

A year on, report on Jeju Air crash probe delayed

Hyunjoo Jin and Jungmin Ryu
REUTERS

SEOUL – A South Korean investigation into the Jeju Air crash that killed 179 people is set to miss a one-year deadline to release a progress report, two officials said, as frustrated relatives of the victims continue to demand answers about what went wrong.

The country’s accident investigation board will not be in a position to release the interim update by the first anniversary on Dec. 29 of the worst aircraft accident on South Korean soil, the two board officials said. They declined to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter.

On Dec. 29, 2024, the Boeing 737-800 made an emergency belly landing at Muan airport, overshot the runway then slammed into a concrete embankment and erupted into a fireball, killing all but two of the 181 people on board.

The government-led Aviation and Railway Accident Investigation Board said in a preliminary report in January that both of the plane’s engines sustained bird strikes.

The pilots shut off the less-damaged engine after the bird strike, investigators said in a July update that was not released publicly due to objections from victims’ families.

Some of the family members said investigators appeared to blame the pilots without exploring other factors, such as the concrete structure beyond the end of the runway that likely made the disaster far more deadly.

“It feels like all kinds of doubts are just growing bigger and bigger. In the meantime, a year has gone by, and it feels like the frustration is only continuing to build,” said Ryu Kum-Ji, who lost both of her parents in the crash.

She joined other family members who shaved their heads and staged a protest in front of a presidential office, calling for an independent and transparent probe.

Misssteps by the transport ministry, which oversees the investigation board, could also be a factor in the accident, Ryu said.



Ryu Kum-ji, 42, who lost both parents in the Jeju Air plane crash, stages a solo protest near the Presidential Office in Seoul Dec. 25.
SEBIN CHOI/REUTERS

A transport ministry official told bereaved family members this month that it would examine their concerns.

“We take seriously your concerns saying that government’s efforts were not sufficient in the process of (finding the truth),” the second vice minister of the transport ministry said. “The government will stand by the bereaved families and take a closer look.”

South Korea’s parliament will launch an independent probe into the crash on Dec. 30.

Under the U.N. aviation body’s rules, a final report is expected within a year of an accident, and if that is not possible, an interim statement should be made public on every anniversary detailing the investigation’s progress and any safety issues raised.

But the investigation board is not planning to release an update yet because of pending legislation designed to ensure its independence, said the two officials.

Lawmakers have proposed replacing board members and transferring oversight from the transport ministry to the prime minister’s office.

South Korea’s anti-corruption body found in a report this week that the concrete embankment at Muan airport violated local and global standards that call for such structures to be “frangible” so they give way in case of impact. That meant it could “cause fatal damage to aircraft and occupants.”

Farmer faces accusation in estranged wife’s death

Jennifer Cortez
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

A powerful farm owner and energy mogul from Southern California has been charged with killing his estranged wife, weeks after she was found with a gunshot wound in her Arizona home.

Michael Abatti, 63, of El Centro, was arrested at about 3:20 p.m. local time on Dec. 23, on a first-degree murder charge, according to a press release from the Imperial County Sheriff’s Office.

The charge stems from the death of Kerri Ann Abatti, 59, who was found unresponsive by a relative inside her home in Arizona on Nov. 20 and was later pronounced dead at a hospital.

The arrest was made in El Centro without incident after a warrant was issued earlier that day by the Navajo County Superior Court in Arizona, with investigators from the sheriff’s office in Imperial County assisting their counterparts in Navajo County.

Michael Abatti was booked into the Imperial County Jail and is awaiting extradition to Navajo County, Arizona. It’s not immediately clear when he will be extradited.

The arrest came after Navajo County detectives executed multiple search warrants on Dec. 2 on properties and vehicles tied to the Abatti family as well as two camp trailers and two vehicles.

Michael Abatti had traveled from California to Arizona on Nov. 20 and then immediately returned to California, the Navajo County Sheriff’s Office said.

Michael Abatti is a highly influential farm owner on California’s agriculture and political scene. His family has been in the Imperial Valley for more than 100 years and helped build the All-American Canal, which brings Colorado River water to the region.

Abatti Farms includes thousands of acres producing crops such as melons, broccoli, sugar beets and alfalfa, which Michael said in a 2017 legal filing generated more than \$10 million a year.

He later expanded into energy development. A company he owns won a



Michael Abatti, seen in 2016, is accused of killing his wife in Arizona.
JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

\$35 million battery storage contract from the Imperial Irrigation District, and he proposed a large solar farm.

Michael Abatti and Kerri Ann Abatti had been married for 31 years before separating in August 2023 and were still in the midst of divorce proceedings at the time of her death. After the separation, Kerri became a full-time resident of Arizona.

The couple married in April 1992 and jointly owned Mike Abatti Farms in El Centro since 1999. Michael oversaw business operations for the family’s farming, energy and real estate interests, while Kerri managed the household.

Divorce filings in Imperial County Superior Court outline the couple’s assets and describe Kerri’s financial struggles as a newly single woman in her late 50s.

She filed for divorce in October 2023 and initially collected \$5,000 a month in spousal support. In January, she sought additional support and attorneys’ fees tied to rental income from farm properties the couple owned. A judge increased the amount to \$6,400.

Challenging Kerri’s request, Michael stated that Mike Abatti Farms suffered financial losses in 2023 and 2024, in part because of fuel and shipping cost increases.

Prior reporting from the Arizona Republic and Desert Sun staff was used in this story.

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NOTICE OF CANCELLATION OF CERTIFICATION HEARING ON PROPOSED ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION LINE CORRIDOR

The certification hearing, Application No. TA25-20 (OGC No. 25-1510), Division of Administrative Hearings No. 25-004655TL, originally scheduled to begin January 12, 2026, has been cancelled. In accordance with the Florida Electrical Transmission Line Siting Act, Section 403.527(6), F.S., on December 16, 2025, all parties to this proceeding stipulated that there are no disputed issues of material fact or law in this matter. Accordingly, on December 16, 2025, the administrative law judge issued an order granting a request to cancel the hearing and relinquish jurisdiction to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Pursuant to Section 403.529(1)(a), F.S., the Department of Environmental Protection will issue a final order within 40 days of the Administrative Law Judge’s order.