

## Experts to probe Singapore Airlines turbulence incident

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Bangkok: Aviation investigators arrived in Bangkok Wednesday (May 22) to learn how and why severe turbulence sent a Singapore Airlines aircraft into a sudden dive that tossed passengers and crew around the cabin, leaving a British man dead and dozens others injured.

Twenty people remained in intensive care in hospital after Flight SQ321, which was flying from London's Heathrow airport to Singapore, hit the turbulence Tuesday (May 21) over the Andaman Sea. The Boeing 777, which carried 211 passengers and 18 crew members, descended 6,000 feet in about three minutes, the carrier said.

The captain diverted the plane to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, where medical teams evaluated those aboard and sent over 80 to hospital. Singapore Airlines sent a special flight to Bangkok on Tuesday night to pick up those well enough to travel. The airline said that 131

passengers and 12 crew members arrived shortly after 5 a.m. at Singapore's Changi Airport.

Six crew members and 79 passengers stayed in Bangkok, where the majority remained in hospital, said Singapore Airlines CEO Goh Choon Phong.

Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital, where most of the injured were taken, said 20 people were being treated in intensive care while 27 others have been discharged. The ICU patients include six Britons, six Malaysians, three Australians, two Singaporeans and one person each from Hong Kong, New Zealand, and the Philippines, it said.

The hospital said nine people underwent surgery Tuesday and five more operations were expected to be completed Wednesday. It said it had provided 104 people with medical care.

"I've only a cut in my eye and a chipped tooth, it could be way worse," said Josh Silverstone, 24, who was discharged from the hospital Wednesday. "Everything was fine until I arrived back in the airport and I couldn't stop vomiting. I couldn't walk, it was pretty bad."

"I woke up on the floor, I didn't realise what happened, I must've hit my head somewhere," the Londoner said. "There were people laying out on the floor, they were paralyzed."

Silverstone added that he was so scared that he bought inflight internet access to message his mother. "I wasn't trying to scare her, but I said 'I love you.'"

British passenger Andrew Davies told Sky News that the seatbelt sign had come on just before the turbulence, but crew members didn't have time to take their seats.

"Every single cabin crew person I saw was injured in some way or another, maybe with a gash on their head," Davies said. "One had a bad back, who was in obvious pain."

Officers from Singapore's Transport Safety Investigation Bureau arrived in Bangkok late Tuesday, Singapore Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat said Wednesday.

He added that the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board is also

sending an accredited representative and four technical advisors to support the investigation because the incident involved a Boeing plane.

Thai officials had withheld the name of the dead man, but British media identified him as Geoffrey Kitchen, 73, who was going on a six-week holiday with his wife. She was among the passengers taken to hospital in Bangkok.

Kitchen was described as formerly working in the insurance industry, and in retirement was continuing his decades-long involvement with amateur theater.

A Thai airport official said Kitchen might have had a heart attack, though that hadn't been confirmed.

Tracking data captured by FlightRadar24 and analyzed by The Associated Press showed Tuesday's flight cruising at an altitude of 37,000 feet .

At one point, the Boeing 777-300ER suddenly and sharply descended to 31,000 feet over about three minutes, according to the data. The aircraft then stayed at 31,000 feet for under 10 minutes before diverting and landing in Bangkok less than a half-hour later.

Most people associate turbulence with heavy storms, but the most dangerous type is so-called clear air turbulence. Wind shear can occur in wispy cirrus clouds or even in clear air near thunderstorms, as differences in temperature and pressure create powerful currents of fast-moving air.

According to a 2021 report by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, turbulence accounted for 37.6pc of all accidents on larger commercial airlines between 2009 and 2018. The Federal Aviation Administration, another U.S. government agency, has said there were 146 serious injuries from turbulence from 2009 to 2021.

“For flight attendants and passengers alike, the dangerous, shaky feeling in midair called turbulence comes from air currents shifting,” said a statement from the U.S.-based Association of Flight Attendants.

It added that clean air turbulence is virtually undetectable with current technology. “One second, you're cruising smoothly; the next, passengers, crew and unsecured carts or other items are being thrown

around the cabin," it said.

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