

Pilot suicide a hasty conclusion in the SilkAir accident

I feel compelled to respond to the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) comments on the final report by the Indonesian National Transportation Safety Committee of the SilkAir accident. These comments, taken at face value, seem to both contradict the accident report of the Indonesian Government, and proceed from a very thin evidence base to a troubling conclusion. The NTSB, finding no convenient "smoking gun" and, relying on a psychological autopsy, concludes that the captain committed suicide and was responsible for the deaths of his passengers and crew.

There are no recordings of the final minutes of the flight. The high speed of the impact in a dif-

ficult location resulted in little surviving physical evidence.

Had some other investigative agency released such comments to an NTSB report, the NTSB response would no doubt have been swift and predictable. That it feels that it can act in a manner where others would be censured reveals a certain arrogance, which is troubling in an agency tasked with the need for objectivity. That the conclusions of an international investigation can be contradicted by NTSB conjecture is inexcusable.

Suicide by pilots of commercial aircraft is so rare that it has never been positively documented by any investigation. Now, within just two years, the NTSB has inferred the existence of sui-

cide in two separate accidents. In neither case can the allegation be proven. In both cases, other governments have pointed to other possible explanations which the NTSB dismisses.

We would hope that the NTSB would be more thorough in exploring other possible causes before proceeding to the suicide explanation. If it is considered impossible to prevent a suicide attempt, it makes more sense to exhaust every other possibility that might be corrected before declaring the investigation complete.

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Accountancy is no 'dead hand'

I was furious to read Noel Falconer describing "the dead hand of accountancy" (*Flight International*, 30 January - 5 February). No professional accountant would behave as such if they valued the future.

If accountancy were a "dead hand", then the Airbus A320 would never have flown with fly-by-wire; Scaled Composites would never have found capital to start business; and neither British Airways nor Air France would have been able to operate successful Concorde services for so long.

All wise professional accountants recognise the benefits of innovation, such as improved efficiency, marketing appeal, ease of operation etc. Finance must of course ensure these worthwhile objectives are achieved cost-effectively; but this is an enabling, not a killing, role.

Any "dead hand" comes from unimaginative management, normally focused on short-term goals at the expense of the long. Of course, such management might well include (bad)

accountants - among many others. Maybe this makes them as an easy target. But it would be helpful if blame for mediocrity could be placed where it belongs.

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TAP/SAir: putting the record straight

Re the article: "SAir drops Bruggisser after rejecting alliance strategy" (*Flight International*, 30 January), I would like to clarify that TAP Air Portugal is indeed a founding member of the Qualiflyer Group established in 1998, and is still an active partner of that alliance. SAirGroup, however, does not hold equity in TAP.

For that matter, SAirGroup and the Portuguese Government - as the only shareholder to date - announced, after agreeing on 3 February last year, that the SAirGroup would take a 34% equity stake in TAP Air Portugal's privatisation in time. This never became effective, since a year later, on 1 February this year, the SAir Group decided to withdraw from the TAP Air Portugal privatisation process, as made

public by both parties (SAirGroup and the Portuguese Government).

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Why can't service carts be secured?

In Japan Airlines' near collision on 31 January, heavy service carts flew around the cabin. It was lucky no-one died.

In 1997, Japan Airlines' Boeing MD-11 had pitch oscillation in which a service cart flew around the galley and killed one of the cabin attendants. The cart was secured in stowage but not prevented from lifting off in service. Why do manufacturers not consider securing carts when in use? It would be easy to install a guide rail or wire in the aisle floor or to make a lightweight cart. Most turbulence accidents occur in cruise when cabin services are in progress. Cabin attendants always face the risk of the carts flying around.

Secured carts would ensure greater safety for attendants.

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