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Report: In Smolensk Crash That Killed Polish Leader, Crew Pressured to Land in Fog

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Lech Kaczynski, Poland's president killed in a 2010 plane crash.

In the minutes before a 2010 plane crash that killed Poland's president, members of the president's entourage urged the crew to land despite thick fog, according to what a radio station said was a leaked transcript of cockpit conversations.

In the transcript, the crew on several occasions ask people to be quiet or to leave the cockpit, and conversations suggest people in or around the cockpit were drinking beer, though there is no indication the crew themselves consumed alcohol.

The crash, in Smolensk, western Russia, killed 96 people, including Polish President Lech Kaczynski, his wife, the central bank governor, top army commanders and other high-ranking officials. An investigation is still under way.

A spokesman for the Warsaw main military prosecutor's office, which is conducting

the investigation into the crash, said the transcript was inaccurate in several places, but did not specify which parts were wrong.

The spokesman, Major Marcin Maksjan, also said that Polish tests had previously shown that neither crew members nor other people referred to in the leaked transcript were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the crash.

The radio station, RMF FM, said the transcript was from the cockpit voice recorder recovered from the aircraft wreckage soon after the crash. It said Polish investigators last year used new techniques to decipher parts of the recording provided to them by Russian authorities, which were of such poor quality that they had previously been unintelligible.

According to the transcript, the crew was worried about reports of thick fog at the airport, and discussed turning back or diverting, but came under pressure to keep going so the president would not have to cancel his engagement.

The radio station said the head of diplomatic protocol in the Polish foreign ministry told the captain: "We will try until we make it" roughly 15 minutes before the crash.

Polish air force commander in chief Andrzej Blasik, traveling on the plane as a passenger, was in the cockpit and told the pilots 41 seconds before the crash: "You'll make it easily," according to the transcript.

As the captain and crew tried to decide whether to land, they were distracted by people in or around the cockpit, according to the transcript.

The transcript cites a person in the cockpit or in its immediate proximity asking someone: "What is it?"

The other person replies: "Beer, and you are not drinking?"

Two minutes later a stewardess asks somebody in or near the cockpit: "Will you drink?" The person replies: "Yeees."

The crash happened as the president and his entourage were on their way to a ceremony to commemorate the Katyn massacre, when the Soviet Union's secret police killed thousands of Polish officers in a forest in western Russia in 1940.

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