

Astronauts may inspect shuttle tiles

AP, Cape Canaveral

Nasa managers could decide Sunday whether a piece of fabric filler sticking out from thermal tiles on space shuttle Discovery's belly needs to be plucked out by astronauts during a spacewalk this week.

The gap filler, which is cracked and about an inch long, remains one of the few concerns that needs resolving before mission managers give the green light for Discovery to return to Earth in over a week.

The early consensus is that it probably won't pose problems during the shuttle's re-entry into Earth's atmosphere, but engineers pulled an all-nighter to recommend what, if anything, needs to be done, NASA officials said.

Agency managers already have cleared a slew of areas on the shuttle that raised their interest after viewing images taken during Discovery's flight to the international space station and before the shuttle docked with the orbiting complex.

Markings on the shuttle's nose cap were determined to be harmless bird droppings. Marks on certain panels of the thermal blanket covering Discovery's belly didn't have crushed coating or other signs of damage. Two other gap fillers didn't appear to pose problems.

If necessary, astronauts Piers Sellers and Mike Fossum could try to pluck the gap filler during their third scheduled spacewalk, which is set for Wednesday.

During the first spacewalk, they demonstrated on Saturday that they could make repairs to the shuttle from the end of a 100-foot combination of a robotic arm and a boom. The duo will make their second spacewalk Monday to replace a cable on the space station's rail car.

"You guys proved the arm and boom are stiff enough to use for (spacewalks)," flight controllers wrote Discovery's crew in an electronic morning message, adding that engineers on the ground who work on the shuttle's protective skin "are sleeping easier tonight" because of their spacewalk.

Discovery's six astronauts planned Sunday to finish unloading almost 7,000 pounds of cargo and supplies they brought to the space station. They also planned to talk to reporters 220 miles below on Earth during a news conference with the space station's three crew members.

The shuttle crew awoke to a recording of ABBA's "I Have a Dream," a song chosen by pilot Mark Kelly's two daughters.

"It sometimes is like being in a dream up here," Kelly radioed to Houston. "The floating is a big part of that."

Engineers also were analyzing whether two thermal blankets on Discovery that appear slightly damaged pose any risk of flying off the shuttle during re-entry.

"Both of these items are very close to be cleared as safe ..." flight controllers wrote Discovery's crew in an electronic message Sunday morning.

The gap filler that concerns managers is just above an area on the shuttle's belly that is connected to the external tank during launch. Gap filler is material fitted between thermal tiles to prevent them from rubbing against each other.

Discovery had a similar piece of fabric sticking out in the same place during last year's flight of the shuttle, the first since the Columbia disaster in 2003. Two pieces of gap filler had to be removed from Discovery's belly during a spacewalk last year because of concerns they would cause problems during re-entry.

The wait starts

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tight security was put in place to deal with the hundreds of thousands of people expected to take to the streets should their team and country win.

"Bring the Cup home," headlined Sunday's edition of the *Corriere dello Sport* while France's *L'Equipe* which has seen sales soar on the back of the French team's run to the final went with "Date with destiny for Zidane and Les Bleus."

CEC confident

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anybody," he said replying to query on whether the EC's latest decision of going from door to door to update the voter list was made under pressure from any political party.

"We have taken the decision to go from door to door for effective implementation of the court's verdict and to show respect to the whole nation and the people who suggested updating of the voter list through door to door visits," Aziz claimed.

About the ongoing legal controversy over updating of the existing voter list, Aziz said some quarters from the very beginning of the task of preparing a voter list have been creating unnecessary controversies by providing misinterpretations of the laws.

"Some people and a quarter are spreading controversies and creating smoke screens by providing interpretations of the laws according to their wishes," he said defending his steps for updating the voter list.

Echoing the same views, Election Commissioner SM Zakaria said there is no confusion in the EC over updating the existing voter list. "The court directed to correct, amend and include names on the existing voter list. We are taking steps in accordance with the court's verdict and electoral laws," he claimed adding "but some people are spreading confusions unjustly."

