Beat: Miscellaneous

Day of mourning in Malaysia as MH17 victims return home

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USPA News - Malaysia marked a national day of mourning Friday as the bodies of 20 people who died in the shootdown of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 returned back to their home country, with memorials taking place nationwide in a country still working to process two air disasters months apart. The bodies of 20 Malaysian victims departed Amsterdam Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands on Thursday afternoon local time and landed at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in the Malaysian capital on Friday at 9:50 a.m. local time.

The victims were flown to Kuala Lumpur onboard a special Malaysia Airlines flight commanded by Captain Dato` Missman Leham. Government leaders attended the official ceremony at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, where 20 coffins draped in the national flag of Malaysia were taken from the aircraft. They were then transported in white hearses to private funerals in various parts of the country as public transport came to a halt and millions observed a moment of silence. "Last month, 43 Malaysian lives were taken over Eastern Ukraine. Today we mourn the loss of our people. Today, we begin to bring them home," said Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak. "Our thoughts and our prayers are with the families and friends of those who lost their lives. Today we stand with you, united as one." Malaysia Airlines also observed a company-wide day of mourning for the victims of the doomed flight, with department heads across the organization leading a two-minute moment of silence at 10:55 a.m. Black ribbons were distributed to crew members and the company`s flag flew at half-mast, as did Malaysian flags. "Malaysia Airlines is deeply saddened by this devastating tragedy. It has been a long and painful wait for the families and friends of the passengers and crew onboard MH17," airline spokeswoman Khairunnisak Dzun Nurin said in an emailed statement. The airline is scheduled to hold a tahlil prayer and recital of Yaasin in remembrance of MH17 on Tuesday at a ceremony in the city of Petaling Jaya. "The prayers, which will be held at Masjid Tengku Kelana Jaya Petra, Kelana Jaya, will give the opportunity to the public to offer their respects and prayers," said Khairunnisak Dzun Nurin. Tuesday`s ceremony will also include a special prayer for Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, the airliner that vanished in March during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. The aircraft - which was carrying 239 people - is believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean west of Perth, but searches have so far failed to recover any wreckage. Friday`s return home of some of the Malaysian victims of MH17 came as the Dutch government said forensic experts in the Netherlands have this week identified the remains of another 46 victims, putting the total number of victims identified so far at 127. It said 26 of the newly-identified victims were Dutch nationals while the other 20 had a foreign nationality. Relatives of those victims have already been notified. In total, forensic experts have now identified 112 Dutch victims, including one Dutch national who also had a British passport, and 61 persons who had a foreign nationality. The nationalities of the foreign victims are not known because the Dutch government decided to change its policy with regards to the publication of foreign victims being identified. "At the request of the embassies of the countries involved, the specific nationalities of victims who are not Dutch will not be released," the ministry said in a statement. "A team of experts is working hard to identify the victims but, as emphasized earlier, it can still take months before each victim has been identified. The media will be notified regularly about the status of this process." Malaysian officials said earlier this week that 28 Malaysian victims were among those identified so far. The Dutch ministry, before the policy change earlier this month, had disclosed that 1 German national, 1 Canadian national, and 1 British national were also among those identified at that point. Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 crashed near the city of Torez in eastern Ukraine on July 17, killing all 298 passengers and crew in the world`s deadliest aviation disaster since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. It is believed the aircraft was downed by a surface-to-air missile which was fired from separatist-controlled territory. Forensic experts have so far been unable to recover all bodies from the crash site due to ongoing fighting in the area. A total of 228 coffins have been flown back to the Netherlands for identification, but some of the coffins contained only partial remains, and it is unclear how many bodies remain unaccounted for.

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