

# Article 1:

## AirAsia crash: Faulty part 'major factor'

Faulty equipment was a "major factor" in the AirAsia plane crash last December that killed all 162 people on board, Indonesian officials say.

The plane's rudder control system malfunctioned four times during the flight - a fault that occurred 23 times in the preceding year, officials said.

Their report added that the crew's response contributed to the disaster.

The Airbus A320-200, travelling from Surabaya to Singapore, crashed into the Java Sea on 28 December 2014.

Investigators had initially indicated that stormy weather was a major factor in the crash - however, they now say that this was not a cause.

The new report from the National Transport Safety Committee, released after a year-long investigation, found that the soldering on a tiny electronic part in the system that controlled the rudder was cracked, causing it to send four warning signals to the pilots.

The crew tried to fix the problem by resetting the computer system, but this disabled the autopilot. They then lost control of the plane.

The plane then entered "a prolonged stall condition that was beyond the capability of the flight crew to recover", the report said.

Maintenance crews were aware of the problem as it had occurred 23 times in the past year, and resetting the system was one of several methods used previously to address it, the report added.

The report also said that:

- Inadequacies in the maintenance system led to "unresolved repetitive faults occurring with shorter intervals"
- There appeared to be miscommunication between the pilot and co-pilot - at one point, the pilot commanded "pull down" but the plane was ascending
- At another point, the two men appeared to be pushing their controls in opposite directions

The report does not apportion blame or liability, but is intended to help the industry avoid future accidents.

Sri Budi Siswardani lost her son Bhima Aly Wicaksana in the crash.

She told the BBC's Indonesian service: "The report today brought back all the trauma, grief and loss... I don't want to be angry with AirAsia, what's the use of anger? In the end it will only hurt me and stop me from moving on.

"We accept Allah's plan for us. But I do want the government to make sure it doesn't happen again. Don't let the disaster of 28 December ever happen again."

Sribudi Siswardani's 31-year-old son was on board AirAsia flight QZ8501 - on his first trip overseas

Malaysia-based AirAsia's Chief Executive Tony Fernandes said: "There is much to be learned here for AirAsia, the manufacturer and the aviation industry."

"We will not leave any stone unturned to make sure the industry learns from this tragic incident."

Since the crash, AirAsia had carried out 51 measures to improve safety standards, the report said.

Meanwhile, an Airbus spokesman said: "Airbus has just received the final accident report. We are now carefully studying its content. With safety being top priority Airbus is fully committed to push the safety track record of our industry even further."

(Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34972263>)

## Article 2:

# Syria bombing: Where UK parties stand

David Cameron has urged MPs to back him over military intervention in Syria against so-called Islamic State extremists.

The prime minister set out what he called a "comprehensive case" before taking questions from 103 MPs over two hours and 40 minutes in the Commons last week.

He set out his response to the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, which had warned the government against pressing ahead with air strikes.

MPs rejected air strikes against Syrian government targets in 2013. This time around, the PM said there would not be a Commons vote unless there was a clear majority for action, saying a government defeat would "hand a publicity coup" to IS.

Following the Paris attacks earlier this month, some MPs' minds are said to have changed and Mr Cameron has called a debate and vote for Wednesday - so where do the parties stand?

## The Conservative Party

The majority of Conservative MPs would vote to back extending UK air strikes against Islamic State targets in Syria.

Thirty Conservative MPs rebelled against David Cameron in August 2013, when the Commons rejected his first attempt to launch bombing raids on Syria - albeit against the Assad regime rather than IS.

A number of MPs who defied their party then - including Charles Walker and Andrew Bridgen - now say they will support the government, Mr Walker suggesting there was "no room for delay" in taking the fight to the extremists.

One of the 2013 rebels told the BBC they predicted about 15 Conservatives would still oppose any kind of intervention, arguing that bombing could be open-ended and will not help achieve a political solution to the civil war in Syria.

Tory MP Julian Lewis - who chairs the Commons Defence Select Committee - told the BBC IS could not be defeated militarily unless Western powers worked with the Syrian regime.

*Total number of Conservative MPs: 331*

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## The Labour Party

Labour is split on Syria. Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, until recently chairman of the Stop the War Coalition, has written to all of his MPs saying he does not back Mr Cameron's case for air strikes.

With at least half of his shadow cabinet believed to be in favour of intervention, this letter generated an angry reaction from some on his front bench, with one member warning of resignations if Mr Corbyn tried to impose his view on the party when it comes to the vote.

The party leadership also asked for people to email their views on Syria bombing and claimed that 75% of the 100,000 who responded opposed the bombing.

After what was apparently a stormy shadow cabinet meeting on Monday, the Labour leader has offered a free vote on the issue - which means his MPs won't be instructed to vote in a certain way. BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg said that, as of Tuesday, around 50 Labour MPs had indicated they were likely to vote for Syria bombing.

