

Premium

Home / Business / Companies / Airlines

Updated

Flydubai axe attack: Aircraft ‘30 seconds’ from crashing in dive, relief crew were heroes, pilot trainer says



John Weekes

Senior Business Reporter · NZ Herald · 7 Oct, 2026 08:00 AM 4 mins to read

Follow author

Security screening for pilots and the relevance of the axe in the cockpit are under scrutiny after the Flydubai hijack attempt.

Airline pilot and Massey University School of Aviation chief executive Ashok Poduval said relief crew on board Flight 1073 faced extraordinary challenges.

“They did a fantastic job, recovering the aircraft from where it was, flying it with a portion of the rudder missing and then making the decision to land in Tabuk.”

Airlines sometimes carried additional crew, deploying them to a destination so they could be ready to begin duties on later flights.

The flight was heading from Dubai to Tel Aviv but was landed in Saudi Arabia after the attack.

Poduval said it was preposterous to suggest anybody with no pilot training would have landed the Boeing 737 MAX 8 jet.

“That’s strictly for the movies.”

Poduval said the incident was likely to become highly politicised given the volatile politics of the Middle East.

When pilot Smit Machchhar was allegedly attacked with the axe kept in the cockpit, the aircraft plunged.

“Most of these jet airliners are extremely strong and this one flew outside of its limits and survived.”

Poduval said stresses on the entire aircraft would have been extreme.

“The aircraft was in a completely uncontrolled dive. It was probably 30 seconds away from striking the ground.”

Poduval said the sturdiness of modern jet airliners was due largely to advances in technology and the use of more composite materials.

The Boeing 737 MAX family has faced intense safety scrutiny from regulators over the years.

But on the weekend, US regulators said a software glitch in some 737 MAX flight computers posed no safety concerns.

Poduval said injured captain Machchhar deserved credit for getting the cockpit door open.

He said training Machchhar received in New Zealand more than 15 years ago was unlikely to be of much relevance to his response on the Flydubai flight.

He said it was unprecedented for a fire axe, also known as a crash axe, to be misused as a weapon as it was on Flight 1073.

The fire axe was intended to help crew escape if they were trapped.

But Poduval said he could recall no incident where a fire axe was used for such a purpose.

The hijack attempt has led to some calls for more scrutiny of pilot security screening.

Latest from Airlines

Premium Airlines

‘Schoolyard bullies’: Airline bosses eye up fight with powerful fuel companies

05 Oct 05:00 PM

Premium Airlines

The superstar aviator who twice chose seclusion

02 Oct 06:50 AM

Premium Airlines

Auckland Airport says multibillion-dollar project now past halfway

01 Oct 04:00 PM

Sponsored

Sri Lanka: Where ancient ruins and leopard safaris share an island

05 Oct 10:53 AM

A former Israeli national security adviser told AP pilots and crew would likely face more scrutiny.

But the Australian Federation of Air Pilots reportedly said security screening of members could not get more intense than it already was.

The Australian newspaper said a survey of 1800 pilots in that country last year found 85% regarded security screening to be inefficient.

A further 77% said they encountered issues including excessive or invasive physical searches, inappropriate touching or lack of consent for pat downs.

Poduval said it was incorrect to assume pilots could travel with items passengers were prohibited from taking on board.

He said pilots generally did not have to queue the same way passengers did but that was largely because they had to be on the aircraft first.

But the possible radicalisation of alleged Flydubai attacker Hammam al-Hammami has also been queried.

Police have said [al-Hammami had been in New Zealand](#) between November 2018 and May 2019 on a six-month student visa.

Assistant Commissioner Michael Johnson said al-Hammami was in the country to “complete a portion of his flight training for a UK-based company, no longer operating in New Zealand”.

In New Zealand, the Civil Aviation Authority requires pilots to complete a “fit and proper person” check.

That included providing a criminal justice and road safety record, and supplying a referee.

Reuters, citing Israeli intelligence sources, said al-Hammami told UAE interrogators he planned the attack before Flydubai hired him.

