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Airline says Airbus checked plane 2 months ago Yemen plane crash blame-game begins



Comoran women in Paris cries after hearing of the Yemenia crash off Comoros

PARIS (Al Arabiya)

The blame-game over the Yemenia airline Airbus crash off the Comoros heated up Wednesday as the only passenger, a teenage girl, confirmed to have survived the crash recovered in the hospital.

Bahia Bakari survived Tuesday's ocean crash, feared to have killed 152 other people including her mother, by clinging to debris in the choppy water and is to be repatriated to France, according to French officials.

The French government said Wednesday one black box flight recorder from had been detected.

Meanwhile French and U.S. aircraft joined the hunt on Wednesday for possible survivors while in Paris expatriate Comorans tried to block another flight by the same airline.

France blames airline

The plane crashed into rough seas in darkness, after disappearing from control tower radar screens at 1:51 am Tuesday (2251 GMT Monday) in the second Airbus crash into the ocean in less than a month.

The A310 had aborted a landing and was making a second attempt when it crashed, officials said. French authorities have said the 19-year-old jet had been banned from France's airspace because of doubts about its safety.

French Transport Minister Dominique Bussereau said French inspectors had in 2007 found numerous faults on the plane and that the airline, founded in 1961, was being closely monitored by EU authorities.

Yemenia's response

But an official at the national Yemeni airline told Al Arabiya a complete maintenance procedure was conducted on the plane less than two months before the crash and under the supervision of its French manufacturer, Airbus.

"Investigation committees will resolve the issue and decide the causes of the crash," said Faisal Omran, manager of the Yemenia Airways office in Paris, on Wednesday.

Yemenia airline, 51 percent owned by Yemen and 49 percent by Saudi Arabia, has never had a crash before, despite the fact that it belongs to one of the poorest countries in the world.

Airbus said it was dispatching a team of investigators to the Comoros. It said the aircraft was built in 1990 and had been used by Yemenia since 1999.

According to an EU legal document, other inspections in Germany and Italy had shown up "deficiencies" with the airline, and in July last year the EU commission had insisted Yemenia provide an "action plan" to address safety concerns.

The flight left Paris on Monday for Marseille and Sanaa aboard a modern Airbus A330, where passengers switched to the older Airbus jet to continue to Djibouti and Moroni.

Comorans in the French city of Marseille, home to more Comorans than the tiny Indian Ocean state's capital, said the tragedy was waiting to happen.

"We had been sounding the alarm bells, both here and in the Comoros," said Moegni Toahiry, 39, as he stood outside his Comoran consulate hoping for news of his cousin and three children who were on the flight.

Some Comorans staged a protest at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport on Wednesday delaying a Yemenia flight for 40 minutes to highlight what they call the poor safety conditions on the planes.

A campaign group called "SOS voyage aux Comores" (SOS Travel to Comoros) called on French authorities to act to stop a repeat of the crash.

"Flights between Sanaa and Moroni are carried out by cowboy operators," spokesman Farid Soilihi told AFP.

(With AFP)