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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Driver Pleads Guilty to Causing Crash That Killed 18

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A police officer inspecting items left over from the collision. Monday has been declared a day of mourning.

A truck driver who crashed into a bus on the outskirts of Moscow, killing 18 people and injuring dozens of others, has pleaded guilty to causing the accident.

Speaking through a translator, Grachya Arutyunyan, an Armenian citizen, testified Thursday in a Moscow city court that he understood the charges against him and pleaded guilty to having been at fault for accident, which took place last July.

Arutyunyan, 46, who at the time was driving a Kamaz truck loaded with rubble, ran an intersection near the village of Oznobishino in Moscow and slammed into the side of a passenger bus, slicing the bus in two.

However, Arutyunyan, who racked up seven traffic violations in 2012, pleaded not guilty to the charge of having knowingly used fake documents to work in Russia.

The charge of vehicular manslaughter resulting in the deaths of two or more people carries a sentence of up to seven years in prison.

The prosecution argued that Arutyunyan had been aware that his truck's braking system was malfunctioning but failed to make repairs, had overloaded the truck with gravel, and violated several traffic rules when running the intersection.

Eighteen bus passengers died at the scene or in hospital later, and about 30 others were hospitalized with injuries, including 15 in critical condition.

Acting Moscow region governor Andrei Vorobyov called for a tightening of the punishment for traffic violations, reviving previous such calls by Moscow officials following previous accidents.

But the head of the Movement of Russian Motorists, Viktor Pokhmelkin, said that the intersection where the crash occurred was known for frequent collisions, and the president of the Moscow-based Board for Legal Defense, Viktor Travin, said that more should be done to prevent violations from occurring in the first place.

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