

《Hijacker of EgyptAir plane surrenders to Cypriot authorities》

NICOSIA, March 29 (Xinhua) -- A six-hour hijack drama ended shortly before 3 p.m. local time (1200 GMT) with the surrender of the man who had forced an EgyptAir Airbus-320 to land at Larnaca airport in Cyprus.



Passengers wait for a bus to Paphos at the Larnaca airport in Larnaca, Cyprus, March 29, 2016. The women and children on a hijacked Egyptian plane have been released after it landed in Larnaca, Cyprus, Cypriot authorities said Tuesday. Larnaca airport has been closed and arriving planes are being redirected to Paphos in western Cyprus. (Xinhua/Zhang Zhang)

The hijacker was seen on live footage of Cyprus's state television walking down the stairs of the plane, parked right next to the security perimeter of the airport. He had his hands raised in the air and was taken into a police vehicle.

The hijacker's surrender was confirmed by Cyprus's president Nicos Anastasiades in his Twitter account.

"My congratulations to all services involved for the termination of the hijack and the arrest of the culprit," Anastasiades wrote.

The hijacking had distracted him from official talks he had with visiting European Parliament President Martin Schulz.

The hijack had caused Cypriot authorities to mount a major security operation and caused tension in the region, with Israeli jets scrambling as a precaution following recent terrorist attacks connected with the Islamic State.

It was soon made clear that the hijack was not connected to terrorism, as the hijacker originally indicated he wanted to deliver a letter or speak with his Cypriot ex-wife.

But the letter delivered to her contained a demand for the release of all women prisoners held by Egyptian authorities.

He also asked to meet senior European Union officials with the aim of obtaining political asylum or alternatively to be allowed to fly to another country.

EgyptAir flight MS-181 had taken off from Alexandria for Cairo at 8 a.m. with 55 passengers and a crew of seven but shortly afterwards it was diverted by the hijacker Larnaca where it landed shortly before 9 a.m.

The hijacker immediately demanded that all policemen and military personnel move away from the plane but he soon started releasing passenger, first all women and children and then the men.

Minutes before his surrender three men in staff uniforms were seen walking down the plane's stairs and a man, probably the captain, jumping out of a cockpit window.

The hijacker, originally named by Egyptian authorities as Imbrahim Samaha, a university professor at Atlanta, USA, was later renamed to Saif el Din Mustafa, a former Egyptian army officer who lived in Cyprus up to 1994.

He was married to a Cypriot woman and the couple had four children, who live with their mother.

Though his action had an almost farcical outcome, it brought to memory a hijack in 1978 when an Egyptian plane was forced to land at Larnaca after taking off from Bangkok.

The hijack drama lasted 16 days and ended in a bloodbath at Larnaca airport, after Egyptian commandos botched their attempt to storm the plane. They were gunned down on the tarmac by the hijackers.

The incident had led to the disruption of diplomatic relations between Cyprus and Egypt, two countries traditionally connected with the closest of relations between neighbors in the region.