"The existing laws have a provision for revising the existing voter list, but the court did not direct to revise the voter list. It instructed for corrections, amendments and inclusions of names on the existing voter list," Zakaria claimed.

Replying to a query about whether there was a necessity for amending the rules to make way for door to door visits, the CEC claimed it was necessary. "It was not possible to make door to door visits unless the rule was amended. People, who have interpreted that the amendment is unnecessary, are not correct. They are misinterpreting the laws," he said.

About the opinions of legal experts who have termed the EC's method of updating the voter list as wrong, Aziz said "They do not need to pay tax on words!"

In a written statement, Aziz described the procedure for updating the existing voter list.

US envoy

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No one has security while the godfathers of the political killings remain unidentified and beyond the reach of justice, Reza said, adding, "Fair election is not also possible oo if there is dominance of guns and money and if the kingpins of the serial killings are not punished."

Embankment washed away as Dharla bursts its banks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

About one kilometre area of the 1.5km Dharla river flood control embankment was washed away at Charborairabi point in Sadar upazila of Kurigram district in last two days.

Some 1,450 families were marooned as 10 villages including Laxmikanto, Charborairabi, Jogmoholer Char and Kaimboraibari were flooded. Fifty families lost their homesteads due to the river erosion, locals said.

The floodwater also washed away a protection cover built to shield the 1.5km embankment that was built this year under a special project for town protection, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) sources said.

"We had taken all preventive measures to save the embankment but failed due to abnormal flow in the river," a BWDB official said.

Dharla river was flowing only 24 centimetres below the danger level yesterday morning.

Gazipur garment

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Police Station Kamrul Islam were injured in the attack.

The unruly workers then took control of around four-kilometre of highway from Borobari to Maleker Bari. The incident left stranded vehicles in gridlocks.

The workers also prevented fire engines from extinguishing the vehicles in flames. They hurled brickbats on the fire engines which also hit Deputy Assistant Director of Fire Service Shahidur Rahman.

Police around 9:30am fired eight gunshots into the air and lobbed 15 teargas shells to disperse the mob.

Vehicular movement on the highway was restored around 11:00am after police were reinforced by the deployment of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), riot police.

Meanwhile, the workers of the attacked factories held three men – Shafiqul Alam, 24, Monir Hossain, 22, and Iqbal, 23, – and handed them over to police for their alleged involvement in vandalism.

Shazneen case

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judgement about the appeal against the death sentence pronounced by the Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka on September 2, 2003.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, the youngest daughter of leading industrialist Latifur Rahman and also a IX student of Scholastica, was raped and killed at her Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

After the court awarded capital punishment to all the six accused of the crime, the convicts later appealed with the High Court against the judgement.

They are Shahidul Islam Shahid, a domestic help, Syed Sajjad Mainuddin Hasan, a contractor for repairing works at Shazneen's house, his assistant Badal, carpenter Shaniram Mondol and housemaids Estema Khatun Minu and Parvin.

The death reference bench heard the submission of both the prosecution and the defence during a 31-workday hearing that ended on June 27.

Beginning the delivery of its judgement on July 5, the bench scrutinised the first information report (FIR) filed by Assistant Superintendent of Police (Criminal Investigation Department) Mojibur Rahman and statements of three witnesses.

It analysed statements of another 15 the following day.

Tax ombudsman

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office at the Directorate of Taxes Inspection in the capital on a temporary basis but a permanent office will be set up in the newly constructed Audit Bhaban in Kakrail.

The office of the tax ombudsman will start its work with a few government officials on deputation but it will require 60 permanent officials for its initial operations.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) sources said the government is likely to appoint AS Jahir Mohammad, a member of the NBR (Income Tax), as the adviser to the ombudsman.

The tax ombudsman said in addition a head office in Dhaka for the department and a branch in Chittagong will be set up soon. He said it will take about six months to start taking complaints.

Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, who is also a former chairman of the NBR, said small taxpayers are usually harassed more than the big taxpayers due to their dependence on middlemen.

He urged the small taxpayers to avoid middlemen for paying taxes so they can avoid complexities and harassment.

