

Plane crash Iran Air's 'first fatal accident in a long time'

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The 37-year-old Boeing 727 that crashed last night in north-western Iran, killing 77, was the first deadly accident for any IranAir plane to kill commercial passengers in 30 years, according to **Ascend**. The only other incident during that time killed four crew members during a training flight.

Sunday night's crash was IranAir's "first fatal accident in a long time," said Paul Hayes, director of air safety for London-based aviation industry consultants Ascend in a phone interview with euronews. "There's no indication that IranAir planes are not properly maintained," he said. IranAir's fleet has an average age of 24 years, he added. "That's an old fleet."

In 1980, an IranAir 727 crash left 128 people dead. In 1996, another 727, used for training, crashed and killed

four out of eight crew.

The aircraft that crashed on Sunday night was delivered new to IranAir in 1974, Hayes said. It completed a major overhaul one month ago, according to media reports cited by Hayes.

From the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2010, Iranian airliners, including the national carrier IranAir, operated 1.3 million commercial passenger flights, Ascend estimates. During that period, they suffered nine fatal accidents, killing 362 passengers, Hayes said.

Worldwide, there were another two crashes in the same period involving 727s that left 219 dead.

Investigators have recovered two black boxes from the aircraft that went down on Sunday. The plane had been on its way from the capital Tehran when it crashed near Orumiyeh.

Safety concerns have plagued Iran's aviation industry for years, as international sanctions prevent its airlines from buying new planes and parts to update their fleets, except from the secondary market.

The crash was not a result of a technical fault, according to **Hamid Behbahani**, minister for roads and transportation, quoted by the state-run Mehr news agency. The incident happened because of severe weather conditions and as the pilot was unable to see in thick fog, he said.

However, a deputy provincial governor of West Azarbaijan told the **agency** that the pilot reported a technical problem in his last communication with the traffic control. Three days of mourning were announced in the province.

According to Ascend's annual report, a fatal accident happened for every 1.3 million flights in 2010 worldwide. That compared disappointingly with a year earlier when the accident rate was one in every 1.5 million flights, which made 2009 the safest year for the aviation industry. The report noted that despite a poor performance in 2010, air safety is still improving.

Other air disasters in Iran include a plane bound for Yerevan, Armenia that crashed minutes after take-off from Tehran in July 2009 and killed all 168 people on board – that was a Russian-made Tupolev Tu-154.

A Revolutionary Guards' Ilyushin crashed in central Iran in 2003 killing all 276 on board. Ascend said it was the country's second-deadliest air disaster after an Airbus A300 with 290 passengers was shot down by the US Navy over the Persian Gulf in 1988.

The first Boeing 727 was delivered in 1964 and a total of 1,832 aircraft of that type were built up to 1984. The first plane built in 1964 made its last commercial flight 28 years later in 1991 and was donated to the Museum of Flight in Seattle, according to the **company's website**. A total of 232 planes of the model are still in service, of which 195 have been converted to cargo, Hayes said.

Ali Sheikholeslami
euronews correspondent in London
ali.sheikholeslami@euronews.net

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