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Dreamliner nightmare

The crash of Flight AI 171, on June 12, 59 seconds after it took off from Sardar Vallabhai Patel airport, Ahmedabad, marked one of the saddest days in India's and world aviation history. This is the first loss of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner in the world.

Two hundred and forty one passengers, including 12 crew were burnt to death, while some 14 deaths were reported at the BJ Medical College Meghnaninagar, Ahmedabad where the Boeing crashed.

The dreams of those like the doctor who quit his job and was flying to London with his family to start a new life were shattered. The Digital Flight Recorder or the Black Box of the Dreamliner was found on top of the building. A lot will be revealed about the cause of the tragic crash after its analysis.

The Boeing lost altitude after taking off at 3.30 pm. Fifty nine seconds after take-off, the pilot gave a Mayday call and shortly afterwards the aeroplane lost contact with the control tower. Preliminary presumption states that there may have been no signal or warning not to take off. There seemed to be no major error before take-off.

However, the most glaring pointer to the crash could be surrounding the landing gear which was not taken off. The Boeing lost lift, there was a sudden drop and the both the engines went dead, leading to the devastating crash, turning the dreams of those on board, into a nightmare.

International expert Captain Steeve in his analysis "Lift vs. Power – What Really Happened to AI171?" suggests that there are three scenarios that could have led to the crash. As seen in the video, the aeroplane begins to fly flat, definitely lost lift and then the nose went up and the tail dropped. The landing gear was still down when it should have been taken off after the aeroplane reached 50 feet.

The first scenario for the crash which could be presumed is engine failure. But there were no flames coming out of the engines. The possibility of bird hit too is ruled out by experts since there were no sparks, no smoke or flames from the engine and this would have to be a large flock of birds which is not visible in the video footage available. So this possibility is ruled out.

The aircraft began to descend and the pilot attempted to pull its nose up, but it could not recover since the aeroplane could not have been over 500 to 600 feet. The fact that there was no lift over the wings and the nose came over suggests there was no proper flap setting. Captain Steeve believes that it is a billion in one possibility that both the engines of the Dreamliner could have failed at the same time. The aircraft which was dubbed as uncrashable, was fully equipped to fly with a single engine

The second scenario for the crash could be that the aeroplane flaps were not out before takeoff. Again this is not plausible since there are two electronic checks done by the plane automatically. So if the flaps were not out, it would have to be done consciously and manually by either of the pilots. If this was done before takeoff there would be big red lights flashing in the cockpit, the horn would go off and there would be configuration warning, international expert Captain Steeve says. Again it is not possible this happened.

The third scenario which can be seen from the video is that the Boeing 787 Dreamline lifts up from the runway, there are no sparks, but one can't tell if the flaps are out. The nose is tilted at 2.5 degrees and the aeroplane is climbing. But the landing gear which should have gone in, is still out. The aeroplane further has its nose up at 12 degrees. But if it was really taking off with full thrust the wings should have been more up, which was not the case. The Dreamliner was not getting the lift, but nothing seemed to be wrong with the engines, the experts observe. Then the nose begins to come over. It is possible that the pilot could have asked the co-pilot to put the gear up, but instead of that the co-pilot could have pulled the flap instead of the gear. This is the only explanation why the plane stopped flying, Captain Steeve suggests. This could explain why there was no lift over the wings and the aeroplane which was heavy with full capacity to fly to Gatwick, had no power and more drag from the landing gear which was still out, Captain Steeve analyses.

The aircraft began to descend and the pilot attempted to pull its nose up, but it could not recover since the aeroplane could not have been over 500 to 600 feet. The fact that there was no lift over the wings and the nose came over suggests there was no proper flap setting. Captain Steeve believes that it is a billion in one possibility that both the engines of the Dreamliner could have failed at the same time. The aircraft which was dubbed as uncrashable, was fully equipped to fly with a single engine. Experts say there can be loss of lift without loss of power, but loss of power does not necessarily mean loss of lift.

Hence, the crash could be presumed to be due to human error or a tragic mistake Captain Steeve says. The Black Box could perhaps reveal the truth, but even if the third scenario painted by experts appears to be not exactly correct and it was a mechanical failure, we cannot bring back those people, whose lives were snuffed out in seconds.

comment

RADHARAO F GRACIAS

Aggressive, logical, and balanced

Life in my college days was slow and sedate, nevertheless young people were active participants in public life responding to every little ill through public demonstrations, keeping the administration on its toes. The headquarters of activism in Margao was the office of Noordin Mavany (Kaka) along the Isidore Baptista Road, who was perhaps the last Sarvodaya movement activist in Goa. Young people and students converged here before setting out to challenge the authorities. The Progressive Students Union (PSU) which spearheaded many a protest, from 50% concession on bus tickets to the notorious Marks Scandal, was headquartered here.

