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38 Killed After Azerbaijan Airlines Plane Crashes in Kazakhstan

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Issa Tazhenbayev / AFP

Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister Qanat Bozymbaev told local media that 38 people were killed when an Azerbaijan Airlines plane crashed early Wednesday in the west of the country after veering from its scheduled route.

Kazakh authorities said 29 people survived the crash of the Embraer 190 near the city of Aktau, an oil and gas hub on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. The plane was flying from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the city of Grozny in Russia's republic of Chechnya.

Russia's civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia said preliminary findings suggested that the aircraft crashed after colliding with a flock of birds. Kadyrov Grozny International Airport claimed that thick fog was to blame for the airplane's rerouting.

A video of the crash shared on social media showed the plane — with its landing gear deployed — falling dramatically toward the ground before it burst into flames.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev cut short a visit to Russia where he had been due to attend an informal summit of leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a grouping of former Soviet nations, his office said in a statement.

Azerbaijan Airlines, the country's flag carrier, said the plane had 62 passengers and five crew on board. It added that the plane "made an emergency landing" around three kilometers (1.9 miles) from Aktau.

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Transportation officials in Kazakhstan said that of the plane's passengers, 37 were from Azerbaijan, six were from Kazakhstan, three were from Kyrgyzstan and 16 were from Russia.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Situations Ministry said its personnel put out a fire that broke out when the plane crashed. The ministry said that 150 emergency workers were at the scene.

The health ministry said a special flight was being sent from the Kazakh capital of Astana with specialist doctors to treat the injured. Kazakhstan said it had launched an investigation into the crash.

Azerbaijan's first lady Mehriban Aliyeva, who is also the country's first vice president, said she was "deeply saddened by the news of the tragic loss of lives in the plane crash near Aktau."

"I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims. Wishing them strength and patience! I also wish a speedy recovery to the injured," she said on Instagram.

The plane's course on Flight Radar 24 showed it flying over the republic of Dagestan along the Caspian Sea coast, after which it disappeared from tracking only to show up around an hour later off course and flying low above the water near western Kazakhstan before crashing.

According to the flight tracking service, "strong GPS jamming" caused the aircraft to temporarily disappear from radar, possibly suggesting it was exposed to air defense systems in Russia.

"At 04:40 UTC we lost the ADS-B signal. At 06:07 UTC we picked up the ADS-B signal again before it crashed at 06:28 UTC," Flight Radar 24 wrote on X.

Later on Wednesday, online video of the passenger jet's tailfin showed it riddled with holes, sparking further speculation that it may have been targeted by air defense systems as it approached Grozny.

Chechnya, along with nearby regions, was targeted by Ukrainian drones early Wednesday.

The Kremlin-funded RT news network cited a surviving passenger as claiming that the pilot tried landing the plane in Grozny three times before "something exploded."

AFP contributed reporting.

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