

Ethiopian Airlines says analysis of flight recorders begins

March 15 2019, by Elias Meseret And Mulugeta Ayene



Ethiopian relatives of crash victims mourn and grieve at the scene where the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 Max 8 crashed shortly after takeoff on Sunday killing all 157 on board, near Bishoftu, south-east of Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia Thursday, March 14, 2019. About 200 family members of people who died on the crashed jet stormed out of a briefing with Ethiopian Airlines officials in Addis Ababa on Thursday, complaining that the airline has not given them adequate information. (AP Photo/Mulugeta Ayene)

Analysis of the flight recorders of the crashed Ethiopian Airlines plane has begun, the airline said Friday, and The New York Times reported that the pilot requested permission "in a panicky voice" to return to the airport shortly after takeoff as the plane dipped up and down sharply and appeared to gain startling speed.

The report cited "a person who reviewed air traffic communications" from Sunday's flight saying controllers noticed the plane was moving up and down by hundreds of feet.

An airline spokesman has said the pilot was given permission to return. But the plane crashed minutes later outside Addis Ababa, killing all 157 on board.

French authorities now have the plane's flight data and voice recorders for analysis. They have said it was unclear whether data could be retrieved. The data recorder appeared to show damage. Ethiopian Airlines said an Ethiopian delegation led by its chief accident investigator had arrived in Paris.

In Ethiopia, officials started taking DNA samples from victims' family members to assist in identifying remains. The dead came from 35 countries.

Countries including the United States have grounded the Boeing 737 Max 8 as the U.S.-based company faces the challenge of proving the jets are safe to fly amid suspicions that faulty software might have contributed to two crashes that killed 346 people in less than six months.

The decision to send the flight recorders to France was seen as a rebuke to the United States, which held out longer than most other countries in grounding the jets. The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board sent three investigators to help French authorities.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration said regulators had new data from the satellite-based tracking that showed the movements of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 were similar to those of Lion Air Flight 610. That flight crashed into the Java Sea off Indonesia in October, killing 189 people.

The data show both planes flew with erratic altitude changes that could indicate the pilots struggled to control the aircraft. Both crews tried to return to the airport.

Boeing said it supports the grounding of its planes as a precautionary step, while reiterating its "full confidence" in the safety of the 737 Max. Engineers are making changes to the system designed to prevent an aerodynamic stall if sensors detect that the jet's nose is pointed too high and its speed is too slow.

Boeing also announced it had paused delivery of the Max, although the company planned to continue building the jets.

The Max is the latest upgrade to the Boeing 737s. Because its engines are larger and heavier, they are placed higher and farther forward on the wings. That created concern that the plane might be slightly more prone to an aerodynamic stall if not flown properly, so Boeing developed software to prevent that.



This photo provided by the French air accident investigation authority BEA on Thursday, March 14, 2019, shows one of the black box flight recorder from the crashed Ethiopian Airlines jet, in le Bourget, north of Paris. The French air accident investigation agency has released a photo of the data recorder from the crashed Ethiopian Airlines jet. The agency, known by its French acronym BEA, received the flight's data recorder and voice recorder Thursday. (BEA via AP)

Investigators looking into the Indonesian crash are examining whether the software automatically pushed the plane's nose down repeatedly, and whether the Lion Air pilots knew how to solve that problem. Ethiopian Airlines says its pilots received special training on the software.

At the crash site in Hejere, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Addis Ababa, searchers continued to pick through the debris. Blue plastic sheeting covered the wreckage of the plane. Students from an elementary school walked an hour and a half to the site to pay respects.

Anxious family members began giving DNA samples and waited for news on the identification of remains. Members of Israel's ZAKA emergency response team were granted access to the site for forensic work.

Canada's ambassador to Ethiopia, Antione Chevrier, told The Associated Press that discussions on repatriating remains would begin once the identification process begins to yield results. "The next steps will take some time," he said. Canada lost 18 people.

"We are not told what they have found so far," Ethiopian citizen Faysal Hussein, whose cousin was killed, told the AP. "We are sitting here like forever. We were taken to the crash site on Wednesday but not allowed to get a closer look."

One relative collected soil in a plastic bag, perhaps for lack of anything else .

A Kenyan citizen, Pauline Gathu, lost a brother. Thirty-two Kenyans were killed.

"We were expecting that we will have our body well-kept but we are amazed to hear that there is nothing, totally nothing," she said. "And people are waiting for us to give them reports of what we have found but we don't have words, we don't know what to do."

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