Eight crashes in eight months

Air disasters mount in East Asia

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At least 203 people were killed February 16 in the crash of a China Airlines jet which was attempting to land at Taipei International Airport in Taiwan. The Airbus 300 jet crashed short of the runway, engulfing a half dozen houses in flames. All 196 people on board died in the tragedy, as well as at least seven people on the ground.

The plane was returning from the Indonesian resort island of Bali. Most of its passengers were Taiwanese tourists, including one family of 13 people. Also killed in the crash were the governor of Taiwan's central bank, Sheu Yuan-dong, and four other central bank officials, who were returning from talks with Indonesian officials on the Asian financial crisis.

The crash is the eighth of a scheduled airliner in south and east Asia since last summer, when the economic crisis began to put increasing pressure on the finances of both the governments and the airlines of the region. The other crashes include:

July 17: A Dutch-built Sempati Air Fokker commuter plane crashed near a housing complex on the island of Java, killing 27 people.

August 6: Korean Air Lines Flight 801, a Boeing 747 jet bringing vacationers from Seoul to the US-owned island of Guam, crashed on approach to Agana airport, killing 225 of the 254 passengers and crew. The airport had neither a fully-staffed control tower nor a properly equipped landing system.

August 11: A Formosa Airlines Dornier 228 commuter jet crashed on approach to Matsu airport, near the mainline Chinese city of Fuzhou, killing all 16 people on board. The plane crashed in light rain but with adequate visibility. The airport, located on a rocky offshore island, has no electronic facilities, and pilots must make visual landings.

September 26: A Garuda Airlines (Indonesia) Airbus A-300 crashed into a jungle-covered mountain slope as it approached Medan, capital of the Indonesian island of Sumatra, killing all 234 people aboard. The crash was blamed on the dense cloud of smog covering most of Indonesia because of widespread burning of the jungle by timber companies.

December 19: A SilkAir (Singapore) Boeing 737 jet crashed into a river on Sumatra, killing all 104 people on board. The plane, in service only ten months and the newest in the airline's fleet, was on a routine flight from Jakarta to Singapore in clear weather when it plunged out of the sky.

January 26: A Fokker F-27 operated by Myanmar Airways crashed on takeoff from Thandwe, a city 150 miles northwest of Rangoon in Myanmar (Burma), killing 14 and injuring 20 of the 45 passengers and crew.

February 2: A Cebu Pacific Air DC-9 airplane crashed into Mt. Sumagaya, on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, while on a flight from Tacloban to Cagayan de Oro. Of the 104 passengers and crew, 89 were killed. Cebu Pacific is a new company, established in 1996 after the privatization of the government-owned Philippine Airlines.

The safety records of China Airlines and the Indonesian state airline Garuda are among the worst in the world. China Airlines suffered a disaster nearly identical to the Taipei crash less than four years ago, when another Airbus A-300 jet crashed short of the runway in Nagoya, Japan, killing all 264 people aboard.

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