

## **Saudi plane isolated in Manila after pilot triggers false hijack alarm**

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**Manila:** Panic gripped airport officials and security forces after the flight crew of a Saudi Arabian Airlines plane mistakenly pressed a hijack warning button as it approached Manila's airport today, Philippine officials said.

### **Saudi Plane**

Eddie Monreal, Manila airport manager, and other officials said Flight SV872 from Jiddah made the distress call about 30 miles (48 kilometers) from the airport. When the airport authorities asked for a verification of the emergency message, the flight crew confirmed the distress call twice, he said.

It was not immediately clear how the confirmation was made, he said.

However, the captain later told the control tower that a button indicating that a hijacking was in progress had been pushed accidentally, Monreal said.

He said the Boeing 777 was isolated after it landed and security personnel were deployed as a precaution. The passengers were later allowed to disembark.

Some of those coming off the plane were dressed in white, likely indicating that they were returning from the annual hajj pilgrimage, a ritual required of all able-bodied Muslims once in a lifetime.

The 71-year-old airline, which operates 119 planes, does brisk business during the hajj, which reached its climax last week.

Monreal said the plane was carrying 410 passengers and 21 crew members.

The incident came after Phillipine officials in February announced they had strengthened security for Saudi Arabia's embassy in Manila and its national airline because of a possible threat. At the time, officials also said additional armed officers were posted in the boarding area for the Saudi flag carrier and to guard the airline's luggage.

It did not elaborate on the threat. However, it came as the Sunni-ruled kingdom has been on increasingly hostile terms with Shiite power Iran.

- (With AP inputs)