

International

Boeing to compensate families of victims of Ethiopia 737 MAX crash

Lawyers for victims' families hail agreement as 'historic'

WASHINGTON: Boeing has reached an agreement with the families of victims of the 737 MAX crash that killed 157 people in Ethiopia, and has admitted responsibility for the crash, according to legal documents filed in a Chicago court on Wednesday.

"Boeing is committed to ensuring that all families who lost loved ones in the accidents are fully and fairly compensated for their loss," the company said in a statement passed to AFP. "By accepting responsibility, Boeing's agreement with the families allows the parties to focus their efforts on determining the appropriate compensation for each family," the aerospace giant said.

Flight 302 to Nairobi, operated by Ethiopian Airlines, crashed southeast of the capital Addis Ababa six minutes after taking off on March 10, 2019. The accident resulted in the grounding of the 737 MAX fleet, and the worst crisis in the history of the American aircraft manufacturer, as it came after a 737 MAX operated by Lion Air crashed in Indonesia in October 2018, killing 189 people.

The lead lawyers for victims' families hailed the agreement as "historic" and a "significant milestone for the families in their pursuit of justice against Boeing." "It will ensure they are all treated equitably and eligible to recover full damages," said lawyers Robert Clifford, Steven Marks and Justin Green in a statement.

The agreement proposed Wednesday does not mention specific sums, but said that jurors will be re-

sponsible for assessing amounts of compensation based on the evidence presented. The families of the victims will be able to take steps to obtain compensation in US courts. The 157 people who died were of 35 different nationalities.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the families of those lost on Lion Air Flight 610 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302," Boeing said. "Since the accidents, Boeing has made significant changes as a company, and to the design of the 737 MAX, to ensure that accidents like those never happen again," it added.

The 737 MAX, a new version of the legendary medium-haul plane originally released in 1967, tarnished the reputation of the aircraft manufacturer and cost it billions of dollars. The planes remained grounded for 20 months before being gradually allowed to fly around the world since the end of 2020. Airlines have brought back into service more than 200 of the aircraft.

A hearing is scheduled for next Tuesday in Chicago to ratify this preliminary agreement. There will then be mediations, but if they fail, each family will be able to present their case to a jury to seek damages, according to the law of the state of Illinois, where Chicago is located. In January, Boeing agreed to pay more than \$2.5 billion to settle certain lawsuits. The aeronautical giant admitted that two of its employees had misled the FAA, the aviation regulator in the United States. — AFP



RENTON: File photo shows, workers next to a Boeing 737 MAX 9 airplane on the tarmac at the Boeing Renton Factory in Renton. Boeing has reached an agreement with the families of victims of the 737 MAX crash that killed 157 people in Ethiopia. —AFP

Ethiopia detains 72 World Food Programme drivers in war-hit north

ADDIS ABABA: The United Nations said Wednesday that Ethiopia had detained 72 aid drivers to the conflict-torn north, the latest roundups despite an international push to end a brutal war. The news, which came a day after the UN reported the arrests of employees in the capital Addis Ababa, is likely to further inflame tensions with the government following a decision in September to expel seven senior UN officials for "meddling" in the country's affairs.

A UN spokesperson said the latest detentions targeted contract drivers for the World Food Programme (WFP) in the capital of Afar province, on the only functional road leading into famine-threatened Tigray. "We confirm that 72 outsourced drivers contracted by WFP have been detained in Semera. We are liaising with the government of Ethiopia to understand the reasons behind their detention," a UN spokesperson said.

At the world body's headquarters, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said, "We are calling for their release." He said that at least nine UN staff members also remained in custody in Addis Ababa, a day after saying that 22 had been rounded up.

Officials last week announced a six-month nationwide emergency amid rising fears that fighters from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) rebel groups could advance on the capital. Lawyers say arbitrary detentions of ethnic Tigrayans — commonplace during the war — have surged since then, ensnaring thousands,

with the new measures allowing the authorities to hold anyone suspected of supporting "terrorist groups" without a warrant.

Law enforcement officials describe such detentions as part of a legitimate crackdown on the TPLF and OLA. Information on the ethnicity of the drivers detained in Semera was not immediately available, though the UN has in the past hired ethnic Tigrayans to transport food and other aid into Tigray.

Famine fears

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray last November to topple the TPLF, a move he said came in response to rebel attacks on army camps. Though the 2019 Nobel Peace laureate vowed a swift victory, by late June the TPLF had retaken most of the region including its capital Mekele.

Since then Tigray has been under what the UN describes as a de-facto humanitarian blockade. Only 15 percent of necessary aid has been able to cross from Semera into Tigray since mid-July, with hundreds of thousands of people living in famine-like conditions, according to UN estimates.

Foreign envoys are scrambling to end the war and mitigate further suffering, putting hope in a push of the African Union led by former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo. "I believe that all sides see the dangers of perpetuating the conflict," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Washington.

"We are hopeful that, given the important work that president Obasanjo is engaged in — the efforts that we're making and others are engaged in — that there is still a window to pull back and to move this to a better place," he said. But TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda appeared to dismiss peace initiatives Wednesday, saying on Twitter that they seemed "mainly about saving #Abiy". — AFP

Violence in Senegalese capital over arrests

DAKAR: Police fired tear gas as they clashed with opposition supporters in the Senegalese capital Dakar on Wednesday, as three prominent figures were arrested. The opposition camp announced that Ousmane Sonko, one of the main candidates ahead of the 2024 presidential election was among those arrested, as well as Barthélemy Dias, who plans to stand for Dakar mayor in January.

Former minister Elhadji Malick Gakou was also arrested. Their lawyers and a Sonko spokesman said later that all three were released from custody in the early evening, but that was too late to prevent scenes of violence in the capital's streets, with law enforcement officers clashing with opposition supporters.

The events unfurled after hundreds of followers escorted Dias as he headed in a motorcade to the appeals court in Dakar for a hearing involving his conviction over a fatal shooting. Police responded with tear gas after protesters began hurling stones. Before the three opposition figures were released, Khalifa Sall, former mayor of Dakar, called on "Senegalese men, women and children to stand up to strengthen and protect our democracy," "I invite our comrades to fight and mobilise," he said.

Dias had been handed a two-year sentence, of which 18 months were suspended, after a man was shot dead in 2011 when the district's town hall was attacked — an episode seen in the context of political tensions. He hopes to run for Dakar mayor in January. —AFP