Beat: Technology

Lao rescue workers recover 9 bodies after Mekong plane crash

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USPA News - Rescue workers in southern Laos have so far recovered the bodies of at least nine people who were on board a Lao Airlines passenger plane that crashed into the Mekong river earlier this week, killing all 49 people on board, airline officials said on Thursday. The accident happened at around 4 p.m. local time on Wednesday when Lao Airlines flight QV301 was preparing to land at the international airport in Pakse, the capital of southern Champasak province.

It was on a domestic flight from the country`s capital, Vientiane, where it took off at 2:45 p.m. local time. Lao Airlines CEO Somphone Douangdara said Thursday that rescue workers in fishing boats had so far recovered nine bodies, including some that had floated downstream. "We have found totally nine dead bodies and some pieces of the aircraft," he said, adding that a team from the airline was at the site and cooperating with authorities and other foreign investigators. Wednesday`s crash occurred as the aircraft was preparing to land at Pakse Airport and ran into extreme bad weather conditions, causing it to crash into the Mekong river about 8 kilometers (4.9 miles) from the runway. It is believed the aircraft was hit by wind shear, causing the front of the plane to move up and pushing the aircraft away from the airport. The airline initially said it was coordinating rescue units in the hope of finding survivors, but Douangdara acknowledged on Thursday that it does not expect to find any survivors. The aircraft was carrying 44 passengers and 5 crew members, putting the death toll at 49 and making it the country`s worst ever aviation disaster. Most of the passengers were foreigners, according to a passenger manifest released by the state-run airline. The manifest listed the passengers as 16 Lao, seven French, six Australians, five Thai citizens, three South Koreans, three Vietnamese, one Chinese, one Taiwanese, one Malaysian, and one American. The airline initially said there were 17 Lao, two Vietnamese and one Canadian on board, but the figures were updated on Thursday. "We have found that the numbers of the Vietnamese victims are changed from two to three persons and there were no Canadian victims on board this flight," Douangdara said, hours after the airline clarified that one person listed as Lao was actually from Australia. Orlavanh Pounthareuangsy, the assistant to the director of the airline`s commercial department, said one of the five crew members was a Cambodian national with more than three decades of flying experience. The four other crew members are believed to have been Lao nationals, but Pounthareuangsy would not confirm this. Wednesday`s accident was the country`s worst ever aviation disaster, surpassing the death toll from the August 1954 crash of an Air Vietnam cargo plane. The freighter was evacuating families of Vietnamese soldiers from northern Vietnam to southern Vietnam when one of its two engines failed, causing it to crash into a tributary of the Mekong river near Pakse after being hit by a sudden storm.

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