In New Zealand, airport workers, contractors, visitors and non-passengers working in airside areas are screened.

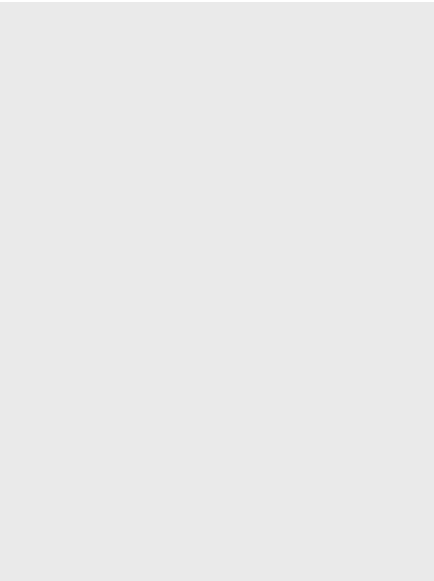
“Prohibited items are the same as those not allowed in the cabin of an aircraft,” an Aviation Security Service guide said.

John Weekes is a business journalist covering aviation. He also has experience covering consumer affairs, crime, politics and courts.

- Stay ahead with the latest market moves, corporate updates, and economic insights by subscribing to our **Business newsletter** – your essential weekly round-up of all the business news you need.

Recommended for you

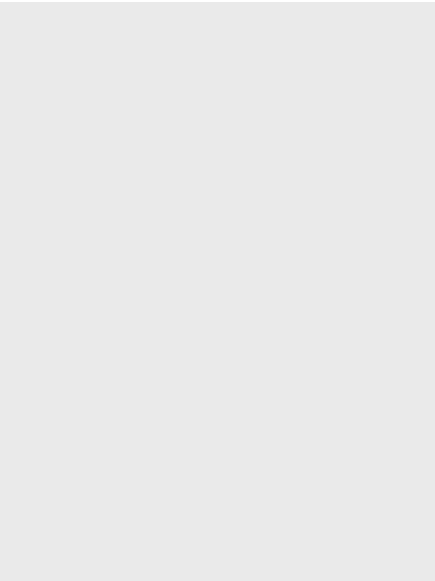
Refresh for more



World

Teacher guilty of sex with teenage boy also sexually abused two schoolgirls

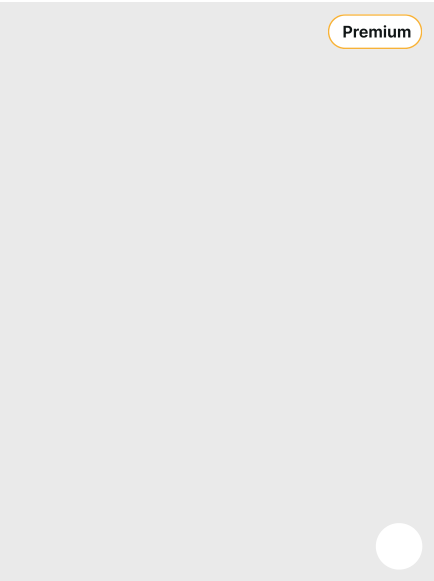
11 Sep 09:26 AM



World

UAE investigation says Flydubai co-pilot planned 'terrorist act' on Israel flight