Mavany, Gurunath Kelekar the freedom fighter, Dr Jaivant Sardesai, retired administrator of Chowgule College, and others provided advice and guidance. By 1990, student power and idealism had dissipated and Goa soon joined the national mainstream. Dr Jaivant has since died, but his son Vijai is alive and invigorated to carry forward whatever remains of the embers of revolution lit by his father and others of his generation. My first real contact with Vijai goes back to 1992 when I contested the Assembly elections for the first time and won. He was active to the hilt in my campaign. He was at the time a 'chela' of Dr Wilfred de Sousa under whose tutelage he cut his political teeth. Along the way, he got involved in student politics and hoodwinked both the ABVP and NSUI to unexpectedly grab the chairmanship of the Goa University Students Union much against the run of play, before taking over as President of Goa Youth Congress. Vijai had arrived. He soon was the focus of politics in the commercial capital of the state and not much moved without his involvement. Vijai, the only son among three siblings took to politics as a duck takes to water after graduating with a B Sc in Agriculture from Dr. Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth.

Crafty questioning and the ability to ferret out information from reluctant ministers is his forte

Vijai's belligerent demeanour is manifest in everything he does. He displays the aggressiveness of the Kshatriya and the logical mind of the Saraswat – both of which are the hallmark of the Sardesai clan tracing its ancestry to Naroa Divar, later settled in Savoi Verem. No wonder the Sardesais unlike most other Saraswats, perform a pooja to weapons, a privilege enjoyed by only a few. Sanjeev Sardesai, hands-on historian and a part of the extended clan, explains: "Suryarao Sardesai family belongs to the warrior-Brahmin community and are known to bring home a red-coloured idol of Lord Ganesh, which symbolises their warrior ancestry."

Having quit the Congress, Vijai debuted as an independent MLA from Fatorda constituency during the 2012 Goa Legislative Assembly election, defeated sitting BJP MLA Damu Naik and trounced MK Shaikh, the official Congress candidate. His natural combative ability coupled with knowledge and innate skill has made him a frontline and much feared legislator, ever since. Crafty questioning and the ability to ferret out information from reluctant ministers is his forte.

During his first tenure, he ensured the victory of his panel in the 2015 Margao Municipal Council elections. A year later, he was instrumental in setting up the Goa Forward Party which he could not join until later, due the provisions of the Tenth Schedule. The Assembly elections in 2017 saw the Goa Forward Party sweep three of the four seats it had contested and emerge as a critical requirement for government formation, with neither Congress with 17 seats nor BJP with 13 seats getting the requisite majority on their own, as GFP held the balance. Two days before the election results, Luizinho Faleiro with great bravado made the headline-hitting announcement that the Congress would not align with the GFP with which Luizinho had declined a pre-election alliance, indicating its preference for MGP and the Goa Suraksha Manch, in case it fell short. This faux pas cost the Congress heavily. To add to it, the BJP announced that Manohar Parrikar, the then Defence Minister, would return to Goa to lead a BJP government. The Congress despite its numerical superiority could not select a leader, with former Chief Ministers Digambar Kamat and Luizinho Faleiro vying for it.

The GFP thus had to act quickly, which it did and together with the MGP decided to support a coalition with the BJP under the leadership of Manohar Parrikar. Vijai was able to secure Cabinet positions for Vinod Paliencar and Jayesh Salgaonkar, the other GFP MLAs. Vijai explained that his alliance with the BJP was inevitable since GPCCI President Luizinho had betrayed him earlier and publicly refused an alliance. Besides, the Congress was unable to finalise its leader to stake a claim to form the government. Instead the party was on the verge of a split, which, though delayed, happened two years later, with a majority of its legislator's splitting and merging with the BJP. Vijai's decision, in hindsight, looks prophetic. Digambar and Luizinho have both abandoned the Congress!

The BJP-GFP alliance died with late CM Manohar Parrikar. Vijai had learnt a hard lesson. The BJP minus Parrikar cannot be trusted. When Vijai was approached for support after the last election – when too BJP was short of majority – he did not deliberate at all. He flatly refused. Tragically, a group of Congress MLAs once again defected to strengthen the BJP.

