

Brazil in mourning after plane crash

by UPI

SAO PAULO -- Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva declared Wednesday the country would observe three days of mourning following a deadly airplane crash. The president's office wouldn't speculate what caused the crash, however, O Globo TV reported Wednesday. The late Tuesday crash of Brazilian airline TAM killed some 200 people, making it the deadliest crash in the country's history. The U.S. National Transportation and Safety Board has sent investigators to Sao Paulo to look into the cause of the crash. A pilot told local media Wednesday that runways at Brazil's Congonhas airport are unsafe and led to the crash. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a pilot for TAM airlines said delays in grooving the tarmac led to Tuesday night's fiery crash of a TAM flight attempting to land in the small Sao Paulo domestic airport during heavy rain, the O Globo newspaper reported. The pilot said pooled water made the runway "smooth as soap" and attributed at least four other skidding accidents to the runway's slickness. The Airbus A320 was flying from Porto Alegre in southern Brazil with 170 passengers and six crew members aboard. An undetermined number of casualties on the ground were also reported. During Tuesday afternoon's rush hour, the plane apparently hydroplaned on the soaked runway while trying to land, crossed a busy highway and crashed into an airline building and gas station in a fireball.

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