

Egypt admits political responsibility for train crash

Contributed by Egypt News
Tuesday, 27 October 2009

Muhammad Mansour

A parliamentary transportation committee meeting held in the presence of Minister of Transportation Muhammad Mansour witnessed a heated debate over Saturday's train crash in Cairo's Ayyat district.

At the meeting, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Moufid Shehab admitted that the government bore "political responsibility" for the disaster. "Criminal responsibility, however, lies with those who didn't follow the rules," he said.

MPs from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) defended Mansour, who came under fierce attack by independent MPs and representatives associated with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) opposition movement.

Presidential Chief of Staff Zakaria Azmy also criticized Mansour. "The minister spent millions of Egyptian pounds on advertisements portraying our national railway as the best there is," he said.

Directly addressing Mansour, Azmy went on to say: "You are responsible for the human error that caused the accident, because those were your employees that did it."

NDP deputy Ahmed Abu Aqrab drew the following analogy: "The transportation minister reminds me of the Zamalek football team. They play well, but always lose due to bad luck."

While Mansour explained that modernization of the national railway system would "take time," MB parliamentarians demanded that he tender his resignation.

In a related development, Egypt's attorney-general has detained the two train drivers involved in the crash for four days pending investigation. Both have been tentatively charged with negligence and manslaughter.

Doomed train's driver admits: "I'm ashamed"

"I'm ashamed," said the driver of one of two trains that collided on Saturday in Ayyat station south of Cairo, killing 18 passengers and injuring 36. "Please don't print my name."

"With my limited education, I find myself forced to handle sophisticated electronic devices that I have difficulty understanding," said the man, who has worked as a train driver for almost 15 years.

"I check everything two ours before departure," he said. "And in case a train has to stop for any reason, we set up beacons 800 meters away in order to warn other trains."

"But the signalman also has to turn the tower signal to red, which the signalman in Ayyat station failed to do," he added, "causing the incoming train to crash at a speed of 120 km per hour."

EGYPT NEWS