

# The World

## All 143 aboard Gulf Air plane killed in crash off Bahrain

Probe into Airbus crash begins as families identify victims

MANAMA, Aug 24 : Rescuers have recovered the bodies of all 143 passengers and crew from the Gulf Air plane which crashed into the Gulf of Bahrain, a Bahraini civil defence official said early today.

The Gulf Air Airbus A320, on a flight from Cairo, crashed into shallow waters off the Gulf as it was attempting to land in Bahrain Wednesday.

"We have pulled out the bodies of the 143 people who were on board the plane," Abdul-Rahman bin Rashed al-Khalifa, administration director of Bahrain's Civil Defence, told state television.

The rescuers, including frogmen, were aided by search-light-equipped helicopters and ships from the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet as they searched in the darkness for survivors among the debris from the plane.

They also recovered the "black box" flight data recorder from the wreckage, a Bahraini government official announced Thursday.

The search was continuing for the cockpit voice recorder which will also help investigators discover exactly what caused the crash.

The Airbus A320 on a flight from Cairo crashed in the Gulf off Bahrain with an engine on fire while making its third attempt to land, officials said.

The captain issued no distress signal before the plane went down, a senior transport ministry official said, adding that the airport remained open.

A Gulf Air official here said the passengers aboard the ill-fated airliner included 63 Egyptians, 34 Bahrainis, 12 Saudis, nine Palestinians, six from the United Arab Emirates, three Chinese, two Britons, and one passenger each from Australia, Canada, Kuwait, Sudan, Oman and the United States.

The crew comprised the pilot from Bahrain, a Pole, an Egyptian, an Indian, one Filipino, one Moroccan, an Omani and another from Bahrain, officials said.

Twenty-six children aged ten years or under were among

those on board.

The Bahraini authorities were organising for bereaved relatives to come to Bahrain later Thursday morning to identify the bodies.

A special flight would bring in relatives of the 63 Egyptian victims of the crash, Abdul-Rahman said.

Stunned relatives of those on board Flight GF072 gathered at Cairo airport, venting their grief or in some cases refusing to believe what had happened.

The scene in Cairo was reminiscent of the aftermath of last October's EgyptAir Flight 990 crash which left 80 Egyptians dead among 217 people who died when the Boeing 767 plunged into the Atlantic off the US coast.

"Nobody has given us any information," Marzuk Abdelaifi Shaladi repeated as he cried.

The US State Department said a US diplomatic courier was aboard.

Meanwhile, experts began today to probe the crash of a Gulf Air Airbus A320 that crashed into the sea off Bahrain the previous night, killing all 143 people on board, a high-level company official said.

Overnight, searchers recovered the bodies of all 135 passengers and eight crew from Flight GF072 from Cairo to Bahrain, and the airplane's flight data recorder.

