

Wind shear alert was down  
Officials say system not crucial for landing

## POST REPORTERS

### Rites for the victims

Phuket airport officials attend a merit-making ceremony near the runway yesterday. Behind them is the covered wreckage of the ill-fated One-Two-Go airliner, which has been moved from the actual accident site further up the runway. Systems to detect dangerous winds at Phuket international airport have emerged as a new factor possibly linked to the horrendous crash of the One-Two-Go flight on Sunday.

Wuttichai Singmanee, director of air safety at the Civil Aviation Department, said three of the six wind shear alert systems at the airport had problems.

"Three out of six low-level wind shear alert systems were not working at the time," Mr Wuttichai said in a report by the AP.

An official at Phuket airport who declined to be named told the Bangkok Post that the system run by the Meteorological Department had not functioned for months.

The systems detect sudden strong winds, also known as wind shear, which could cause trouble for a plane landing at the airport.

Officials responsible for the system would normally alert air traffic controllers to warn pilots about the situation on the ground.

These systems are installed at all international airports in Thailand. They are located in areas around the airport.

With investigators still trying to determine the cause of the tragedy, it was unclear yesterday whether the accident, which left 89 people dead and 41 injured, was due to pilot error or weather conditions.

But Mr Wuttichai said even though the wind shear detection system was not fully functional, this would not necessarily lead to an accident.

The airport at Phuket was also equipped with its own, separate wind detecting system and could inform incoming and outgoing planes of the situation, the official said.

"The wind shear alert system is not a requirement for an international aviation standard," he said.

A pilot of Thai Airways International (THAI), who asked not to be named, agreed with Mr Wuttichai, saying the wind shear detection system was not crucial for landing or take-off.

Most passenger aircraft nowadays were equipped with their own wind detection equipment, which the pilot could refer to, he said.

Transport permanent secretary Chaisawat Kittipornpaiboon, who is heading the inquiry into the disaster, said wind shear had not been ruled out and it had been the cause of several major airline accidents.

Transport and aviation authorities yesterday appealed to the public not to point the finger at Arief Mulyadi, the chief pilot on the fatal flight.

Chaisak Ungsuwan, director-general of the Civil Aviation Department, said no judgement should be passed before the information on the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder had been analysed.

The recorders, which were retrieved from the wreckage of the plane, were being sent to the United States for analysis, he said. The McDonnell Douglas MD-82 was made in the US.

"I do not want to see any blame heaped on the pilot or any other party involved because it is not fair. We should wait for the results of the examination of the data recorders," said Mr Chaisak.

Khajit Hapnanont, chief executive officer of One-Two-Go Airlines, echoed the appeal. He insisted the airline's safety was not lax and that Mr Mulyadi was one of the company's best.

Mr Chaisak, quoting a recorded conversation between the pilot and the flight tower, said flight OG 269 requested landing permission and inquired about weather and wind speed about four minutes after an aircraft owned by Orient Thai Airlines, which owns One-Two-Go, landed safely.

He said flight OG 269 also acknowledged that wind shear had been reported by the other plane before asking for landing approval.

Khanit Promsathit, a THAI pilot, said Phuket airport is a difficult place to land especially at night or in bad weather.

Two critically injured passengers were yesterday flown to a hospital in Bangkok for intensive burn treatment.

Phuket public health office chief Wanchai Sattayawuthiwong said Chainarong Maharae, 38, chief of Bang Muang tambon administration organisation in Phangnga and Ms Bethan Jones, 22, a Briton, sustained 40-60% burns and were transferred to a Bangkok hospital.

Pol Col Pomprasert Kanjanarin, deputy chief of the Foreign Affairs Division, said 36 bodies of Thai victims had been claimed by relatives.

Forensic officials had identified 20 out of the 53 foreigners killed.

**21 SEPTEMBER 2007**

**POST REPORTERS**

**88 die in Phuket plane crash**

A budget airline flight with 130 people aboard crashed on landing at Phuket airport in heavy rains and strong winds yesterday, killing 88 people and injuring 42.

The One-Two-Go Airlines plane was carrying 123 passengers, two pilots and five attendants from Bangkok. It landed in heavy rain and veered off the runway, before hitting an earth embankment, breaking into two and bursting into flames.

The 12-year-old McDonnell Douglas MD-82 plane that served flight OG/OX269 left Don Mueang airport at 2.30pm before crash-landing on arrival at 3.40pm.

Only 44 passengers were Thai. The other 79 passengers were foreigners.

Witnesses said the plane seemed to abort its first landing attempt. However, it skidded when it touched the runway, before hitting the embankment.

Wreckage was strewn over a large area. Rescuers battled smoke and intense heat to remove bodies of the dead, and evacuate the injured.

A pilot informed the control tower that he would abort the first landing attempt because he could not see the runway.

According to witnesses, a fire broke out on the right wing while the plane was slipping from the runway. The fire went out, but then re-ignited until flames covered most of the aircraft.

