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THE JOURNEY HOME

First batch of MH17 victims due back Aug 22

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SPECIAL FLIGHT: Identities to be known then

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THE final journey home for Malaysians who died in the MH17 tragedy will start with the first batch of 15 remains to be flown back on Aug 22.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin yesterday declared Aug 22 a national mourning day in honour of the 298 passengers and crew killed when Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crashed in eastern Ukraine on July 17.

It was believed to have been shot down by a missile.

"The 15 remains comprise six Muslims and nine non-Muslims. We have also obtained approval to bring home the remains of a Dutch citizen, who wanted to be buried in Malaysia," he said after chairing a meeting on the official ceremony to receive the remains yesterday.

"The remains will arrive at the Bunga Raya Complex at 10am and a special dignified official ceremony to honour the remains will be held there," he said, adding that the national mourning day would, for now, not be declared a public holiday.

Muhyiddin said arrangements had been made to fly the bodies back on a special flight. Each coffin will be carried by armed forces personnel, before they are placed into 16 hearses.

The ceremony, he said, would be a simple official affair and the nation would observe a moment of silence upon the arrival of the 16 bodies.

The national mourning day would also be attended by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Hajah Haminah Hamidun.

Of the 15 Malaysian remains, Muhyiddin said the families of two



Deputy Prime Minister **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin** (centre) discussing with Transport Minister **Datuk Seri Llow Tiong Lal** and Defence Minister **Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein** preparations for the national day of mourning for victims of MAS flight MH17 in Putrajaya yesterday. Pic by Abd Rahim Rahmat

victims had requested for the bodies to be cremated in the Netherlands and their families would be present for the final rites.

Muhyiddin said several families and next of kin had also requested for their loved ones to be buried in their hometown, with the government providing transport.

"The government will provide Hercules (Charlie) C-130 transport aircraft for long-distance destinations like Sarawak, and Nuri helicopters for those heading to different states in the peninsula.

"Once the bodies arrive at the respective states, the state governments will take over and it is up to them to hold a simple mourning ceremony before the burial rites."

The identities of the 15 victims would be released on the

day of arrival.

Muhyiddin said the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry and the Rural and Regional Development Ministry would contact the victims' families in Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Sarawak, Johor and Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory to assist the government in transporting the remains back to their hometowns.

On the number of families and next of kin who would attend the official ceremony, Muhyiddin said he could not confirm this as it was up to the families to determine how many would turn up.

"They will be given a place to stay the night before the ceremony and we will notify them in one or two days' time."

Since the remains would arrive

on a Friday, Muhyiddin said all mosques would be asked to hold *solat jenazah ghaib* (prayers in the absence of the remains) while the Friday sermon would touch on the MH17 incident.

To date, Muhyiddin said, 24 Malaysians had been identified by the Dutch team and the repatriation of the remains of nine other victims would be announced soon.

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