FORMER COLLEAGUE OF FLYDUBAI CAPTAIN TELLS OF CLUES TO CRASH

News / Airlines

A German pilot who worked alongside the captain of Flight FZ981 has spoken of his shock at news of the crash in Russia, and his fears for former colleagues at FlyDubai after Saturday's tragedy.

The 39-year-old has been flying jets since 1998 and received his lead position command for a commercial airliner in 2005. He worked with the experienced Cypriot captain, Aristos Sokratous, for an airline in Asia.

Several critical factors were likely to have caused the crash, according to P?M, who requested that his full name be withheld.

The pilot said evidence in the public domain, including a recording of the crew's dialogue with Russian air traffic control and black-and-white CCTV footage, could offer vital clues to reasons behind the first crash involving a UAE airline.

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“I met the pilot during my time working in Asia," said P?M, who previously worked in the UAE and is now employed by a European carrier.

“We only met briefly. He was a very competent pilot, very easy to get along with. We went through very similar selection procedures and took a similar career path.

“I have worked with most of the flight operations staff and cabin crew at FlyDubai. It is shocking. It instantly got me worried some may have been involved.

“I immediately feared people I know may have died. The pilots there are consummate professionals. They wouldn’t be making basic errors."

As is procedure, the Russian investigating committee has opened a criminal investigation into any possible safety breaches that may have led to the loss of 62 passengers and crew.

More than 50 investigators have been allocated to the case, with crew error, technical failure, adverse weather conditions and other factors listed as possible reasons for the crash.

A global shortage of airline pilots piles the pressure on those occupying busy rosters, but that alone should not have caused the crash, P?M said.

“Most airlines are working crews heavily," he said. “A lot of FlyDubai guys are complaining about their busy rosters, but it is worse elsewhere, like in Indonesia. FlyDubai is nowhere near that level because many of their flights are short sectors."

The UAE has adopted proven aviation safety regulations from the UK, restricting annual flight time for pilots to 900 hours.

Pilots must take two consecutive days of rest every 14 days, and one day off after seven working days. The aviation industry classes a working day as 36 hours free of duty – to allow adequate sleep either side of time behind the controls – including two local nights off.

“In Malaysia, there are a lot of thunderstorms, so the captain will have experienced that, but maybe not crosswinds and icy weather," P?M said. “On the voice recorder, I can distinctly hear two voices. I know the captain’s voice and he seems very awake and lively on the radio.

“Moderate windshear is reported by the crew on the audio, that would have been very rough. Most pilots would hardly ever experience that in their career. I have only flown during wind shear once or twice."

Although Russian aviation authorities measure wind speed and altitude in metres, as opposed to the imperial system used by the majority of the rest of the world, communication should not have been an issue, P?M said.

A shift in the aircraft’s centre of gravity due to it being only a third full, strong gusts, or wind shear, and ice on the tail could have reduced the captain’s control during his second attempt at landing at Rostov-on-Don, the pilot speculated.

Other theories include a possible stall that could have been the cause of the nosedive, as seen in the black-and-white CCTV footage taken near to the crash site.

“In my opinion, those are the most likely scenarios," he said. “Everyone on board would have

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followed a clear decision-making process."

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