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Phuket mourns air-crash victims

By Gazette staff

PHUKET: Less than two weeks after an emergency response drill at Phuket International Airport (PIA), the island was devastated by the events of Sunday, September 16 that saw One-Two-Go flight OG269 crash land, claiming the lives of 89 people.

Memories of the 2004 tsunami were revived as rescue workers jumped into action and were on the scene within 10 minutes after the McDonnell Douglas MD-82 skidded off the runway and crashed.

About 3:45 pm, 56-year-old Indonesian pilot Areef Mulyadi attempted to land the aircraft, which was carrying some 123 passengers, five cabin crew, himself and his Thai co-pilot.

At a press conference at the airport on September 17, Phuket Airport Director Sq Ldr Pornchai Eua-aree said that the crash was the result of a "mis-approach", after which the pilot attempted to take off again with insufficient speed and landed "hard" before sliding off the runway, crashing into an embankment and breaking in two.

The pilot, co-pilot and three crew members were killed, as were many passengers in the forward section of the fuselage, where a fire broke out.

Some of the 41 survivors were thrown from the fuselage as the plane crashed into the embankment, while others had to drag themselves and each other to safety while the mangled plane became engulfed in flames.

Several passengers risked



The wreckage of One-Two-Go Flight OG269 on the morning after it crashed at Phuket International Airport, killing 89 passengers and crew. Some 41 passengers miraculously survived the crash and fire that followed. Photo by Sangkhae Leelanaporn.

their own lives in heroic efforts to save fellow passengers. Also hailed as heroes were the many rescue workers who were on the scene in minutes to rush survivors to hospital.

Bodies recovered at the scene were taken to a makeshift morgue at Phuket Airport Hall, to the south of the main airport terminal.

Udom Thanprasongchai, managing director of Orient Thai, which operates One-To-Go, arrived in Phuket late that Sunday

night. As well as expressing his condolences and regret for the tragedy, K. Udom pledged transport and accommodation for family members of survivors, as well as an initial 100,000-baht payment for each victim.

PIA remained closed until 4 pm the following day. Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont arrived about 4:40 pm and visited patients at Bangkok Phuket and Vachira Phuket Hospitals.

One source at the Aeronautical Radio of Thailand

(AeroThai) said the pilot tried to land amid heavy rain, low visibility and a 30-knot crosswind.

Two "black box" flight recorders were recovered from the site and have been sent to the US for analysis to determine the cause of the crash and results are expected soon.

Chaisak Angsuwan, director-general of the Air Transport Department, said "the objective is to seek the real reason [for the crash] and to prevent it happening again".

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