CAUSE OF DAALLO AIRLINES A321 EXPLOSION UNCLEAR: CEO

News / Airlines

Mohammed Ibrahim Yassin, the chief executive of Somalia's Daallo Airlines, has confirmed that an apparent explosion struck the company's Airbus A321 earlier today on a flight from Mogadishu to Djibouti.

Yassin said that the cause of the incident is "still unclear," but that the aircraft in question (MSN 642) has never had any technical faults during its three years of service with Daallo.

"Fifteen minutes the aircraft was in the air. There was a bang, a sort of an explosion, and then it returned safely," he told me in a telephone interview Tuesday afternoon. "There are two minor injuries. We don't know what caused it … Anything is possible. By tomorrow the picture will be clearer."

Photographs of the aircraft taken after its return to Mogadishu show a gaping hole in the fuselage just in front of the right wing.

The type of damage immediately fueled speculation that a bomb may have been detonated on-board, but Yassin said it is too early to reach any conclusions. "That is what they are saying, but the Civil Aviation [Authority] thinks differently," he cautioned. "Nothing is certain."

Local media carried unconfirmed reports that a charred body was seen falling to the ground about

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40km outside of Mogadishu.

Asked whether he is certain that all 74 passengers disembarked safely, the chief executive said he was unable to give that assurance. “It’s not clear,” he admitted. “It was a little bit chaotic when the aircraft landed. The passengers were panicking and then nobody is sure, but we will know things by tomorrow.”

Yassin confirmed that the aircraft arrived in Mogadishu after a flight from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Some 204 passengers traveled on the earlier flight, and the aircraft was on the ground in Somalia for about one hour.

MSN 642 is operated by Greece’s Hermes Airlines under a wet-lease agreement.

Daallo has never suffered a fatality since launching services in 1991 – a remarkable achievement for an airline whose home country has been wracked by more than two decades of civil war.

“Twenty five years we’ve been doing this, and 25 years without incident,” Yassin said. “We are lucky. We are very, very lucky. And still we are very lucky.”

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