The ombudsman also said instead of individual taxpayers, institutional taxpayers are more likely to file complaints in the initial days of the ombudsman's office.

Meanwhile, the newly appointed NBR Chairman Abdul Karim assumed his office yesterday.

In his remarks to the media after taking responsibility, Karim said tax dodgers and guilty officials will be punished if allegations against them are proven to be true.

Bangladesh a success

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perpetual cycle of poverty with child bearing.

Targeting the poor is particularly important if one has to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs), particularly when about half of the population lives below poverty line in the country, said the country top boss.

"All our country programmes have reflection of MDG goals and are in conformity with PRSP targets," she said citing examples of maternal mortality reduction, gender equity, prevention of HIV and AIDS.

Access to reproductive health for all is a PRSP target, which contributes to all the MDGs, she said adding population and reproductive health is linked with every MDG. Quoting UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, said none of the MDGs can be achieved without addressing population and reproductive health issues.

There exist close intricacies between poverty and reproductive health and it keeps the poor in persistent poverty through a vicious circle. Infant mortality is also double among the poor though it has come down to 65 per 1,000 in 2004 from a level of 140, she went on.

Referring to another success, she said contraceptive prevalence rate increased to 58 percent in 2004 from a level of 8.5 percent in mid 70s. Bangladesh has also made considerable success compared to the South Asian countries.

"Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth and Adolescent (RHIYA) is a programme for the South Asian countries but Bangladesh has done the best in this regard," she lauded.

A growing concern in Bangladesh, as it is in many other developing countries, is the persistence of health inequality, she said adding a serious inequality that exists in the reproductive health indicators is birth attended by skilled health personnel.

"More than 45 percent in the highest income group has access to safe delivery care whereas in the lowest income less than four percent get this service," the country representative noted adding the first round of success had been in the human poverty with reduction of fertility to three percent in 2004 from six percent in the mid 70s.

"I have seen things changed and there are very positive changes. You need community participation and it is also very important that males are participating in the whole process," she felt. "I found that programmes are not implemented properly but political leaders are committed to it and they are after it."

"Every pregnancy should be planned and every birth should be a joy," said Suneta, who is leaving Bangladesh this month after serving around five and a half years in her current post. "We have covered yards, but there are miles to go."

Iajuddin back

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to his office at 11:55am and did a number of routine work for more than one hour before leaving for his residence.

Press Secretary to the President Mokhesur Rahman Chowdhury said the president signed a number of government files and a message on the World Population Day and diplomatic documents.

AFM Solaiman Chowdhury, secretary to the president, and Mokhesur welcomed the president back to his office with bouquets.

High military and civil officials of Bangabhaban were also present on the occasion.

The press secretary to the president said in line with the doctor's advice the president has to take adequate rest and medication and the number of visitors is limited.

Senior officials of the presidential office, family members of the president and people who are involved with his treatment are in the list of visitors in the coming days, he added.

He requested other intending visitors to wait until the president fully recovered.

The 75-year-old head of state attended his office last on May 23, the day when he fell sick and was admitted to Dhaka Combined Military Hospital (CMH). He was flown to Singapore the following day and he returned home on June 20 after a bypass at Mount Elizabeth Hospital there.

But he had to stay four more days at the CMH for checkups before he could return to Bangabhaban, where he had been resting until the resumption of his office yesterday.

SPEAKER'S CLARIFICATION

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, who discharged as the acting president for 44 days due to illness of President Iajuddin Ahmed, yesterday came up with a new explanation in parliament claiming that he was the constitutional president during the period.

"There is no post of acting president or president in charge in the constitution. So anybody who discharges duties in the post of the president either elected or temporarily is the constitutional president," the Speaker explained in the House.

The speaker also defended use of protocol, flag and symbol of the president even from the day of return of President Iajuddin Ahmed from Singapore.

"The president and in case of anybody who discharges duties to the post of the president will be provided with the protocol, flag and symbol," the Speaker claimed.