*Total number of Labour MPs: 231*

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## **The Scottish National Party**

The SNP opposed military action in 2013 but has vastly increased its Westminster presence since the general election and can exert real influence.

The party says it will not support air strikes in Syria unless the prime minister is able to address "key questions" that "remain unanswered".

Angus Robertson, the SNP's Westminster leader, said there was no effective ground support in place to take and hold territory.

And he said there was no fully-costed reconstruction plan in place for Syria.

He added: "The prime minister has asked us to consider his plan. We have listened closely. However, key questions posed by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee remain unanswered.

"And unless the prime minister answers these questions satisfactorily, the Scottish National Party will not vote for airstrikes in Syria."

*Total number of SNP MPs: 54*

(Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34710658>)

## Article 3:

# Adam Lambert concert sparks Singapore culture debate

By Tessa Wong BBC News, Singapore

A growing controversy over a Singapore concert starring openly gay US singer Adam Lambert has highlighted a widening cultural divide in the strait-laced city-state.

Lambert will be the headline act of a lavish New Year's Eve show organised and televised live nationally by state-owned broadcaster MediaCorp.

Over the course of the week, thousands of Singaporeans have flocked online to sign two duelling petitions. One, started on Wednesday, calls on MediaCorp and the government to drop Lambert, on account of his support for gay rights and reputation for risqué performances, which it called "contrary to mainstream Singaporean values". Comments on the petition called Lambert's performances "disgusting", "disturbing" and "lewd". "Please give more wholesome role models to our youths," said one petitioner Elaine Lui.

A counter petition was started on Thursday night and quickly gathered steam, calling on organisers to keep Lambert as a demonstration that Singapore "shuns discrimination and promotes diverse inclusive points of view".

"In no way whatsoever does his sexual orientation have any relation to his role as an entertainer and singer. Asking for him to be banned on TV is ludicrous and is akin to asking retailers to stop selling iPhones because [Apple has a] gay CEO," said commenter Ivan Lin.

As of Friday evening, both petitions were neck-to-neck with thousands of signatures each, drawing in supporters from Malaysia, Australia, Hong Kong and Japan as well.

Lambert previously performed in Singapore in 2013 to few complaints, and concerts by other artists such as Lady Gaga have generated greater controversy.

## Heated debate

The debate over Lambert this time stems from a cultural divide in Singapore that has widened recently. A modern and open city-state with a thriving gay scene and liberal minority, much of its society also remains deeply conservative. A religious right, supported by some Christians and Muslims, has grown in tandem with a burgeoning gay rights movement.

The annual gay rights event Pink Dot, where supporters don pink as a message of inclusion, has sparked a counter campaign called Wear White where conservatives tog themselves in white as a symbol of purity. Both sides have become more vocal in recent years, and though the conflict has not gone beyond heated debate, it has unnerved Singapore officials charged with maintaining the peace on the tiny island. They have tried to strike a balance. A

controversial law that bans gay sex - a key flashpoint in the divide - remains on the books, but the government has promised never to enforce it.

Authorities have also sought to rein in both camps by curbing their public demonstrations, in some cases refusing permits to both conservative and gay rights groups to hold or expand their public events.

As for Lambert, they appear to have come to a compromise. MediaCorp has not dropped him - but has promised that the show will conform to strict broadcast regulations and be made "suitable for family audiences".

Meanwhile, Lambert has said in a statement that his performance would "celebrate the entire human family in all its diversity" and that he was "a uniter, not a divider".

(Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34941179>)

## Article 4:

# UK university applications fall by 4%, Ucas figures show

**The number of people applying for UK university places has fallen by more than 25,000 (4%) on last year, data from the admissions service Ucas shows.**

The figures show a sharp decline in those applying to study nursing courses - down 19% - and a continued fall in the number of mature students, notably in England and Northern Ireland.

The number of EU students planning to study in the UK has fallen by 5%.

It is the first decline since fees were last increased in England, in 2012. Fees in England will increase to £9,250 this year, and **student loans are subject to an increase in interest rates** - rising from 4.6% to 6.1% from this autumn.

University leaders said a number of factors could be fuelling the fall in applicants, including Brexit, higher fees and funding changes for trainee nurses and midwives. From 1 August, new nursing, midwifery and most allied health students will **no longer receive NHS bursaries** - instead, they will have access to the same student loans system as other students.

The latest Ucas figures show the number of people who had applied to UK universities for the coming academic year by the 30 June deadline was 649,700 - compared with 674,890 in 2016.

There have been reductions in applicants from all four countries in the UK. There were:

- 437,860 applications from students in England - down 5% from 459,430 last year
- 48,940 from Scotland - down 1% from 49,470
- 22,530 from Wales - down 5% from 23,740
- 20,290 from Northern Ireland - down 4% from 21,110

Applications from EU students fell from 51,850 in 2016 to 49,250 this year.

