

7 die as Air Force jet crashes in Abuja

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...CAS orders immediate investigation

...Buhari condoles with NAF, families of victims

By Kingsley Omonobi & Johnbosco Agbakwuru

A Nigerian Air Force Intelligence Reconnaissance aircraft crashed, yesterday, at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, killing all seven persons on board.

The military aircraft, a King Air B350 plane, crash-landed on final approach path of Abuja Runway 22 at 10:48 am, shortly after the pilot complained of engine failure.

The aircraft exploded on impact, triggering a ball of flames.

Aviation Minister, Hadi Sirika, who first confirmed the crash on his twitter handle, said: “A military aircraft, King Air 350, has just crashed short of our Abuja runway after reporting engine failure en route Minna.”

He said the aircraft, marked NAF 201, departed Abuja at 1033UTC with seven persons on board, including two crew members. “The aircraft reported engine failure at time 1039 and crashed landed on the final approach path of Abuja Runway 22 at time 1048UTC. Fire services are already at the scene of the accident. All seven persons on board were reported dead,” the minister said.

Pilot complains of engine failure

A source at the control tower of the airport, said the pilot complained of engine failure barely moments after take-off.

The source, who pleaded anonymity, said there had been regular flights from Abuja to Minna since the abduction of the Kangara students last week.

“The aircraft was on its way to Minna. Moments after, on getting to Bassa Local Government Area, he informed the control tower that he had experienced an engine failure. He was advised to return to the Abuja airport immediately but it crash-landed,” the source said.

Asked if the identities of those on board had been ascertained, the source said they were in the process of doing so. “There have been frequent flights to Niger State since the abduction of the students at Kagara. Last week, some ministers also flew. Soon, we will know their identities,” he said. Also confirming the crash yesterday, the Nigerian Air Force said seven persons died in the crash.

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Director of NAF Public Relations and Information, Air Vice Marshal Ibikunle Daramola, who gave the confirmation in a statement, also disclosed that Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice Marshal Isiaka Amao, has ordered an immediate investigation into the cause of the crash.

CAS orders investigation

While commiserating with all NAF personnel and families of the deceased, the CAS urged the general public to remain calm and await the outcome of the investigation.

The statement read: "This is to confirm that a Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Beech Aircraft B 350 crashed while returning to Abuja airport after reporting engine failure en route Minna. "First responders are at the scene. Sadly, all the seven personnel on board died in the crash.

"The Chief of Air Staff, Air Vice Marshal Isiaka Oladayo Amao has ordered an immediate investigation into the incident while urging the general public to remain calm and await the outcome of the investigation, the CAS on behalf of all NAF personnel, commiserates with families of the deceased."

The identity of the personnel involved were not made public but Vanguard gathered it is standard operations practice to allow the NAF authorities get across to their next of kins and inform them before making the names public.

The names of those on board include Flight Lieutenant Haruna Gadzama, (Pilot); Flight Lieutenant Henry Piyo (Co-Pilot); Flying officer Michael Okapra (Airborne Tactical Observation System (ATOS Specialist); Warrant Officer Bassey Etim (ATOS Specialist) and Flight Sergeant Olasunkanmi Olawunmi (ATOS Specialist).

Others are Sergeant Ugochukwu Oluka (ATOS Specialist) and Aircraftman Adewale Johnson (Onboard Technician).

Buhari condoles with NAF, families of victims

Reacting to the crash, President Muhammadu Buhari expressed sadness over it.

In a statement by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Chief Femi Adesina, President Buhari extended his heartfelt condolences to family members, friends and colleagues of those who died as a result of the tragedy.

The president said he joined the Nigerian Air Force, the military and other Nigerians in mourning the unfortunate loss of the dedicated and courageous personnel, who died in the line of duty.

"While investigations into the cause of the crash are ongoing, the safety of the Nigerian airspace remains a key priority of the government," he said. The President prayed that God will comfort the bereaved families and nation, and grant the souls of the departed peaceful rest.

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