Update voter list

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The CEC however again confirmed that no draft voter list will be published based on the field level task as there is 'no need' for it. Legal experts however said not publishing a draft list will deprive the people from the chance of disputing or complaining about any anomaly on the list rendering the entire process illegal again despite door to door visits.

The EC Secretariat in a circular directed the district election officers, who are working as registration officers, to send all information about the task to the secretariat by August 20, sources said.

Meanwhile, the on going method of updating the voter list from the offices of different local government bodies or government organisations have completely failed to get response from the people in the last 9 days. But the EC however decided to continue the procedure simultaneously along with the latest method of door to door visits.

relaxed the strict procedure that had compelled people to apply with a set of documents for inclusion of names on the voter list.

"Applications for voter registration will be collected through door to door visits. So, There will be no need for attaching receipts of municipal tax payments or house rents or payments to local guards, and affidavits of proof of age or attested copies of SSC certificates with the application," CEC MA Aziz said yesterday.

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Children

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However, as no further evidence can be derived from the case it will be futile to send the case back for fresh trial by the appropriate juvenile court.

According to the HC judgment, the Children Act, 1974 has an overriding effect to try all offences where children are accused. In any case, the question of jurisdiction of offence is secondary to the question of jurisdiction of person. So the trial in question is without jurisdiction of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal.

It also said that this provision of trial in juvenile court under the Children Act, 1974 is a right guaranteed by the Article 28 (4) of the constitution of Bangladesh.

Advocate Shahdeen Malik stood as the Amicus Curie (friend of the court) and gave expert opinion to assist the court. Deputy Attorney General Fahima Nasrin represented the state while Advocate Abdul Jabbar was the defence lawyer.

UM Habibun Nessa, head of Programme (Protection) at Save the Children UK, in a press release said it's a landmark judgment which will establish the fact that no children should be tried in the criminal justice system or any special tribunal established under any special law.

Portfolios of 2 state ministers changed

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday made a minor reshuffle in the cabinet transferring two state ministers to other ministries.

State Minister for NGO Affairs Lutfar Rahman Khan Azad has been transferred to the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment with the same status.

On the other hand, the State Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, Major (retired) Qamrul Islam, has been shifted to shipping ministry with the same position.

"The prime minister has given them the new portfolios as per Rule 3 (IV) of the Rules of Business 1996," said an official announcement yesterday.

PM for promoting

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rising above anger, favour and personal liking or disliking.

"We have introduced a balanced policy for promotion in the armed forces. I hope this will establish parity with three services so far as promotion is concerned," she said.

Khaleda said the patriotic army of the country was organised through the War of Liberation and it has earned wide recognition as a high standard force at home and abroad.

"I think this has enhanced your responsibilities. Therefore, importance will have to be laid on merit, workability, consciousness and prudence of the officers while selecting future leadership of the force."

Advising the army officers to be responsible towards their subordinates and respectful towards their seniors, the PM said, "Our goal is a professional army and we want professional officers for this purpose."

Referring to multifarious activities of the army, she said besides protecting independence and sovereignty of the country, they are also standing by the people during natural calamities, taking part in development activities and making contributions to UN peacekeeping missions.

She also referred to the reputation of army personnel in curbing terrorism through active contribution to the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and said they will have to develop themselves as more efficient and enhance professionalism to uphold this reputation and glory.

Teachers

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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and the International Labour Organisation.

Over 5 lakh teachers and employees have been observing the strike under four platforms on almost identical demands.

The pro-BNP Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Jote led by Selim Bhuiyan yesterday announced a series of programmes alongside the indefinite strike.

The programmes include protest processions and demonstrations at upazila levels at 11:00am today, at district levels tomorrow, formation of human chains at upazila and district levels on July 13, divisional rallies from July 14 to 20 and indefinite sit-in programme in Dhaka from July 23.

At a press conference Bhuiyan said they would also bring out procession from Central Shaheed Minar and stage demonstration in front of the Shikhhah Bhaban on July 11 to compel the government accept their demands.

Another faction of the Oikya Jote led by Shariful Islam went on indefinite strike yesterday threatening to continue their strike until their six-point demand was met.

