

Questions abound over Penghu crash

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Wreckage of the TransAsia Airways plane crash is strewn over Sisi Village in Penghu yesterday.

Photo: Lo Pei-der, Taipei Times

The crash of TransAsia Airways (台航) Flight GE222 outside Magong Airport on Penghu Wednesday evening killed 48 people aboard the plane and injured 10, officials said yesterday.

Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) Director-General Jean Shen (申) said that rescuers had located 48 bodies at the crash site in Sisi Village (西勢), but many of the bodies were not intact.

As of press time last night, CAA Deputy Director-General Lee Wan-lee (李萬里) said the rescuers have yet to confirm the identities of 17 bodies, including that of the pilot, Lee Yi-liang (李義祥).

Amid questions as to why the flight was allowed to depart from Greater Kaohsiung amid inclement weather conditions, and if such a flight had violated regulations, Lee said the weather information at 7pm on Wednesday showed that the wind was blowing southwest, while the flight path was on a north-south route.

Visibility was 1.6km, with the wind blowing at a speed of 20kph and cloud ceiling of 330 feet (100.5m), Lee said.

Data also showed that winds gust were blowing at 38kph and there was a thundershower of medium intensity in the air as well, he said.

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Based on the flight standard set for civilian aircraft, ATR72 aircraft are able to take off and land in such weather, he said.

However, an aircraft's pilot has the right to decide if they want to land in any given situation, Lee said.

"Even if the weather was fine, the captain could still choose not to land the aircraft if he felt there was something strange with the wind and decided to go around instead," Lee said. "CAA record shows that a Uni Air (宇翔航空) flight had landed at the Magong Airport before the TransAsia crash."

Lee said he would not speculate if the pilot had experienced deteriorated visibility within a very short period of time, adding that Aviation Safety Council (ASC) investigators would be able to determine the cause of the crash after decoding the information recorded in the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder.

CAA data showed that Flight GE222 was circling above Penghu for about 30 minutes before it prepared to land following improved visibility.

Air traffic control personnel said they received a request from the pilot to go around at 7:06pm, but they lost track of the aircraft afterward.

The visibility worsened from 1.6km to 0.8km at 7:10pm.

What happened to the pilot within the four-minute interval is considered key to the investigation.

Both of the plane's "black boxes" were brought back to Taiwan proper yesterday afternoon.

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ASC investigators said that the exterior of the cockpit voice recorder was slightly damaged, but they said that the memory of the device should still be intact. The flight data recorder looked relatively undamaged.

ASC Executive Director Thomas Wang (王國材) said the council is would issue a preliminary result of the plane crash investigation within four weeks, adding that a more detailed report could be produced within three to four months.

Casualties caused by the accident ended the best aviation safety record achievement in the past two decades.

Statistics from the CAA showed last month that the average aviation accident rate was 0.17 times per million flight hours, which was better than the global average of 0.32 times per million flight hours.

TransAsia said that each passenger's family would receive a preliminary compensation of NT\$1 million (US\$ 33,360). Civil aviation regulations stipulate compensation for each deceased passenger is NT\$3 million, and NT\$1.5 million for passengers who suffer major injuries.

Lee said these figures do not include any settlements that might be reached in civil court cases.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2014/07/25](#)