



### Top Story



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#### **Mount Everest plane crash blamed on pilot error**

Investigators in Nepal have blamed the crash of a De Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otter near Mount Everest in October last year on pilot error. Eighteen of the nineteen on board were killed when Yeti Airlines Flight 103 struck a rock at the side of the runway at Lukla Airport and caught fire.

#### **Maria de Jesus, the world's oldest person, dies at age 115**

Portuguese Maria de Jesus died Tuesday, at 115 years and 114 days old. The vegetarian, non-smoking, teetotal farmer had only visited a hospital once in her life, outliving her husband by 57 years, and two of her five children. The cause of her death is either unknown or has not yet been released.

De Jesus had five children, 11 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and six great-great-grandchildren. She had no need

for a mobility scooter — instead she lived on her farm and moved with a walking frame, declining nursing care. However, due to sight and hearing problems, she could not recognize her family, including daughter Madalena, 84, with whom she lived.

She never went to school, and could not write, but one of her children said of her that she never "fell ill, nor took any medication."

She became the world's oldest person after the November 26 death of American Edna Parker, who was 115 years and 220 days old. Her position as the world's oldest person has now been taken by American Gertrude Baines, 114.

#### **NASA issues survivability report on Columbia crash**

NASA has issued a report on survivability during the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, entitled "Columbia Crew Survival Investigation Report". Although the report finds the accident was impossible to survive, it still faulted a number of design issues with the astronauts' equipment.

The accident investigation report was released in 2003, the year of the crash. During launch on January 16, the spacecraft's wing was holed when a chunk of foam detached and struck it. The shuttle then broke up on re-entry on February 1 over Texas, killing the seven on board.

This new report reveals details of

what happened to the astronauts during the accident sequence, although some parts have remained confidential to the victims' families. The report reveals that within seconds of the breakup commencing the crew became unconscious due to the rapid depressurization and that they never regained consciousness prior to their deaths.

The report notes that the cabin began spinning wildly, causing some of the astronauts' helmets to come off. The report noted that most on board were secured only by lap harnesses that offered no restraint to the upper body and were not designed to cope with sideways motion, meaning "lethal trauma" was caused by the rotation. However, the report was unable to determine whether the astronauts had died from oxygen deprivation or the extreme nature of their injuries.

The pressure suits the crew wore, introduced after the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, were criticised as the crew could not keep their visors down throughout re-entry due to a design limitation that would have caused excess levels of oxygen to be present had they done so, leaving the suits unsealed. The gloves also made many tasks difficult or impossible. When the accident occurred, three people were not wearing gloves, one was not wearing a helmet, and none had their visors down.

The helmets also did not conform to the heads of the wearers. Upon disintegration, the occupants were

exposed to extreme heat and high friction from re-entry and the astronauts were likely dead by the time the shuttle had broken up.

The report added that although the crew all wore parachutes, they had to be activated by the crew — impossible as they were unconscious. The report concluded that future spacecraft require sturdier construction and better restraints, while safety devices should be automatic. NASA is designing better suits and helmets.

### **Mathematician Martin Taylor awarded knighthood**

Pure mathematics professor and Vice President of the Royal Society Martin Taylor is among the scientists honoured in the British New Years Honours List. Professor Taylor, who becomes a Knight Bachelor for services to science, headed the SCORE group, which consisted of science teachers who advised the government on how to boost school pupils' interest in the sciences.

Taylor is known in mathematics for his work on the properties and structures of algebraic numbers. In particular he proved in 1981 the Fröhlich Conjecture. Albrecht Fröhlich was his PhD supervisor at King's College London. The conjecture relates the symmetries of algebraic integers to the behaviour of certain analytic functions called Artin L-functions. At the young age of 33 he was appointed to a chair in pure mathematics at UMIST and continued in this position until the merger with the Victoria University of Manchester in 2004 when he became a professor in the School of Mathematics of the newly formed University of Manchester.

Taylor has received numerous honours including the London Mathematical Society Whitehead Prize in 1982 and shared the Adams Prize in 1983. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1996. He was President of the London Mathematical Society from 1998 to 2000. In 2003 he received a Royal Society Wolfson Merit award and he became Chairman of the International Review of Mathematics (Steering group). In 2004 he was appointed Physical Secretary and Vice-President of the Royal Society and in 2006 he awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Leicester, the university in the town of his birth.

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The only survivor of the crash was the aircraft's captain. Twelve Germans, four Nepalis and two Australians were killed. The flight had departed from Katmandu and was attempting to land at Lukla, which is at an elevation of 9,200 feet (2,800 meters), and has a sheer drop at the runway's end.

The report says the pilots had underestimated deteriorating weather conditions during approach, and had attempted landing after entering a thick patch of fog. Investigators examined the crash site and interviewed eyewitnesses before producing the report, which has been submitted to the government.

### **New Year fire kills at least 59, injures 212 more at Bangkok pub**

A Thai inferno greeted the world and the Year of the earth Ox (牛) after a pyrotechnic display started a blaze which ripped through Santika, a three-story Bangkok nightclub, in Ekkamai Soi 9 (Sukhumvit 63), Ekkamai district, Thong Lor. Police Colonel Suphin Sapphuang has confirmed that at least 59 people are dead - 53 at the fire scene and six later in various hospitals. At least 223 people were injured, including 29 foreigners; all have been taken to Bangkok hospitals, including Ramkhamhaeng, Bangkok, Kluaynam Thai 2, Vipa-Ram hospitals, for emergency treatment. Thong Lo (or Thong Lor or Thonglor, ทองหล่อ a.k.a. Sukhumvit Soi 55), is a road in Watthana district, Bangkok, Thailand.

According to Gen. Jongrak Jutanont and media reports, the victims who suffered injuries include at least four Britons, including Steven Hall, a British national, two South Korean, one Singaporean, and four Japanese nationals, and citizens of France, Australia, Nepal, and the Netherlands. Media reports reveal most of the fatalities are Thais but foreign residents and international tourists are also among the fire victims of the "Bad Boy Party". Teo Sze Siong, a Singaporean has died, while one of the Japanese, Wada Keiichi, 25, has 60 percent burns and is in a coma. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) says it has confirmed "three Australians - a 29-year-old woman, her 30-year-old brother and a 49-year-old man - have been injured" in the fire. Firemen have put out the blaze after two hours, which started on the upper

floor.

Siriyodsophon said.

Lt. Sutin Pongkhamphan has revealed a stampede of about 1,000 celebrants inside the pub, which has few exits, has caused most of the deaths and serious injuries. Others have also died due to burns, smoke inhalation and suffocation. "The fire spread very quickly because there was a lot of fuel in the club, like alcohol, foam and balloons," he added. Police Lieutenant Colonel Prawit Kantwol has further explained that "the fire started from the area of the stage where a band was playing. There were some pyrotechnics and it appears that they started the blaze."

Senior fireman Wacharatpong Sri-Saard has provided details saying "there was only one main way to get out from the front. People who worked there were able to escape from the back because they knew the exits, but the others had no chance." The club's New Year's party poster advertising is entitled "Goodbye Santika," a dire omen and ironic promo gimmick, since the owner has planned to transfer the building to a new location because of termination of lease contract.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, on Thursday morning, has said that the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) has established a coordinating assistance centre for injured victims.

The Asian Tribune says 30 bodies are "very difficult to identify". It has further reported that all charred bodies have been delivered to the Chulalongkorn Hospital for forensic study and identification with the aid of the Police Hospital. "39 bodies had been identified by Thursday afternoon — 38 Thais and one Singaporean," Police Major Akaluk

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