BRITISH AIRLINERS ON STANDBY FOR STRANDED TOURISTS IN EGYPT

News / Airlines

Eleven empty **British airliners** are **on standby** in Cyprus and might be used to fly home thousands of **tourists stranded in Egypt**'s Sharm al-Sheikh, airport authorities in the Mediterranean island said on Saturday.

Britain halted flights to and from the Red Sea resort after a Russian plane crashed over the Sinai Peninsula on Oct. 31 with the loss of 224 lives. Western officials think a bomb likely brought the airliner down.

Some flights resumed on Friday to bring home tourists stuck in the resort, where about 20,000 Britons were on holiday, but the operation descended into chaos when Egypt cut the number of flights it would allow to fly them out.

An airport official in Cyprus said it was not yet clear what role Cypriot airports might play in efforts to fetch the stranded holidaymakers, but added that almost a dozen British commercial aircraft were at the island's two airports.

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"It's possible that they'll be used for this purpose," said Adamos Aspris, spokesman for airports operator Hermes Airports. "They might be used if circumstances allow it."

Eight commercial aircraft from Luton, Gatwick and Stansted in London stayed overnight in Larnaca, while three from Manchester and Birmingham landed empty at the western Paphos airport after being diverted from Sharm al-Sheikh, Aspris said.

Only eight of the 29 flights scheduled to fly Britons home left Sharm al-Sheikh on Friday because Egypt said Britain's insistence that passengers returned with only hand luggage meant the airport was unable to cope.

A Cypriot foreign ministry official said there had been no request for Cyprus to assist in efforts to fetch the tourists.

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