BODY FOUND ON CASH CARGO PLANE REFUELLING IN ZIMBABWE

News / Airlines

Crew of Florida-owned cargo plane arrested and millions of rand destined for South Africa's Reserve Bank impounded after Harare airport staff follow blood trails and find a body.

A cargo plane carrying millions of South African rand has been grounded atZimbabwe's international airport after ground staff spotted blood dripping from it and discovered a man's body.

The plane, owned by Florida-based Western Global Airlines, is understood to have been transporting large sums of cash from Munich in Germany via Belgium and Nigeria and was bound for the seaside town of Durban in South Africa when it stopped in Harare for refuelling.

"The jet crew was questioned and they said they hit a bird in the air. But then a search was made and the body of an adult male fell out," a source told African News Agency.

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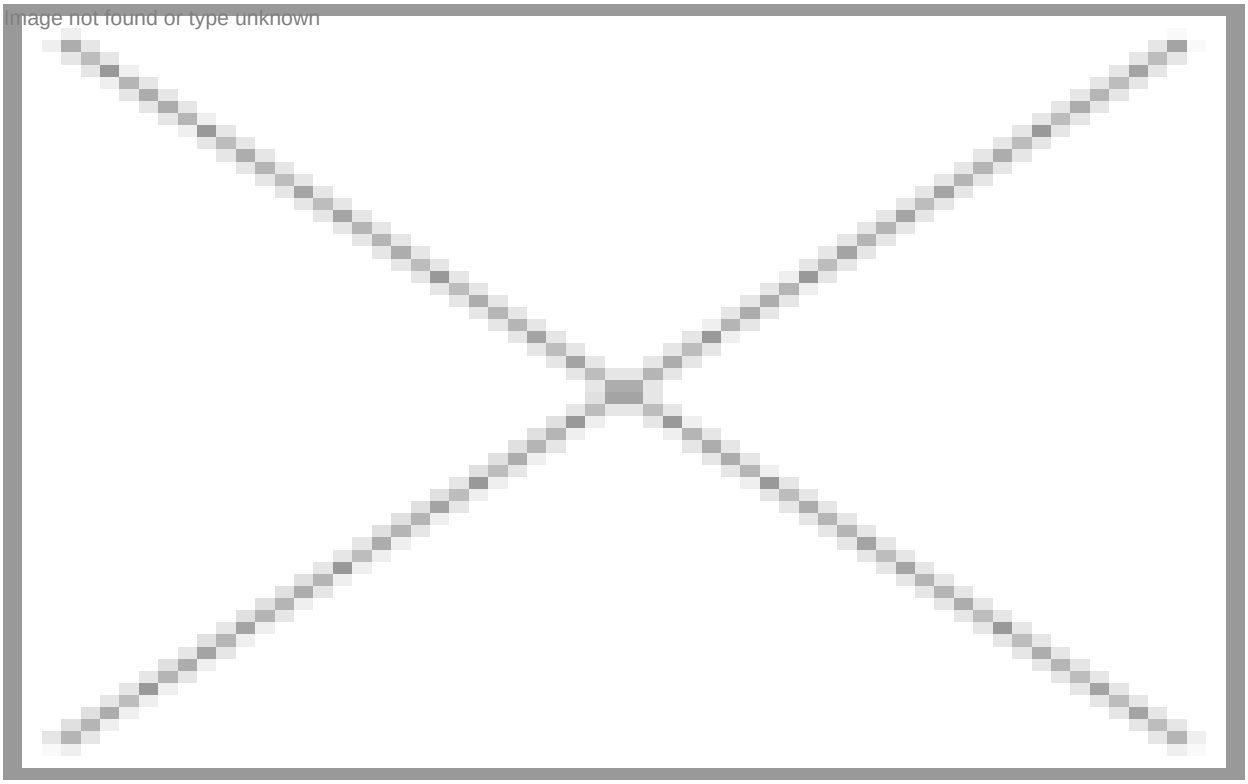
A spokesman for the South African Reserve Bank suggested the body belonged to a “stowaway” and expressed the hope its money would be released soon.

Local reports said four crew members had been arrested: two Americans, a Pakistani and a South African. An airport source told The Telegraph that two couriers had remained on the plane since the discovery on Sunday, reluctant to leave its valuable cargo.

Images circulated on social media showed a charred body protruding from a flap on the outside of the aircraft. Officials with face masks stand to one side on a hydraulic platform and Zimbabwe Republic Police tape is visible. A Zimbabwean aviation source told The Telegraph the body fell out of the flap when security staff began searching for the source of the blood.

Pradeep Maharaj, Group Executive for the South African Reserve Bank'scurrency operations, would not confirm whether SARB employees were on the craft.



Local newspaper reports said that the body was 'suspended' in the plane

“The South African Reserve Bank is aware of an aircraft carrying a SARB consignment that stopped in Harare and was detained following the discovery of an unidentified body that is presumed to be a stowaway on the aircraft,” he said in a statement.

“The SARB is working with the relevant authorities to ensure that the cargo is released and transported to South Africa.”

David Chawota, chief executive of Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe, said the case had been handed over to the police. “The plane, which is owned by Western Global Airlines, has been grounded at Harare International Airport since Sunday,” he said. “The cargo in the plane belongs to the South African Reserve Bank."

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He declined to give further details about the plane’s cargo, citing “security concerns”.

The plane is believed to have requested a “technical landing” in Harare after being denied the right to land in Mozambique.

"The matter was reported to the authorities at the airport and the plane was impounded while the body was taken to pathologists,” the Herald quoted an aviation source as saying.

Harare International Airport was previously the venue for another multinational drama when, on March 7 2004, British mercenary Simon Mann and 69 others were detained on the tarmac after their Boeing 727 was searched and found to be carrying £100,000 worth of weapons and equipment.

Mann and his colleagues were put on trial in Zimbabwe accused of plotting to stage a coup in Equatorial Guinea. He was later extradited to that country and jailed but was released under a presidential pardon in November 2009.

Western Global Airlines did not respond to a request for comment prior to publication.

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