Vijai has been an active promoter of Sports and is the President of the Progressive Goa Wrestling Association and the Goa Dodgeball Association. No wonder, he is considered the most artful dodger in the state!

Vijai has demonstrated a preternatural ability to diffuse a potentially explosive situation through tact and diplomacy to reconstruct an old chapel obstructing the widening of NH17 at Maddel Margao, some distance away. Today the new edifice has become the cynosure of all eyes and place of devotion for Catholics. Contrast this with the heavy handed demolition of the Khapreshwar temple at Porvorim which caused so much hurt. A similar situation, a different approach, that's Vijai. He exudes class and quality in everything he does, like the world class fish market in Margao.

Vijai has travelled long, literally and figuratively. He was born this day in distant Argentina (home to Maradona and Messie!) fifty-five years ago to Dr Jaivant who was serving the UNO as an entomologist and his wife Laxmibai. Today, our land is facing a huge crisis with decline in every aspect. It is time to sink personal and political differences and work together to revive Goa from the administrative nadir it has fallen to. Vijai has displayed ample capacity to bring together disparate elements to work for the betterment of the State, which can be achieved only through united efforts. It is essential for the Congress to come down from the high horse it has been riding, without the actual ability to hold the reins. We need a collective leadership to take Goa forward. And I believe, Vijai must take up the challenge to unite all those who love this land and work for its betterment.

people'sedit

SKIES CRASHED, DREAMS SHATTERED

CS KRISHNAMURTHY

In the wake of the Ahmedabad Dreamliner crash, a nation mourns lives lost, moments frozen, and questions unanswered.

It was just another afternoon. I had settled with my regular cup of coffee, idly scrolling through the news, when the screen lit up with a dreadful alert:

"Air India Dreamliner crashes in Ahmedabad. Over 240 feared dead."

For a moment, I stared blankly. Surely it was a mistake -an erroneous report, a digital misfire. But as each passing minute brought more confirmations, the truth sank in like a cold stone in still water.

Flight AI-171 had barely taken off from Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Airport. Bound for London, it was carrying 242 passengers -families heading for holidays, students chasing ambitions, professionals on tight schedules, and grandparents eager for reunions. Among them was former Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani.

Just five minutes into the flight, the aircraft plunged into Meghani Nagar, a residential locality bordering the airport. In an instant, a vibrant neighbourhood was turned into an apocalyptic scene. Buildings torn open, vehicles crushed, glass and metal strewn like confetti from some cruel celebration. The aircraft had crashed into the BJ Medical College hostel. Tragically, at least five MBBS students and a resident doctor -none of whom were passengers -lost their lives. Victims of sheer, blind misfortune!

Every seat on that flight carried more than a person -it held a story. Each life now a story cut short. A father texting a last-minute goodbye. A child holding onto a favourite toy. A grandmother smiling softly, thinking of the welcome she'd receive at Heathrow. These stories ended not in mid-air, even before that.

As I watched the news unfold, imagination painted its own haunting scenes:

A young man reciting a silent prayer. A stewardess adjusting her scarf for the hundredth time. Passengers sharing a brief laugh over cabin announcements. Ordinary moments, now etched in permanence.

For those of us watching from afar, grief crept in slowly. First came disbelief. Then the desperate search for survivor lists. And finally, the heavy, helpless ache that doesn't go away. What of the families? Some must have still been waving from the terminal. Somewhere, a mother might still be staring at her screen, rereading the last message: "Flight just took off. I'll call once I land."

Sudden loss like this rips through the mind. Psychologists often compare it to solving a puzzle with half the pieces missing. There's no preparation, no closure -just a swirl of questions, fears, and unbearable silence.

Yet even amid the ruin, humanity rose. Residents of Meghani Nagar ran towards the smoke. Strangers helped lift rubble with bare hands. Firefighters battled flames. Doctors worked in full swing. BJ Medical College staff, grieving their own, treated the injured with compassion and care.

From around the world, condolences poured in. Governments issued statements. Leaders expressed sorrow. For a brief time, borders dissolved and politics paused, and for a while, humanity took the front seat.

And then came a glimmer of hope. Seat 11A: Vishwas Kumar Ramesh.

