RUSSIA PLANE CRASH: FLIGHT RECORDERS 'SIGNIFICANTLY DAMAGED'

News / Airlines

Investigators working to extract data from flight recorders from a flydubai jet that crashed in Russia say they are "significantly damaged."

Flight FZ981 from the United Arab Emirates was making its second attempt to land in Rostov-on-Don early Saturday when it crashed about 250 meters (800 feet) from a runway, killing all 62 people on board.

The flydubai plane had aborted an initial scheduled landing and circled for more than two hours in poor weather conditions above Rostov-on-Don airport.

Russian state media reported strong winds and poor visibility at the time.

The search operation at the crash site ended Sunday, with investigators moving on to the cause of the accident and identification of bodies, officials said. The airport is expected to reopen on Monday morning, Russia's Emergencies Ministry said.

Specialists from Russia's Interstate Aviation Committee, the United Arab Emirates and France had started inspecting the damaged flight recorders, opening and extracting the memory modules from

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the devices in preparation for downloading the data, the IAC said in a statement.

The preparation for the data extraction was expected to be completed Sunday, it said.

Identifying bodies

Russia's Minister of Transport Maxim Sokolov announced the end of the airport search operation Sunday, governement news agency TASS reported.

The ministry will focus on helping Russia's investigative committee, interstate aviation committee, insurers and Boeing representatives, Deputy Emergencies Minister Leonid Belyaev said.

"We shall also continue studying the plane's fragments to clear out reasons of the crash, will continue working on identification of the bodies, on collecting the DNA, and working with the families of the victims," Tass quoted him as saying.

Day of mourning

Russia has declared Sunday a day of mourning in the Rostov administrative region, which borders the Sea of Azov and eastern Ukraine.

"State flags of Russia, flags of the region and municipalities will be flown at half-mast across the region. An event dedicated to the memory of the victims will be held outside the international terminal of the Rostov airport," a regional official said, according to Tass.

Tass said Russia's transport minister and the regional governor would be among those attending the event.

Crash victims

Flydubai said 44 of the passengers who died were Russians, along with eight Ukrainians, two

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Indians and one Uzbekistani. Four children were among the victims.

The airline said Sunday it would provide "hardship payments" of $20,000 per passenger to relatives of those killed in the crash, to help address immediate financial needs.

Flydubai CEO Ghaith Al Ghaith told a news conference in Dubai that the final compensation amount would be decided after the crash investigation had concluded.

In a statement on the airline's website, Ghaith said flydubai was focusing on caring for those affected by the accident and supporting those investigating its cause.

"We now have our own specially trained Care Teams both on the ground in Rostov-on-Don and in Dubai. We are making arrangements for the families who wish to visit the scene of the accident, to do so," he said.

Flydubai was still contacting relatives of victims and would not release the names of passengers until families had been informed, he said.

Russian state media earlier reported that family members of the victims would receive 1 million rubles (about $15,000) from Moscow.

Possible causes of crash

Authorities have ruled out terrorism as a cause of the crash.

Flydubai's Ghaith told reporters Saturday the plane had passed a comprehensive inspection on January 21.

The pilots were "quite experienced," he said. The Cypriot captain had flown 5,965 hours while the Spanish co-captain had 5,769.

Ghaith said he was not aware of a distress call made.

As far as the airline knew, he said, "the airport was open and we were good to operate."

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