

179 Dead After Plane Crashes, Explodes During Landing at South Korean Airport

The Jeju Air flight was carrying 175 passengers and six flight attendants. Two crew members survived.

377

295

Save



Firefighters and rescue teams work at the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan-gun, South Korea, on Dec. 29, 2024. Chung Sung-Jun/Getty Images



By Melanie Sun

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A passenger plane on Sunday caught fire after a failed landing at South Korea's Muan International Airport, killing 179 people.

Investigating authorities said the plane's landing gear malfunctioned and failed to deploy during a second landing attempt, forcing the pilots to conduct a belly landing near the end of the runway. The Boeing 737-800 jet failed to reduce speed, exceeded the runway, and crashed into a fence at the outer perimeter of the airport. It then exploded.

Thick black smoke filled the air at the crash site.

Investigators are considering a bird collision as the cause of the malfunction.

A total of 179 people—85 women, 84 men, and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable—died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two crew members to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

The Jeju Air flight 7C2216 was carrying 181 passengers, including six flight attendants, as it was returning from Bangkok, Thailand. The passengers included two Thai nationals and the rest are believed to be South Koreans, according to the transportation ministry.

The crash occurred just after 9 a.m. local time. The fire took 43 minutes to extinguish, the Herald reported.



Firefighters carry out extinguishing operations on an aircraft which drove off runway at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Jeolla Province, South Korea, on Dec. 29, 2024. Yonhap via Reuters

The Muan airport is located in Korea's South Jeolla Province. All domestic and international flights at the airport were canceled following the deadly crash, Yonhap reported.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognizable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said.

Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane went past the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said.

Senior Transport Ministry official Joo Jong-wan said workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box, which will be examined by government experts investigating the cause of the crash and fire. He said it may take months for investigators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muan airport will be closed until Jan. 1, the ministry said.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok, who was named interim leader of the country on Friday after the previous acting president was impeached amid an ongoing political crisis, ordered all-out rescue efforts, his office said.

His chief of staff convened an emergency meeting.

Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident."

In a televised news conference, Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president, bowed deeply with other senior company officials as he apologized to bereaved families and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident. Kim said the company hadn't identified any mechanical problems with the aircraft following regular checkups and that he would wait for the results of government investigations into the cause of the incident.

Boeing said in a statement on social media platform X it was in contact with Jeju Air and is ready to support the company in dealing with the crash.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew," Boeing said.

Hotlines have been established for family members who believe their loved ones were on board: +82-1599-8629 for callers from overseas, 1-833-892-0197 for callers in North America, and 080-898-1500 for callers in Korea.

Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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