Many of the dead perished in their seats, and were found with their seatbelts fastened. Other passengers, mainly from the rear of the aircraft, jumped from windows, or squeezed through jagged openings in the fuselage.

Some made it out through the plane's emergency exits.

The plane had flown in from Bangkok in mid-afternoon in heavy rain and low visibility.

"The pilot asked to go around," said Chaisak Angsuwan, director-general of the Aviation Department. "The control tower allowed it but the aircraft fell to the runway and the body broke."

Rescue workers had put out the blaze by 5.20pm, then kept evacuating survivors and removing bodies. The airport was closed and about 20 flights were cancelled immediately.

Dr Tinakorn Pongwiwat, adviser of the Narenthorn rescue centre in Phuket, said injured passengers were admitted to Thalang Hospital, Bangkok Hospital Phuket, Vachira Phuket Hospital and Siriroj Hospital.

Most injured passengers suffered impact injuries and burns. The injured foreigners included Australian, English, Dutch, German, Iranian, Israeli and Irish nationalities, according to hospital officials.

The bodies of the dead victims, some badly burnt, were gathered at Phuket airport for an initial

autopsy.

Mr Chaisak initially attributed the accident to heavy rains and strong winds at Phuket airport. Inquiries will focus on communication between pilots and the control tower, and flight recordings.

One-Two-Go Airlines chief executive Udom Tantiprasongchai said he was shocked, and expressed regret for the accident. He would arrange compensation for victims and relatives.

"I would like to express my deep sorrow to the relatives of the dead and I will take full responsibility," he said upon arrival in Phuket last night.

Airline staff and insurance officials headed to Phuket airport to arrange compensation as the airline opened a 1126 hotline centre and a coordination centre at Don Mueang airport to answer inquiries.

Phuket airport director Pornchai Ua-aree said the airport would stay closed today until the accident site was cleared.

He said the accident took place in heavy rain. However, visibility remained at 3-4 kilometres and the winds were not so strong, about 11 knots or 19 kilometres an hour. He said the airplane's tyres touched the runway but it slid 60 metres from the tarmac. Then its right wing hit the earth wall before the plane caught fire.

Tourism and Sports Minister Suvit Yodmani said the lists of killed and injured foreign passengers were being reported to the countries concerned last night.

Chantra Purnriksha, secretary-general of the Office of the Insurance Commission, said the airplane was rented from abroad and insured with foreign agencies. Forensic police chief Pol Maj-Gen Saengchai Suwatthanapakdi suggested relatives send in personal documents and medical records of dead passengers to help with identification. Forensic staff will arrive at Phuket airport today.

## **Authorities yet to identify 13 bodies**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2007**

### ***DNA matching needed for charred bodies***

Authorities have not yet identified 13 out of 89 people killed in Sunday's airliner crash in Phuket, saying those charred bodies must be identified through DNA matching.

Nitinai Sorasongkhram, a Phuket-based forensic officer, said 13 of the 89 bodies were totally burnt. His team would collect tissue samples from the bodies and wait for relatives to match their DNAs with the samples.

Acting national police chief Seripisuth Temiyavej said rescue workers have retrieved all dead bodies from the wreckage of the crashed plane. He also set up a body identification panel, chaired by Pol Lt-Gen Potjanee Sunthornket of the Police Hospital.

He said the forensic team should finish identifying all the dead as soon as charred bodies can be identified from DNA samples, fingerprints and teeth.

Pol Gen Seripisuth also assigned his deputy, Patcharawat Wongsuwan, to head a team that would find out if the crash was caused by any human error or recklessness.

Local authorities said relatives have already claimed the bodies of 36 Thai passengers, two Israelis and one Indonesian. The remaining 50 bodies are being kept at a multi-purpose building of Phuket international airport.

Relatives who want to have the bodies of their loved ones flown home may seek assistance for free-of-charge air transport from the cargo section of Thai Airways International, officials said.

Meanwhile, Foreign Ministry deputy spokesman Piriya Khempon said the ministry has set up a coordination centre to assist relatives of foreign passengers on board the crashed airliner as well as embassy staff. The centre could be reached at Tel 0-2644-7245 and 0-2643-5522.

According to local authorities, among the 89 dead victims were five senior officials based in Phuket and Phangnga. They were two judges and three provincial office heads.

One-Two-Go Airlines chief executive Udom Tantiprasongchai said the airline is focusing its effort on taking care of the injured passengers.

The airline will take responsibility for all passengers stranded at Phuket international airport. It also will take care of travel and accommodation expenses incurred by relatives who travel to Phuket to claim the bodies of those killed in the plane crash or to look after the injured.

Kongkiat Ketphet, director of Bangkok-Phuket Hospital, said four of 22 injured passengers admitted to his hospital were in serious conditions.

