



AIRLINES ARE RISKING LIVES TO SAVE MONEY, SAY AIRCRAFT ENGINEERS

News / Airlines



Aircraft engineers have accused airlines of putting lives at risk by being motivated by cost and not safety.

The Aircraft Engineers International group (AEI), which represents 40,000 mechanical staff in 30 countries, also said the aviation industry is failing to learn lessons from plane crashes, which in turn leads to more accidents.

It recommended a global change in attitude towards safety in the industry.

The group was responding to the publication of the first major report into AirAsia flight QZ8501 that crashed into the Java Sea last December killing all 162 onboard. The report by Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee found that a faulty rudder control system, and the crew's response to it, was the cause of the accident.

AEI said the crash was "avoidable" and that it "highlights that the industry as a whole has learnt little from two previous tragic accidents", citing investigations into 2008 Spanair and 2009 Turkish Airlines crashes that found "similar causal factors".

The Spanair crash was found to be the result of crew error and a Take-Off Warning System failing to work, while the Turkish Airlines crash was caused by a faulty altimeter followed by an incorrect response from the pilot.

"The public must be made aware that aviation today is driven by cost," AEI said in a statement.

"Cost, not safety, is paramount. Pilots and engineers are often placed under increasing pressure to accept second best, in order to ensure aircraft meet unrealistic flight schedules. The consequences of which are more incidents and ultimately more avoidable accidents."

The group said non-reporting of defects, inadequacies in the maintenance system, crew training issues and "ineffectiveness of the current regulatory oversight system" were common issues across the three incidents.

The report into the Air Asia crash found that the system that helps control the rudders had cracked soldering, which caused it to send warning messages to the pilot. However, the pilots responded by re-setting the warning system, causing the autopilot to disengage before they lost control of the aircraft. It found that the rudder had had 23 problems in the year prior to the crash.

The plane was en-route from Surabaya to Singapore when it crashed.

After the report was released, Tony Fernandes, the Malaysian entrepreneur who owns both AirAsia and Queen Park Rangers, expressed his "deep sorrow" for all the families affected by the tragedy and promised to learn lessons to make the industry safer.

"There is much to be learned here for AirAsia, the manufacturer and the aviation industry," he said. "We will not leave any stone unturned to make sure the industry learns from this tragic incident."

"These are scars that are left on me forever but I remain committed to make AirAsia the very best. We owe it to the families and my crew."

Families of those killed in the crash are in the process of finalising the amount compensation due to them from the airline.

The AEI statement continued: "The lesson to be learnt from this and other avoidable accidents is that it is now time for the industry to listen to and properly support safety professionals trying to keep flying safe."

It called on the industry to implement five reforms, including an improvement in training at all levels, government investment in regulators and the installation of a "genuine culture of safety".

Robert Alway, the current elected president of the AEI, is also the chairman of the British Association of Licensed Aircraft Engineers (ALAE). He told Telegraph Travel that the ALAE supports AEI's viewpoint.

Nathan Stower, chief executive of the British Air Transport Association said that the AEI's statement "paints a picture that we simply do not recognise", adding "the safety and security of passengers and employees is the number one priority for UK carriers and it is a responsibility they take incredibly seriously."

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