

Russian plane crashes in Indonesia

Clara Weiss
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On Wednesday, a Russian Sukhoi Superjet 100 crashed into the rock face of a volcano near the Indonesian capital of Jakarta. No survivors have been found and it is presumed that all 50 occupants of the aircraft were killed. Those on board the demonstration flight were mainly representatives of Indonesian media and airlines.

The twin-engine regional airliner disappeared from radar on Wednesday about 20 minutes after takeoff. It was only on Thursday morning that the remains of the plane were found on the slopes of the 2,200-meter-high Salak volcano, 50 kilometres south of Jakarta.

According to the Russian web site gazeta.ru, technical failures and errors committed by the crew are being blamed for the crash, which took place during difficult weather conditions. The plane apparently hit the slope at full speed.

The Superjet had been plagued by problems and its production had been repeatedly delayed by technical defects. There were a number of reports of problems with the engines. The Russian airline Aeroflot, which has used the model since the end of 2011, complained about technical defects in March. The aircraft has not been certified for EU airspace. The problems in the production and delivery of the aircraft have driven up costs and experts now suggest that the model will never break even. The Russian government and banks have invested several billions in the project.

The Sukhoi Superjet 100 is the first passenger plane to be developed in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union and was considered a status symbol by the Kremlin, which hoped the aircraft would help restore the Russian aviation industry to a leading position in the world. A number of Western companies such as Boeing and Alenia were involved in its development and several states, including Italy and Saudi Arabia, have already ordered a number of the jets.

In Indonesia, another demonstration flight had proceeded successfully and more flights were planned in Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Laos and Vietnam. The plane crash could now signal the end for the project.

The Russian aerospace industry, which was an international leader in Soviet times, has literally collapsed in recent years. Its demise is symptomatic of the catastrophic demise of Russian industry and infrastructure over the last 20 years.

Russia has experienced a number of serious air accidents recently with many fatalities. In September last year, the entire team of the Locomotive Yaroslavl hockey club was killed in the crash of a Yakovlev Yak-42. The aircraft has no longer been used since then and was due to be replaced by the Sukhoi Superjet. The below-average performance of Putin and the ruling United Russia party in Yaroslavl in the Duma elections was attributed by many to widespread outrage over the crash.

In April, there was another crash by an airliner in Western Siberia, killing 31 of the 43 persons on board.

The vast majority of Russian aircraft are outmoded and do not fully comply with international safety standards. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, eight of the nine Russian aircraft that crashed last year dated back to the Soviet era. Citing security experts, however, the newspaper writes that the problem in many cases is not so much older aircraft, but lack of regulation and the poor training of pilots.

The number of air accidents with fatalities has increased markedly since 2009. In 2011, Russia ranked last place in worldwide rankings for aircraft safety, trailing behind developing countries such as Congo and Indonesia.



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