MH17 PROBE REPORT OUT TOMORROW

News / Airlines

International investigators will release their final report into the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over war-torn Ukraine tomorrow, but the burning question of who was to blame will remain unresolved.

The Dutch Safety Board, leading a team of international investigators since the Boeing 777 went down last year, will release the report at the Gilze-Rijen air force base in southern Netherlands.

All 298 people on board - most of them Dutch - including the 15 crew members died when the routine flight between Amsterdam and Kuala Lumpur was brought down, possibly by a missile, during heavy fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists.

Tomorrow's report -- 15 months after the July 17, 2014 crash -- will focus on four subjects, the Dutch board said in a statement. "The cause of the crash; the issue of flying over conflict areas; the question why Dutch... relatives of victims had to wait two to four days before receiving confirmation from the Dutch authorities that their loved ones were on board; and lastly, the question as to what extent the occupants of Flight MH17 were conscious of the crash."

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But as the board has pointed out many times, it will not assign blame or say who pulled the trigger.

"It is the purpose of the criminal investigation to answer those (questions)," it said.

Kiev and the West, however, have pointed the finger at the separatists, charging they may have used a BUK surface-to-air missile supplied by Russia to blow the plane from the sky. The Russian maker of the BUK missile said it too will hold a press conference in Moscow tomorrow to explain the "real reasons" for the disaster after holding an "experiment" that entailed detonating a missile next to a plane.

Fragments of a Russian-made BUK were found at the crash site earlier this year. But Moscow denies involvement and instead has accused Ukraine's military of being behind the tragedy.

The downing of MH17 further strained ties between Russia and the West, already at their lowest ebb since the Cold War due to the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Relatives of the victims, who in July marked the first anniversary of the crash with an emotional gathering attended by over 2,000 people, said they believed the final report will at least answer some questions. They will also for the first time be confronted with the harrowing sight of a partial reconstruction of the doomed plane made from pieces of wreckage brought back from the crash site.

Relatives understand that the criminal probe has not yet been completed to answer who was behind the probable firing of the missile, Mr Dennis Schouten, chairman of the MH17 Air Disaster Foundation, told AFP.

"That must come from the criminal probe and has to be proved properly," said Mr Schouten. But with the release of tomorrow's report "the net is certainly drawing a little closer", he added. "Is there more than one guilty party? The airlines and their flight routes? So many questions remain."

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