Blaming the education minister for the anomalies in the education sector, Shariful demanded resignation of Education Minister Osman Farruk.

"We are fighting for rightful demands," said Kazi Faruque, chief co-ordinator and convener of Shikhhak Karmachari Front that went on indefinite strike last Saturday. He said it was the election pledge of the ruling BNP to give 100 per cent basic salary to the teachers from the government exchequer.

Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad Convenor MA Awal Siddique said they have already formed upazila and district committees and taken a number of programmes including rallies and processions at upazila level for two days every week.

Meanwhile teachers of government colleges, training colleges and Alia madrasas, under the banner of BCS General Education Association, will hold a rally in front of the Shikhhah Bhaban in the capital today demanding departmental promotions and creation of new posts.

Shia gunmen

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gunmen were checking people's IDs and attacking them if they indicated the person was Sunni.

"They looked at his ID and asked him where he was from and he said (the Shia holy city of) Karbala, so they told him 'you are fine,'" said Shimmari, adding that his brother had seen corpses by the side of the checkpoint.

The massacre ended only when US and Iraqi forces surrounded the area and imposed a curfew.

A wave of sectarian violence has engulfed Iraq, especially Baghdad, since the bombing of a revered Shia shrine in Samarra in February.

Sunday's rampage came despite a massive security clampdown on the capital over the past four weeks, with tens of thousands of troops patrolling the streets.

In other violence at least eight people were killed in Iraq Sunday, including two Sunni clerics from the powerful Muslim Scholars Association, a Sunni religious body.

The two were shot dead by gunmen in the northern town of Samarra.

Mahmud Mustafa al-Darji of the Ahmed Ibn Hanbal mosque and Hussein Alaa Khalaf al-Abassi of the Abdullah Ibn Massud mosque were shot dead by gunmen dressed in shirts usually worn by Iraqi security forces, police said.

Meanwhile, the abductors of a Sunni woman MP made a new demand for her release Sunday.

The kidnappers of lawmaker Taiseer al-Mashhadani demanded the release of 25 prisoners held in US jails in Iraq in return for her freedom, a Sunni politician told AFP.

They freed two of the seven bodyguards captured along with her on July 1 in Baghdad.

Mashhadani is a member of the Sunni National Concord Front, the largest Sunni Arab parliamentary bloc.

On Sunday the Iraqi army said it captured a top rebel from the militant group the Islamic Army in northern Iraq.

A senior military officer said Ali Najm Abdullah, also known as Abu Hoziefah and the number two in the Islamic Army, was captured in a raid at 6:00 am (0200 GMT) on Sharifiyah village in the insurgent-plagued district of Hawjah, west of the oil city of Kirkuk.

The officer said Abdullah and his commander Abu Aesha were responsible for nearly 75 percent of insurgent attacks in northern Iraq's Kirkuk, Mosul and Tikrit regions.

Abu Aesha is still at large.

In 2004 the Islamic Army kidnapped two French journalists, who were later released. It also abducted and subsequently killed an Italian journalist.

Dengue strikes in city

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"Nearly 70 per cent of the patients with viral fever have been diagnosed with dengue," he said adding that the rest are patients suffering from respiratory viral infection with cold and enteric viral fever with diarrhoea.

As the people have become more aware of dengue and its treatment, most dengue patients come to hospitals in the primary stage of the disease, Prof Siddiqui said adding that they are being cured quite easily and not requiring blood transfusion.

It has been found that the private clinics have been facing the influx of dengue patients more than the public hospitals.

The symptoms of dengue are severe headache, pain in shoulders, eyes and back and nausea.

On Saturday, 20 new patients were admitted to city's Shomorta, Central Hospital, Padma General Hospital, Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital, Suhrawardi Hospital and Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

At the Mitford Hospital on Saturday, around 100 patients with viral fever came but there were no dengue-affected patients, while 12 dengue-infected people were found at the DMCH in seven wards.

Nur Alam Lavlu, 18, a student of Narayanjan Technical College from Postogola said he caught the fever 12 days ago.

"I was afraid as blood was coming up along with vomiting. I got admitted to the DMCH a week ago, where the doctors diagnosed me with dengue," he said.

