

172 people miraculously escape after BA jet catches fire in US

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Houston: All 172 people on board a British Airways plane had a miraculous escape today after an engine of the aircraft burst into flames on the runway just before taking off from Las Vegas to London.

The left engine of 257-seat Boeing 777 burst into flames on the runway at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas shortly after 0430 IST while it was about to depart for London's Gatwick Airport with 159 passengers and 13 crew members on board, according to the airport authorities.

Heavy black smoke and orange flames could be seen pouring from under the plane's wings, sending passengers fleeing quickly from the aircraft and across the tarmac before about 50 firefighters doused the aircraft in minutes.

Officials said 14 people aboard the Flight 2276 were taken to hospital for minor injuries, most as a result of sliding down the inflatable chutes to escape. Fire officials said paramedics on the scene were also evaluating some passengers.

Firefighters stationed at the airport reached the plane two minutes after getting reports of flames and within another three minutes, everyone inside the plane had escaped. After firefighters extinguished the flames, emergency vehicles could be seen surrounding the aircraft which was left a sooty gray from the smoke and fire retardant.

Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Ian Gregor said the plane's left engine caught fire and an investigation was underway.

The National Transportation Safety Board was collecting information about the incident, said Eric Weiss, a spokesman for the agency in Washington.

British Airways said the fire was caused by a technical issue. One of the airport's runways was shut down but operations continued on the other three runways, officials said. Las Vegas airport is the ninth-busiest in the US and had nearly 43 million passengers last year.

The airport has been taking steps to accommodate more international travellers seeking direct flights to Europe and Asia, including adding new gates to accommodate wide-body double-decker jets.

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