04 Oct 12:31 PM



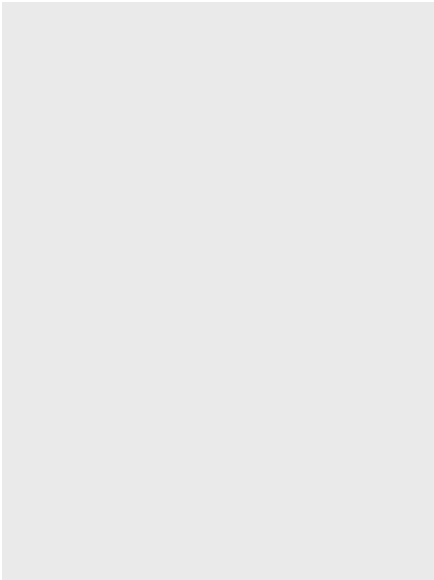
Premium



Opinion
Alex Powell

Why Red Bull are running out of excuses to sack Liam Lawson

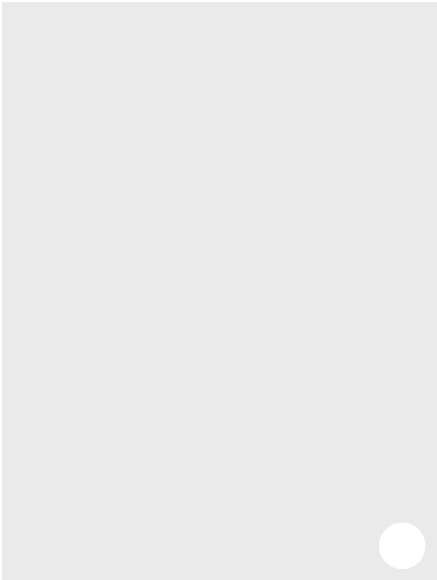
05 Oct 06:15 PM



World

The bloody brawl for control on board 'hijacked' flight to Israel

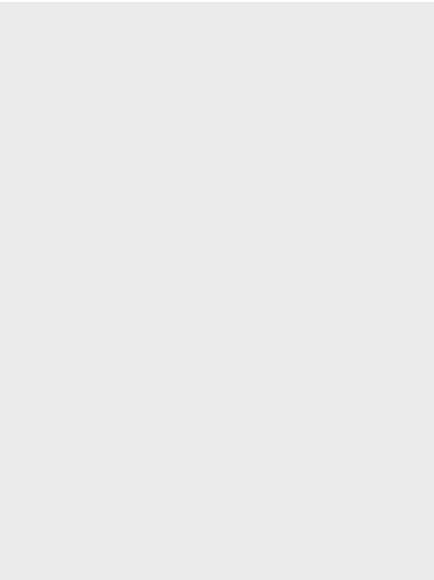
01 Oct 07:53 AM



New Zealand

Young Irish sportswoman dies months after moving to NZ

05 Oct 12:22 PM



World

'True hero': Netanyahu invites NZ-trained flydubai pilot to Israel

04 Oct 07:56 AM

Paid Promoted Content

Latest from Airlines

Premium

Airlines

‘Schoolyard bullies’: Airline bosses eye up fight with powerful fuel companies

Airlines welcome \$5.7m in Government help as soaring fuel bills bite.

05 Oct 05:00 PM

Premium

Airlines

Auckland Airport says multibillion-dollar project now past halfway

01 Oct 04:00 PM

Premium

Airlines

The superstar aviator who twice chose seclusion

02 Oct 06:50 AM

Sponsored

Sri Lanka: Where ancient ruins and leopard safaris share an island

05 Oct 10:53 AM

Paid Promoted Content

NZ HERALD

- About NZ Herald
- Meet the journalists
- Newsletters
- Classifieds
- Help & support
- Contact us
- House rules
- Privacy Policy
- Terms of use
- Competition terms & conditions
- Our use of AI

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

- NZ Herald e-editions
- Daily puzzles & quizzes
- Manage your digital subscription
- Manage your print subscription
- Subscribe to the NZ Herald newspaper
- Subscribe to Herald Premium
- Gift a subscription
- Subscriber FAQs
- Subscription terms & conditions
- Promotions and subscriber benefits

NZME NETWORK

- The New Zealand Herald
- The Northland Age
- The Northern Advocate
- Waikato Herald
- Bay of Plenty Times
- Rotorua Daily Post
- Hawke's Bay Today
- Whanganui Chronicle
- Viva
- NZ Listener
- Newstalk ZB
- BusinessDesk
- OneRoof
- Driven Car Guide
- iHeart Radio
- Restaurant Hub

NZME

- About NZME
- NZME careers
- Advertise with NZME
- NZME Digital Performance Marketing
- Book your classified ad
- Photo sales
- NZME Events



© Copyright 2026 NZME Publishing Limited