

What we know about the Dubai-Israel plane incident after reported stabbing



LightRocket via Getty Images

The Flydubai plane took off early on Wednesday morning (Stock photo)

A flight from Dubai to Tel Aviv was unexpectedly diverted to Saudi Arabia after a pilot was stabbed, Israeli officials have told local media.

The Flydubai plane - which took off from Dubai International Airport in the United Arab Emirates early on Wednesday morning - signalled an emergency alert two hours into the flight.

Tracking data also showed a sudden drop in the plane's altitude.

Flight FZ1073 - carrying around 150 people, most of whom are Israeli - was forced to change course from its route to Ben-Gurion Airport in Israel and instead landed at Tabuk Airport in northeastern Saudi Arabia.

On arrival, accounts from passengers to local media detailed a stabbing in the cockpit of the plane.

The plane's captain and first officer were injured and taken to hospital, the company that owns Tabuk Airport said. It did not say what caused the injuries.

Flydubai said all passengers on its plane are safe and accounted for.

Here's what we know.

What happened to the flight?

Flydubai's flight FZ1073 took off from Dubai International Airport in the UAE at 03:05 GMT (07:05 local time) on Wednesday.

Data from flight tracking website Flightrader24 shows a rapid descent for the plane over Saudi Arabia around two and a half hours after take-off, dropping more than 17,000 feet (over 5,000m) in less than two minutes at around 05:21.

Minutes later, the plane signalled an emergency code - squawk 7700 - before switching it to a squawk 7500 code reporting a hijacking.

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Route of flight FZ1073

Plane was scheduled to fly from Dubai to Tel Aviv



Source: Flightradar24 (times in GMT)

At 05:40, the plane - which had briefly entered Jordanian airspace - looped back into Saudi Arabia, where it later started its manual descent for landing.

Less than an hour later, the plane returned to squawk 7700.

Initial local media reports cited Israeli officials as saying a fight had broken out between two pilots.

Israeli broadcasters Channel 12 and Channel 14 later reported an official as saying that one pilot stabbed the other, before being restrained.

Passengers have also shared accounts of a stabbing with news outlets.

The plane touched down at Tabuk Airport in northeastern Saudi Arabia, according to location data at 06:58.

The BBC is yet to receive official statements from police, emergency services, or investigators regarding the incident, and the motive on the apparent attack remains unknown.

'Blood everywhere': Passengers describe fear on board

Passengers on board the flight have been talking to various media outlets. BBC News has not been able to verify their accounts.

Yasmin Abukasis told Reuters that her daughter - who was on the flight - said a man holding a knife had forced one of the pilots onto the floor, and that there was blood everywhere.

Speaking from Israel's Ben Gurion Airport, she said her daughter phoned her to say she heard screaming on the plane as a pilot called for help, adding that two other pilots took control of the plane as other passengers ran towards a man who had a knife.

"The plane start to lose control. So all the people, they scream, they think they are going," Abukasis told AP news agency.

One female passenger described the "very stressful" moment people realised the plane was descending. "We understood the pilots lost control," she told Israeli newspaper Israel Hayom.

"There are people here with shirts covered in blood," she said, adding: "Now we are fine and want to return home."

Another unnamed passenger told the Jerusalem Post that while passengers near the front of the plane forced the attacker from the cockpit after the stabbing of the co-pilot, two pilots from the back of the plane helped land the aircraft.

Almog Itali, who was also on board the flight, told media one of the pilots who landed the aircraft was British.

The other pilot was European, Itali said, although he did not provide a specific nationality.

What has the response been so far?

Shortly after the incident, the Israeli and Saudi Arabian air forces dispatched fighter jets, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held urgent consultations.

He later said the situation is under control.

Flydubai meanwhile, said "all passengers are safe and accounted for" as it confirmed its flight "experienced an incident en route".

"Our teams are working closely with the relevant authorities," it said in a statement, adding it will provide updates when further details become available.

There are reports that a recovery flight is on its way to Tabuk Airport to pick up the passengers of the diverted flight.

Flightradar24 shows a seperate Flydubai flight (FZ8455) set off from Dubai just before 12:56 local time (09:56 BST) and is due to land in Tabuk at 14:41 local time (12:41 BST).

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