Beat: Technology

Plane carrying skydivers crashes in Belgium, killing 11

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USPA News - A small plane carrying a group of skydivers crashed in central Belgium on Saturday, killing all eleven people on board, local officials said, making it the country`s worst aviation disaster in more than four decades. The cause was not immediately known.

The accident happened at approximately 3:35 p.m. local time when the Pilatus PC-6 Turbo Porter aircraft went down in a field in Gelbressée, a town near the city of Namur that is the capital of the province carrying the same name. The plane had taken off from a nearby airport about 10 to 20 minutes before the crash. The small aircraft was carrying a pilot and 10 skydivers who were identified as Belgian citizens between the ages of 20 and 40, but none of them survived the violent impact. The skydive had been planned as a birthday present for one of the passengers, which included several instructors. Witnesses reported seeing a part of a wing break off, causing the plane to enter into a spiraling nosedive. Officials in nearby Namur said investigators believe at least three of the skydivers tried to jump out of the aircraft as it went down, adding that three open parachutes were found near the crash site. "The causes of the accident are still unknown but an investigation is underway under the direction of the Prosecutor`s Office of Namur," city officials said in a statement. It added that efforts were underway to formally identify the victims, but the families of all eleven victims were already notified. King Philippe, Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo and Interior Minister Joëlle Milquet all visited the crash site on Saturday evening. "Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo has learned with sadness about the news of a tragic plane crash near Namur," the prime minister`s office said in an e-mailed statement. "His thoughts go out to the numerous casualties. He conveys his sincere sympathy to their families and their loved ones." Saturday`s crash was the country`s worst aviation accident since October 1971 when British European Airways flight 706 crashed near the village of Aarsele in the western province of West Flanders. The country`s worst aviation disaster happened in February 1961 when Sabena flight 548 crashed near Brussels, killing all 72 people on board and one person on the ground.

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