

S Korea orders air safety probe after deadliest crash

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Seoul : Acting South Korean President Choi Sang-mok has ordered an emergency safety investigation into the country's entire airline operations following one of the deadliest plane crashes in South Korea's history, which claimed 179 lives.

"Once the accident recovery is completed, the Transport Ministry has been instructed to conduct a comprehensive safety inspection of the entire aviation system to prevent future accidents," Choi stated during a disaster management meeting in Seoul.

Jeju Air flight 7C2216 was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea on Sunday when it made a mayday call and belly-landed before skidding off the runway at Muan International Airport. It then crashed into a wall and burst into flames.

All passengers and four of the six crew were killed in the crash. Two

crew members were pulled from the wreckage alive and taken to hospital.

Officials initially cited a bird strike as the likely cause of the crash.

Seoul said it would conduct a special inspection of all 101 Boeing 737-800s operating in the country. It added that US investigators — possibly including from plane manufacturer Boeing — will join the investigation.

"We are reviewing plans to conduct a special inspection on B737-800 aircraft," Joo Jong-wan, head of the aviation policy bureau at South Korea's Transport Ministry, said on Monday.

Flags in the country flew half-mast on Monday as the nation began seven days of mourning following the disaster.

Meanwhile, investigators were trying to identify some of the last remaining victims as grieving families camped inside the Muan airport terminal.

According to authorities, investigators have identified 141 of the 179 dead with the help of DNA analysis or fingerprint collection.

Acting President Choi said the foremost priority was to identify the victims, support their families and treat the two survivors.

"Even before the final results are out, we ask that officials transparently disclose the accident investigation process and promptly inform the bereaved families," he said.

The Muan International Airport will remain shut through Wednesday, but the rest of the country's international and regional airports are continuing operations as scheduled.

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