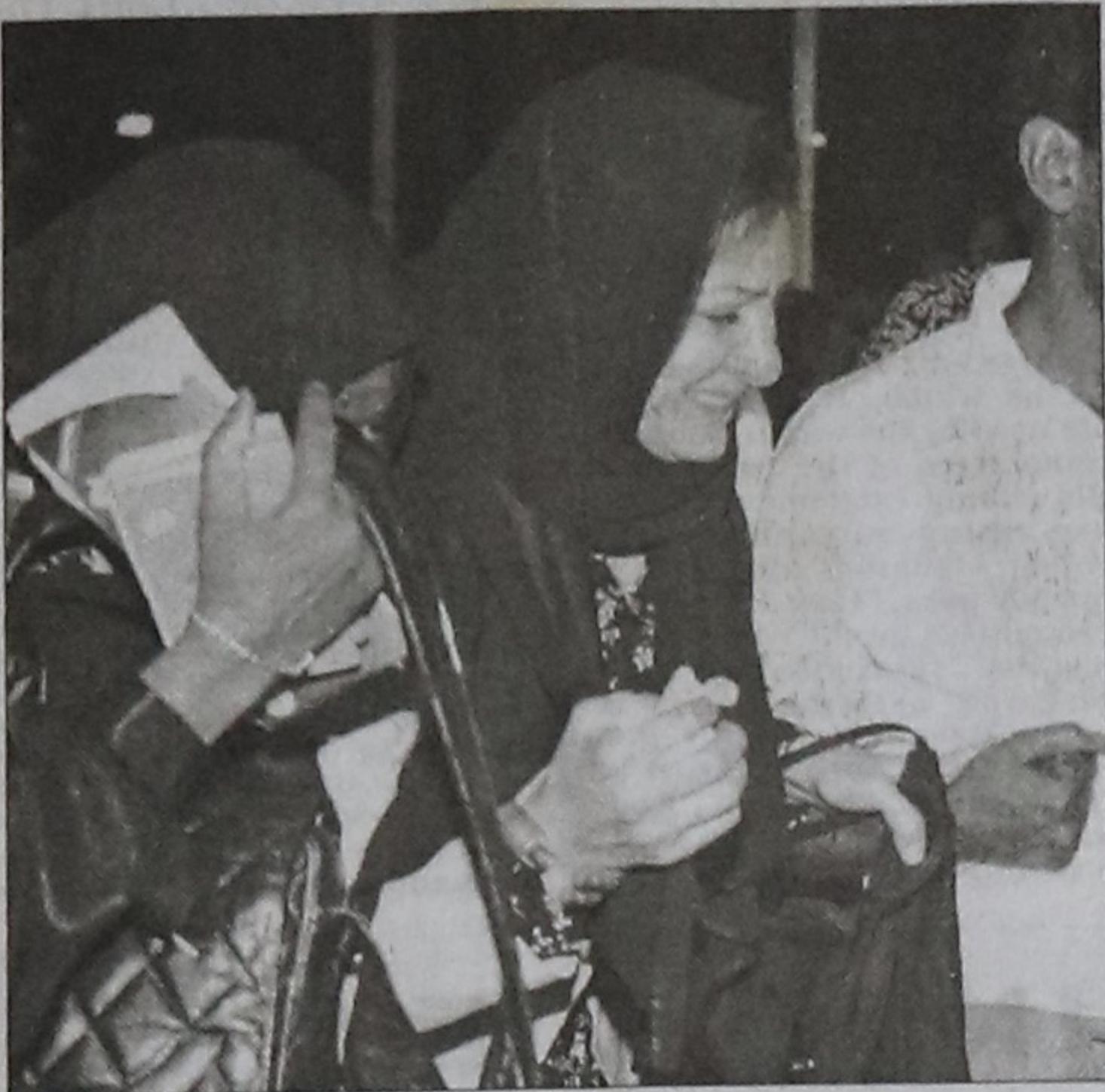
The second "black box", the cockpit voice recorder, was retrieved later.

The two boxes have been found, Gulf Air vice-president Ali Almadi said. "Over time, I am sure they will expose the conversation between the air traffic control and the cockpit."

"It is too early to ascertain what caused the crash," Almadi said. "The investigation is ongoing and it will be some time until the results are published."

Calling it a "tragic event", he added: "The company is working in coordination with government officials to best cope with the situation."

Searchers continued Thursday to bring in debris from the aircraft and personal effects of the passengers to aid the crash investigation and identifying the dead.



Relatives of passengers killed aboard a Gulf Air flight grieve at Cairo Airport late Wednesday.



Bahraini coast guards collect the bodies of a Gulf Air jet passengers north of Manama late Wednesday. A Gulf Air Airbus A-320 crashed into the sea while trying to land at Bahrain Manama airport with 135 passengers and eight crew aboard, killing them all. - AFP photo

China detains 130 underground church men

BELING, Aug 24 : Chinese police have detained 130 members of an underground Protestant church, including three US citizens, a Hong Kong-based human rights organisation said today, reports AFP.

A police official in the village of Dawangzhuang, located in central Henan province, told AFP that local officers, aided by police from Xiuhan county, had interrogated about 100 people on Wednesday.

Those questioned by police all belonged to the China Fangcheng Church, one of several Protestant groups not recognized by the Beijing authorities, according to the Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

The center said the arrested included three American "missionaries," identified as Henry Chu, Patricia Lan and Sandee Lin, all from California.

An official at the US embassy in Beijing Thursday told AFP that so far he had received no information from the Chinese authorities on the case.

## Japan, N Korea shelve row for next round of talks

KISARAZU, Japan, Aug 24 : Japan and North Korea shelved acrimonious disputes today as they agreed to a new round of talks to overcome decades of hostility and set up diplomatic ties, reports AFP.

"We had a very serious exchange of views in order to hold constructive discussions for the next round," said a Japanese foreign ministry official after a morning session between delegations from both nations.

"We have more or less cleared a stage," he said.

The next talks after the current round in Japan were expected to be held in October, possibly in Beijing, officials said.

The two sides are divided over Pyongyang's demand for compensation for Japan's brutal 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, and Tokyo's concerns about the alleged abductions of Japanese by North Korean agents.

An afternoon session was billed before the two countries

MIAMI, Aug 24 : Hurricane Debby was downgraded to a tropical storm Wednesday, but hurricane warnings remained in effect for part of the Bahamas and Cuba, the National Hurricane Centre warned, reports AFP.

Propaganda-blaring vehicles from far-right Japanese groups followed the delegations as the talks' venue switched from a foreign ministry guest house in Tokyo Tuesday to a convention and recreation resort here.

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