



Probe blames weather for Faridabad aircraft crash

[Smita Aggarwal](#): New Delhi, Mon Jan 09 2012

The probe panel set up for the Faridabad crash of a small Pilatus aircraft has attributed the “probable cause” of accident to weather-related phenomenon.

The air ambulance, which had seven on board including a terminally ill teenager, crashed 14,000 feet on a two-storey house in a residential colony in Faridabad. All seven were killed in the crash, which also resulted in the death of three others on the ground on May 25. At the time of the crash, the aircraft was 25 nautical miles away from its destination — Delhi airport. Reports said the plane encountered updraft and downdraft, resulting in disorientation of the two-member cockpit crew, who lost control.

Over the next two minutes, the aircraft spiraled downward, with an “unusually high rate of descent” varying between 6,000 and 12,000 feet per minute.

Right before the nine-seater Pilatus PC-12 entered bad weather, the report points towards delay on part of flight crew in diverting from winds and Air Traffic Controller’s (ATC) failure in providing the local weather, said a source.

“It was a dark night, so the aircraft was flying under instrument conditions (referring to flying with navigational aides and ATC assistance),” said the source.

The aircraft, of Air Charter Services, was chartered by the Patna-based business family of the 19-year-old comatose Rahul Raj, who was suffering from acute jaundice and stage one of hepatitis. Raj’s cousin Ratnesh Kumar, two doctors and one medical attendant from Delhi’s Apollo Hospital were killed on board the flight, and three of the family — a woman, her daughter and daughter-in-law — died when the plane crashed on their Parvatia Colony house.

The investigation report is likely to be accepted by the government soon, following which it will be released.

The accident occurred within 400 metres, which said sources, clearly means the aircraft spun out of control and nosedived. The investigation relied on radar pictures to build the height profile and rate of turn in absence of flight recorder device, which is mandated on aircraft weighing above 5,700 kg — a Pilatus weighs around 4,700 kg.

The probe panel, first of its kind independent crash investigation, headed by former safety head in the Indian Air Force (IAF) Air Marshal (Retd) P S Ahluwalia, has also pointed towards gaps in existing rules on air ambulances framed by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

“The existing rules on medical evacuation or air ambulances are ambiguous. It is not clear whether single-engine aircraft can be deployed for air ambulances,” said the source. DGCA performed the dual role of regulator and investigator till the setting up of a probe panel.

“The air accident investigation must be independent. An independent investigation board should be constituted,” the source said. Formation of such a board is one of the major recommendations of the report.

Some of its other recommendations include mandating flight recorders on all types of aircraft and formation of rules on air ambulances.