

China denies safety lax on high-speed rail link

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A high-speed train prepares to leave the station in Beijing on Monday for a trial run to Shanghai. A top railway official tried to ease safety concerns over the high-speed rail link between Beijing and Shanghai, just three days ahead of the line's much-anticipated official launch.

A top Chinese railway official tried Monday to ease safety concerns over a major high-speed rail link between Beijing and Shanghai, just three days ahead of the much-anticipated formal launch.

He Huawu, chief engineer at China's railway ministry, dismissed accusations by a former official that the top speed of the nation's high-speed [trains](#) -- as set by the ministry -- was unsafe, the official Xinhua news agency said.

"The claims of the former MOR (railway ministry) official are

groundless," Xinhua quoted He as telling a news briefing. China's high-speed trains are "fast, comfortable and safe", he stressed.

His comments came after Zhou Yimin, a former deputy railway chief engineer, told state media last week that claims the trains could run as fast as 350 kilometres per hour (217 miles per hour) were "fraudulent" and ignored safety standards.

A major corruption scandal that erupted in February has also raised concerns over the costs and safety of China's [high-speed rail](#) links.

Then railways minister Liu Zhijun was dismissed after an investigation into "serious disciplinary violations" -- a term that usually results in [criminal charges](#).

He had allegedly taken more than 800 million yuan (123 million dollars) in kickbacks on contracts linked to China's high-speed rail network, which state press reports have said may have resulted in shoddy construction work.

In April, officials issued a nationwide directive saying all high-speed trains must run at a slower pace than previously announced -- no faster than 300 kph.

Officials have since said the trains on the \$33 billion Beijing to Shanghai link will run between 250 and 300 kph, and not the maximum speed of 380 kph.

The eagerly awaited line goes into service on Thursday, just one day before the ruling Chinese Communist Party marks its 90th anniversary.

The link, which has been operating on a trial basis since mid-May, will cut the journey between the two cities to four hours and 45 minutes --

two hours less than the fastest current trip by train.

A flight between Beijing and Shanghai takes about two hours. But travel to the airports is time-consuming, and the busy air route is often subject to delays and cancellations, making train travel a reasonable option.

China has invested heavily in its high-speed rail network, which reached 8,358 kilometres (5,180 miles) at the end of 2010 and is expected to exceed 13,000 kilometres by 2012 and 16,000 kilometres by 2020.

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