

# SLEEPY PILOTS MAKE FATAL MISTAKES



Tired people make mistakes. It is especially a problem when they are responsible for other people's lives like in the case of pilots. For example in India both pilots on an Air India Jaipur-Mumbai flight last week fell asleep and flew several miles past their destination. When the air traffic controllers realized that the plane is neither descending nor reacting to radio instruction, they checked if it was not hijacked. After that the controllers decided to contact the crew by a SELCAL (selective calling). When this high frequency communication system is used it makes a buzzer sounds in the cockpit. The sound woke the pilots up. At this point, a report said, the aircraft was almost half way to Goa.

Nevertheless, Air India spokesman Jitendra Bhargava said it was not true, he claims the plane strayed "only" 10-15km away from Mumbai. The General Manager of Mumbai aerodrome, M G Junghare, denied that the pilots were asleep behind the control column. According to the manager, the aircraft had a radio communications failure and so could not be contacted. An air safety expert Capt Ranganathan claims this is a clear indication of an urgent need for an independent safety board. According to the captain the ministry of civil aviation does not focus enough on the air safety.

However, fatigued pilots are not a problem only of India. According to the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), crashes linked to fatigue have killed 249 people since 1997. The NTSB pushes the Federal Aviation Administration to develop a "fatigue management system" that would improve the situation. Currently, federal pilots are allowed to work up to 16 hours a day and loopholes allow longer days in some situations. As a result tired pilots make deadly mistakes. On Oct. 19, 2004 two pilots flew the plane too low into trees, 13 people died. On April 12, 2007 Pinnacle Airlines Flight 4712 skidded off the end of a snowy runway, fortunately no one was hurt. NTSB Chairman Mark Rosenker said the problem must be dealt with otherwise there will be catastrophic results.

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