UAE says Flydubai co-pilot attempted to carry out a 'terrorist act'

Omani attacker motive haze

New York: An Omani citizen, Hamam al-Hammami, has been identified as the Flydubai co-pilot who attacked Indian pilot Smit Machchhar and allegedly attempted to take control of a Dubai-Tel Aviv flight this week, media reports said.

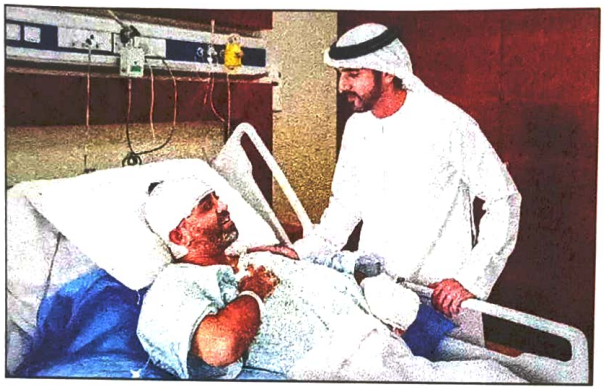
Al-Hammami was previously barred from flying in Oman over concerns about his radical ideological views, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Saturday, quoting people familiar with the matter.

The co-pilot had attacked and severely injured Machchhar with a crash axe, typically kept in the cockpit for use in emergencies, for instance, to break open a window to escape or break open a panel to access a fire.

But the bleeding Indian made "one last push" and managed to open the cockpit door, enabling passengers and crew to overpower the attacker.

After two reserve pilots landed the aircraft safely in Saudi Arabia's Tabuk city, al-Hammami was taken into custody.

The motive for the attack remains unclear. The UAE, which is leading the investigation, said on Saturday the co-pilot had attempted to carry out a "terrorist act".



Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum meets Captain Smit Machchhar on Saturday. (@HamdanMohammed/X via PTI)

A Gulf diplomat said investigations were trying to establish whether the co-pilot had acted alone or "has any connection with any extremist groups".

Machchhar, being treated at an Abu Dhabi hospital, is stable and "recovering well", the Indian embassy in the UAE said.

Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum visited Machchhar in hospital on Saturday and said the pilot had "embodied the highest degrees of courage, responsibility, and care for human life".

"From us, and from the leadership of the nation, he has our full appreciation and praise," he said.

Several news publications, including CNN, identified al-Hammami by name although his identity has not been officially confirmed.

Reports said al-Hammami was born in the UAE to an Omani father and a Syrian mother and had spent several years of his life in the UAE.

CNN cited a regional diplomat as saying al-Hammami had been removed from flight training in Oman because of concerns over his radical views and was subsequently given another role at the country's national airline.

It was not immediately clear to what extent he was vetted before being hired by UAE-based Flydubai. News reports citing sources said he had been working for the airline for about eight months.

Moroccan carrier Royal Air Maroc told Reuters that al-Hammami had undergone three months' training with the airline in 2025 but his application to work there afterwards was rejected. It did not elaborate.

Al-Hammami completed a three-year distance-learning course in aviation management from Buckinghamshire New University in the UK and graduated in 2023, the BBC reported, quoting the university. The university said he did not undergo any pilot training at the institution.

Little else was immediately known about the co-pilot's background. His Instagram account was active until the day of the flight and then deleted.

Israel does not have official diplomatic relations with Oman, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said pilots from such countries are not permitted to operate flights to Israel. It was not clear how al-Hammami came to be assigned the flight to Tel-Aviv.

Netanyahu told Fox News on Thursday that the attacker had shouted "Kill me, kill me!" after being subdued on the flight. He said the remark suggested the attacker was suicidal and intended to bring down the plane.

On Friday, Netanyahu said that Israel was looking into whether the co-pilot had acted under anyone's direction, warning that anyone involved would pay a "heavy price".

Israeli officials are expected to question al-Hammami in the UAE. Most of the 174 passengers on the flight were Israelis.

A FlyDubai spokesperson said the airline could not comment beyond its official statements and acknowledged "there are many questions at this stage".

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Omani attacker

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There was no immediate comment from Oman Air, and Oman's government has said nothing publicly in response to repeated questions.

The incident is a test for the UAE government, which has earned a reputation for effective measures against extremist activities but has also bristled in the past over criticism of security lapses.

Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Karan Johar, Ranveer Singh, Anil Kapoor and several other Bollywood personalities have praised Machchhar for his courage and presence of mind.

Shah Rukh said Machchhar "stood strong when it mattered the most" and put his own safety on the line to protect those on board.

Salman said "*hum sab aap ko* salute *karte hain* (we all salute you)"; Ranveer called Machchhar "Captain Courageous".

PTI, Reuters and AP