prudently resolved to take all legal measures made available to us. Quietly we worked on addressing all issues limiting ourselves to what is legal and within the confines of good moral conduct," Pahati said.

- With Louella Desiderio

* TRANSPORTATION

* DOTr