

Bangladesh flight hijack: Minister says not sure if 'hijacker' was carrying 'toy gun'

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Dhaka: Bangladesh's top civil aviation officials on Monday said that they are probing how a "hijacker" was able to bypass airport security with a "toy pistol" and board a Dubai-bound plane.

"We are still trying to understand the situation," State Minister for Civil Aviation Mahbub Ali told reporters.

The minister also said that authorities are yet to ascertain whether the suspected hijacker was carrying a "toy gun".

"We have checked all our airport security scanning system. We didn't find any flaw in the security system there," he said.

The flight, en route Dubai from Dhaka via Chattogram, with 148 passengers and crews on board was hijacked soon after it left Dhaka Sunday.

The pilot contacted Chattogram's Shah Amanat International Airport and made an emergency landing. Passengers were then evacuated safely from the plane.

After two tense hours, a commando operation put an end to the hijacking in about eight minutes. Army and air force officials said a suspect holding a pistol had been killed.

Asked how the weapon had gotten on board the plane, Civil Aviation Secretary Mohibul Haque said: "We do not know whether it was a weapon. We do not know if it was a toy pistol. The full details will be available in the investigation report."

Bangladesh Civil Aviation Authority (CAAB) Chairman Air Vice Marshal Naim Hassan said sounds of gunshots were heard in the midair while its crew reported they saw the pistol emitting smokes.

"But it doesn't prove that it was a real pistol because, we are yet to find out bullet mark or shell inside the airplane... There are some toy guns which look like a real one that can make sound and even create smoke," he said.

He said that they cannot make any sweeping comment about the incident before getting the investigation committee report.

Officials said a five-member committee has started investigating the incident as it was asked to submit report to the ministry within five days.

The officials confirmed that the "hijacker" was a domestic passenger.

In a separate press briefing, the Rapid Action Battalion identified the 25-year-old suspected hijacker as Polash Ahmed, who had married a film actress.

Earlier, the officials said the "hijacker" appeared to have been "mentally imbalanced" and that he wanted to speak to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

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