Mohammad Choyon Uddin, 35, a banana wholesaler, has been undergoing treatment for dengue for the past week at the DMCH.

"I came from Naogaon with a truck of banana a week ago. While staying at Gabtoli, I slept on the pile of banana the whole day. When I reached Teigaon, I felt feverish and did not know when I fell unconscious," he said. With vomiting and bleeding with stool, he was admitted to the DMCH.

Around 90 per cent viral fever patients are prescribed three litres of water every day, adequate rest and paracetamol tablets if necessary and are sent back home, the doctors said.

Meanwhile, the patients admitted to the DMCH are provided with glucose saline, as their condition is slightly worse.

Those who are affected with dengue for a second time are slightly in danger compared to the first time affected ones, the doctors said.

They further suggested not to take any medicine except Paracetamol with the permission of the doctors and to test the blood to be confirmed of dengue, if the fever continues for more than five days.

The doctors also stressed the need for precautions such as using curtain while sleeping, cleaning the house and outside and specially not let the containers to hold clear water, which is the breeding ground for Aedes mosquito responsible for transmitting dengue virus.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials have started collecting information on dengue patients at different hospitals.

Babar asks

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peddling, and food faking and the use of toxic additives to and preservatives in foodstuffs and fruits, the home ministry will also restart anti-drugs and anti-adulteration operations soon.

A committee headed by Additional Secretary Mohammad Mohsin was formed yesterday to make recommendations on how to check the abuse of drugs with social motivation programme, the minister said, adding that the drive against adulterated food would begin in a couple of days.

A new tablet and a syrup are being smuggled in, ruining the youth community, the meeting noted.

Law and order in the capital marked an improvement as 18 murders occurred in Dhaka city in June while the number was 47 in May, the state minister said.

New IGP Anwarul Iqbal, the director general of the Coast Guard and senior officials of home ministry were present at the meeting.

150 killed

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and 192 passengers on a flight from Moscow to Irkutsk, said Irina Andrianova, of the Emergency Situations Ministry. Many were children headed to nearby Lake Baikal on vacation, the Russian news agency ITAR-Tass said.

Rescue workers had recovered 65 bodies, said another ministry spokeswoman, Natalya Lukash. She said 55 people were injured and most of the other 145 people on board were feared dead.

ITAR-Tass and the Interfax news agency estimated the death toll at around 150, citing preliminary numbers from the regional prosecutor's office and transport ministry.

The plane was landing around 7:50 a.m. local time when it veered off the runway and hit a concrete barrier, bursting into flames, Andrianova said.

"It was travelling at a terrific speed," the spokeswoman said.

She said it took emergency workers more than two hours to put out the fire.

Russian television pictures showed smoke rising from the wreckage and firefighters clambering on top.

There was no word yet on the cause of the crash 2,600 miles east of Moscow.

Sibir is Russia's second-largest airline, carved out of the Siberian wing of the Soviet monopoly carrier Aeroflot.

Cash-strapped and saddled with aging aircraft, regional airlines whittled out of Aeroflot were once notorious for their disregard for safety. But in recent years crashes from equipment failure or pilot error have declined sharply.

In 2004 a Sibir Tu-154 was one of two planes lost in near-simultaneous crashes blamed on terrorist bombs. A total 90 people were killed.

Three years earlier, another Sibir plane was shot down by a stray Ukrainian missile fired during military exercises. All 78 people on board died.

In May, another Airbus aircraft crashed in stormy weather off Russia's Black Sea coast, killing all 113 people on board.

Airline officials said they believed the crash of the Armenian passenger plane was due to bad weather driving rain and low visibility.

Among other deadly crashes in Russia in recent years, a Tu-154 Russian passenger plane crashed in Siberia in July 2001, killing all 143 people on board.

And in March 1994, an Airbus A-310 belonging to Aeroflot went down near the Siberian city of Novokuznetsk, killing 70 people. Investigators said crash was caused mainly by the pilot's teenage son inadvertently disconnecting the autopilot.