However, applicants from overseas countries outside of the European Union are up 2%, from 69,300 in 2016 to 70,830 this year.

There has been a significant drop in mature students (those aged 25 and over) in England and Northern Ireland - down 18% (11,190) and 13% (220) respectively.

### **Mature students**

Prof Les Ebdon, director of Fair Access to Higher Education, said: "The downward trend in mature student numbers is now one of the most pressing issues in fair access to higher education.

"Undoubtedly, the reasons behind the fall are complex and multiple, but universities and colleges should look to do what they can to reverse the decline in mature student applications, as a matter of urgency."

Dame Julia Goodfellow, president of Universities UK, said universities recognised that there were a number of issues to address.

"Continuing to communicate to European applicants that they are welcome and enrich our education system is important," she said.

"The decline in part-time and mature student entrants must also be addressed.

"We recognise also the concern about the total cost of going to university.

"Any analysis needs to cover the cost of maintenance and the interest rate on the loans."

Sarah Stevens, head of policy at the Russell Group, said it would be a concern if EU students were being put off by the uncertainties of Brexit.

"It's positive that applications from overseas students outside the EU have risen slightly," he said.

"International students bring social and cultural diversity to our campuses and this benefits all students, and they contribute £25.8bn to the UK economy."

The Department for Education pointed out that the number of 18-year-olds applying for university was at record levels despite the fall in the overall number of applicants.

A spokeswoman said: "Higher education reforms will give people more choice and universities will be expected to continue improving access and participation in higher education.

"The government is committed to supporting all young people to reach their full potential - whether that is going to university, starting an apprenticeship or taking up a technical qualification."

Pam Tatlow, chief executive of MillionPlus, said the application data from Ucas was "not good news". "As predicted, the abolition of bursaries has depressed rather than increased applications for nursing and there will be no additional nurses trained in spite of ministers' assurances," she said. "There is no doubt that the government's approach to Brexit is damaging and is creating huge uncertainties, both for EU students and UK universities."

(Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-40581643>)



## Article 5:

# Record number of environmental activists killed around the world

**Growing competition for land and natural resources saw a record number of environmental activists killed in 2016, says Global Witness.**

The **green group's report** details at least 200 murders across 24 countries, up significantly from 2015.

Disputes over mining were the cause of the greatest number of killings, followed by logging and agribusiness.

Brazil saw the most deaths overall, but there were big increases in Colombia and India.

Global Witness has been publishing annual reports on the threats to activists since 2012, although it has data going back to 2002.

The organisation compiles its analysis from media sources, information from other non-governmental organisations and from the UN. It also verifies the data with monitoring groups in priority countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and the Philippines.

Some 60% of the killings last year took place in Latin America, with a significant number of victims from indigenous communities. According to those who compiled the report, those doing the killing have become bolder in recent years.

"We've always thought of these cases taking place in remote isolated areas but we are seeing attacks becoming more brazen, and that's because so few of these cases result in successful prosecutions," said Billy Kyte from Global Witness.

"Indigenous people are massively over represented in the figures and that's because many of their lands overlap with lands rich in minerals and timber and also because they have less access to justice or communications."

Disputes about mining resulted in 33 murders, while those linked to logging increased from 15 to 23 in a year. A similar number were linked to agribusiness projects.

While Brazil saw the greatest number of killings with 49, Colombia saw a record high of 37. Although **a peace deal has been agreed** between the government and Farc rebels after 52 years of conflict, the hangover from the violence is still impacting environmental activists.

"What we believe is that communities are going back to try and reclaim their lands in the context of the peace process and in doing so are coming into conflict with paramilitaries, with organised crime and with those who have stolen their land during the internal violence," said Billy Kyte.

"There's also a power vacuum in some of these areas especially where the Farc had a lot of presence and that vacuum is being filled by organised crime and actors who want the land to grow monocultures like palm oil."

India also recorded a growth in environmental violence with a three-fold increase in deaths. The report's authors believe that this was sparked by a general crackdown on activism.

Almost half of those killed died in public protests or demonstrations.

One of the **most infamous murders of a green activist in 2016** was that of Berta Caceres, a Honduran campaigner who was shot after receiving dozens of death threats. However, Global Witness believes that her death has had some positive impacts.

"Although Honduras had 14 killings last year, this year only one person has been killed," said Billy Kyte.

"We did a lot of advocacy with the Honduran government and there has been huge international pressure after the killing of Berta. There are signs that some of that pressure is beginning to bear fruit but there are still many people being attacked."

The authors believe that banks and investors in big mining, agribusiness or logging projects should do more to ensure that killings are not being carried out in their name.

"Although they can seem one step removed from the violence, ultimately it's the investors money that is being invested in these projects that are causing this violence," said Billy Kyte.

"In the case of Berta Caceres, she received 33 public death threats before she was killed and not once did the investors speak out to try and ease the tensions around the dam project they were investing in."

(Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-40584139>)