Israel to honour Indian pilot Smit Machchhar with its top civilian award

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News

Israeli President Isaac Herzog announced (8 Oct 2026) that Indian pilot Captain Smit Machchhar will receive Israel's highest civilian award, the Presidential Award for Civil Heroism. On flydubai flight FZ1073 from Dubai to Tel Aviv (30 Sept 2026), the co-pilot sent the plane into a steep dive; the injured captain regained control and the crew and passengers restrained the co-pilot. The aircraft made an emergency landing at Tabuk, Saudi Arabia.

Key facts

Award	Presidential State of Israel Award for Civil Heroism – reported as its highest civilian award
Announced by	Israeli President Isaac Herzog – Jerusalem
Flight	flydubai FZ1073 (Boeing 737 MAX 8), Dubai → Tel Aviv; 30 Sept 2026
Emergency landing	Tabuk, Saudi Arabia
Smit Machchhar	Ex-SpiceJet; flydubai captain since 2022; grew up in Ghatkopar, Mumbai; family roots in Rajkot district, Gujarat
Gujarat honour	CM Bhupendra Patel announced the 'Vishisht Gujarat Garima' award (1 Oct)

Background

- India–Israel: India recognised Israel in 1950 and set up full diplomatic relations in 1992. Narendra Modi became the first Indian PM to visit Israel in 2017.
- Indian bravery awards: Ashoka Chakra (highest peacetime gallantry), Kirti Chakra, Shaurya Chakra; 'Jeevan Raksha Padak' awards for saving lives. Flight attendant Neerja Bhanot, killed in the 1986 Pan Am hijacking, is the youngest Ashoka Chakra recipient.
- Aviation safety: the 'two-person rule' keeps two crew in the cockpit at all times (widespread after the 2015 Germanwings crash). The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) – Montreal, under the 1944 Chicago Convention.
- Geography: Tabuk is in north-west Saudi Arabia; Dubai is in the UAE; Israel declares Jerusalem its capital, while many embassies are in Tel Aviv.

Tamil Nadu link: J.R.D. Tata flew India's first commercial airmail service on 15 Oct 1932 from Karachi via Bombay to Madras (Tata Air Services), giving Madras a key place in Indian aviation history.

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