A 40-year-old British citizen of Indian origin, pulled out alive from the wreckage. Barely conscious, but alive. His name lit up every headline -and every heart. A miracle among devastation!

Now begins the search for answers. Why did this happen? Was it mechanical failure? A bird strike? A software malfunction? Pilot error? The black box may hold the facts. But will those facts ease the pain? The pilot's final "Mayday" was heard too late to save lives -but just in time to demand truth.

This was not just an aviation tragedy. It was a brutal reminder of how fragile life is. Like a diya swaying in a gust of wind, everything can change in an instant.

Perhaps the only lesson to carry forward is this: Hug more. Speak kindly. Don't postpone love or apologies. Life rarely gives notice.

There isn't much one can say in the face of such grief. Only silence. Only prayers. And the quiet promise that those 242+ souls -and the lives they touched -will not be forgotten.

May they find gentler skies.

letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

A horrifying air disaster

The air crash involving that Ahmedabad-London Gatwick bound Air India flight has been horrific. The authorities will investigate what caused that horrendous crash that snuffed away so many precious lives within a minute of the aircraft taking off. In addition, to add to the tragedy were the lives lost and those injured who were in the medical hostel and neighbourhood into which the ill-fated aircraft crashed.

One wonders how construction of these buildings was allowed so close to the airport while the law requires that a buffer zone be maintained around airports. Similarly, in Goa around the Dabolim Airport so many high-rise residential buildings have been allowed in clear violation of law.

On the late evening of April 2nd, I was to take a London Gatwick Air India flight to Goa's Mopa Airport. As we were all getting ready to board the flight, we were told that the flight was being cancelled, as there was a problem with the emergency lights. The 250 odd passengers comprising mostly of Goans were outraged, furious and fuming. Late that night, we were herded into a London hotel and our flight to Goa was rescheduled for the next evening. In hindsight, it was worth the delay and inconvenience, but to gladly reach Goa safely and return to London after a week on the now controversial Air India Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

May lessons be learnt from this disastrous air crash so that all precautions and safety measures are taken to ensure safety of passengers and the crew. We are in an age where we spend a lot of hours in airspace and life as we know must go on.

Aires Rodrigues, London

Deadliest air crashed

The Ahmedabad plane crash marks one of the deadliest aviation disasters in recent times, casting a dark shadow over the country's air travel sector. As rescue teams continue their tireless efforts and families await answers, the entire nation grieves the profound loss of precious lives. The incident has triggered a wave of sorrow across social media and news platforms.

People from across the country, including celebrities, politicians, and common citizens, are expressing their condolences. Temples, mosques, and churches across India are holding special prayers for those who lost their lives in the accident. As more details are expected to emerge as investigations progress, the focus remains on supporting victims' families and ensuring a thorough probe into the causes of this catastrophic incident.

Meanwhile, it seems some bad omen has discomfited India, as the nation has been witnessing a series of catastrophic incidents over the last two months, starting with Pahalgam attack in April and followed by the Bengaluru tragedy and the Mumbai suburban train accident just days ago. Even as the country could slowly limp back to normalcy from these doleful incidents, the Ahmedabad air crash has come as a big whammy and severely impacted its reclamation.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Repair culture centres during Tiatr off-season

Members of the tiatr fraternity have reportedly called for expediting the repair work of the Margao Ravindra Bhavan and make Pai tiatrist Hall available to stage tiatr at the earliest. Tiatr producers and directors spend huge amounts of money to bring out a tiatr and hope to recover from shows staged during the monsoon. However the Pai Tiatrist Hall remains out of bounds for the tiatr fraternity due to repair works. It does not seem proper to carry out the repair works during the monsoon as the rains can delay the repair work. An entire tiatr season has been lost as there are also plans to shut down the auditorium ahead of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI).

Tiatr happens to be a popular form of entertainment for Goans. Because of the closure of the auditoriums, besides the producers and directors, citizens are deprived of entertainment during the monsoon season. The main auditorium and the Black Box have been closed as precautionary measures as they could be unsafe for the general public. The false ceiling at the Ravindra Bhavan collapse led to the early closure. It would be in the fitness of things for all repair works at the cultural centers like the Ravindra Bhavans and Kala Academy to be carried out during the tiatr off-season when tiatrs are not staged.

The authorities could carry out all the repairs during this 40-day period as the tiatr season commences from Easter Sunday. It would be desirable to maintain this schedule in future so that Goans tiatr lovers are not deprived of this popular form of entertainment.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

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