

## **Strict vegetarian passenger dies on Qatar Airways flight after being denied special meal**

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Dhaka: A Southern California cardiologist has died aboard a Qatar Airways flight after reportedly choking on food when his requested vegetarian meal was unavailable, according to a wrongful death lawsuit cited by The Independent (UK).

The passenger, 85-year-old Dr Asoka Jayaweera, was flying from Los Angeles to Colombo, Sri Lanka, when the incident occurred. His family claims the airline failed to provide the vegetarian meal he had ordered in advance, forcing him to attempt to “eat around” the meat in a regular meal instead.

Shortly after doing so, Jayaweera began choking, according to the lawsuit filed by his son, Surya Jayaweera. Flight attendants administered aid and contacted MedAire, a company that provides in-flight emergency medical support, but the passenger’s condition

deteriorated quickly.

The crew reportedly informed Jayaweera's travel companion that the plane could not make an emergency landing because it was "flying over the Arctic Circle and Ocean." However, the complaint disputes this claim, alleging that at the time of the emergency the aircraft was actually flying over Wisconsin—well within range of several major US airports.

Despite attempts to stabilize him with oxygen and medication, Jayaweera's oxygen levels remained dangerously low. He lost consciousness several hours before the plane finally landed in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead. The cause of death was listed as aspiration pneumonia, a condition that occurs when food or liquid is inhaled into the lungs.

The lawsuit, initially filed in California state court and later transferred to federal court, accuses Qatar Airways of negligence and wrongful death. It seeks compensation beyond the limits set by the Montreal Convention, an international treaty that governs airline liability for injuries and fatalities during international flights. The treaty typically caps payouts at around USD 175,000.

Jayaweera's family argues that the airline's failure to provide the vegetarian meal he had ordered and its alleged refusal to divert the flight when he began choking both contributed to his death.

Qatar Airways has not yet issued a public statement on the case.

The airline, which offers a wide range of special meals—including several vegetarian and vegan options—has faced similar complaints in the past regarding passengers with dietary restrictions. In separate incidents, travelers with severe nut and shellfish allergies have reported near-fatal reactions aboard Qatar Airways flights after being served meals containing allergens despite advance warnings.

Jayaweera's son, Surya, told The Independent that his father's death could have been prevented had the airline honored his meal request and acted promptly during the emergency. The case is expected to proceed in US federal court.