The hospital's medical team was closely monitoring the four patients now in its critical care unit. It also asked its sister BNH Hospital in Bangkok to send specialists to reinforce the team in Phuket, said Dr Kongkiat.

After Sunday's plane crash, Phuket international airport was closed as authorities worked to retrieve dead bodies from the aircraft's wreckage and clear debris from the runway. As a result, 54 flights

scheduled to land yesterday were cancelled. Out-bound passengers were transferred to board their planes from Krabi airport instead.

## Crash kills 5 from same family

19 SEPTEMBER 2007

*They all lived under same roof in Phuket*

### ARTHIT KHENMEE & WASSAYOS NGARMKHAM

The Phuket air crash has left one home in the resort province almost empty as five members of the same family died in the blazing wreckage. For businessman Pipat Tunyakarn, the tragedy has taken too many people who were closest to his heart.

The crash of the One-Two-Go budget airliner in Phuket killed Mr Pipat's mother Yajai Tunyakarn, aunt Puengboon Ratanadilok na Phuket, sister-in-law Wannaporn Boonsoong, and two maternal relatives, Sirikorn and Somluck Anyasakul, who were married.

Except for the sister-in-law, everyone lived under the same roof in Phuket and all five who perished ran the family business together.

Mr Pipat had moved out of the house after he was married.

The five and Mr Pipat were in Nonthaburi for a business seminar at the Muang Thong Thani convention centre last Friday.

The seminar ended on Sunday and his five relatives caught the doomed One-Two-Go flight OG269 back home to Phuket.

Mr Pipat drove to Bangkok for the meeting and was driving back to Phuket when he heard the tragic news.

The aftermath of the crash has left Mr Pipat in shock. He now has only his grandfather, who suffers from Alzheimer's, and two young kids left in the house.

"There's now only grandpa alone. He is old and has Alzheimer's. So I must move back in and find someone to take care of grandpa. I must also run the family business alone because all the pillars of the family are gone," Mr Pipat said.

The man said his wife had a dream some time ago they would lose many of their immediate relatives. But Mr Pipat had dismissed the possibility the dream was an omen.

After he heard about the crash, he tried to call his five relatives but to no avail. By midnight, it was clear he had lost them all.

"The weather was very bad that day. It was raining heavily and the wind was strong. The pilots should not have landed the plane in such conditions," Mr Pipat said.

He said he had caught a One-Two-Go flight before and thought the seats were too close together.

He thought that if there had been more space between the rows of seats, passengers might have had a better chance of surviving.

The bodies of the five family members have been placed in coffins at Wat Latthiwaram temple in Phuket for funeral rites. Mr Pipat complained that One-Two-Go staff had not contacted him yet to

offer any assistance.

If no one stepped forward to show responsibility by Monday, which is the day of the funerals, Mr Pipat said he was prepared to file a lawsuit.

Mr Pipat's aunt Paphawee Phumipong said airline staff had only sought her phone number and done nothing else. She praised government officials for providing her family with assistance in locating the bodies of her dead relatives.

## **Financial compensation guaranteed for all victims**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2007**

One-Two-Go Airlines and the Civil Aviation Department have guaranteed financial compensation for all victims of Sunday's plane crash.

A notice in Thai and English posted on the budget airline's website yesterday expressed regret for the accident and said it would "definitely provide support and take full responsibility" for all injured and dead passengers.

The airline's chief executive officer and founder Udom Tantiprasongchai also promised the victims' relatives the company would meet all expenses when he visited Phuket immediately after the tragedy.

Civil Aviation chief Chaisak Angkhasuwan said the airline must pay the relatives of each dead victim 100,000 baht for funeral expenses as soon as possible.

The airline's insurance company would have to cover the medical expenses of the survivors, Mr Chaisak said.

The airline carries more than US\$300 million (10.2 billion baht) in insurance cover with UK based-underwriter Penloyd. The insurance covers damage to the aircraft, passengers and third parties, Mr Chaisak said.

Chantra Purnriksha, secretary-general of the Office of the Insurance Commission, said the airline had two accident insurance policies with Penloyd.

In addition to the \$300-million insurance covering passengers for death, medical expenses and transport after an accident, it had another policy, worth US\$5 million, covering damage on the aircraft and its passengers.

She said the commission would work closely with Penloyd to determine the actual cause of the crash.

Staff from Penloyd's Singapore office were expected to fly into Phuket soon, Ms Chantra said.

Ms Chantra said the insurance commission would also work with the General Insurance Association and the Thai Life Assurance Association to ensure rapid disbursement of payments to relatives of passengers who purchased accident insurance policies.

Passengers' relatives seeking help could phone the insurance commission's Phuket centre at 076-219-496, 081-174-8960 or call its hotline at 1186.

The Justice Ministry's Rights and Liberties Protection Department has also sent a team to Phuket to assist victims' relatives with legal matters, the director-general, Suwana Suwannajutha, said.

