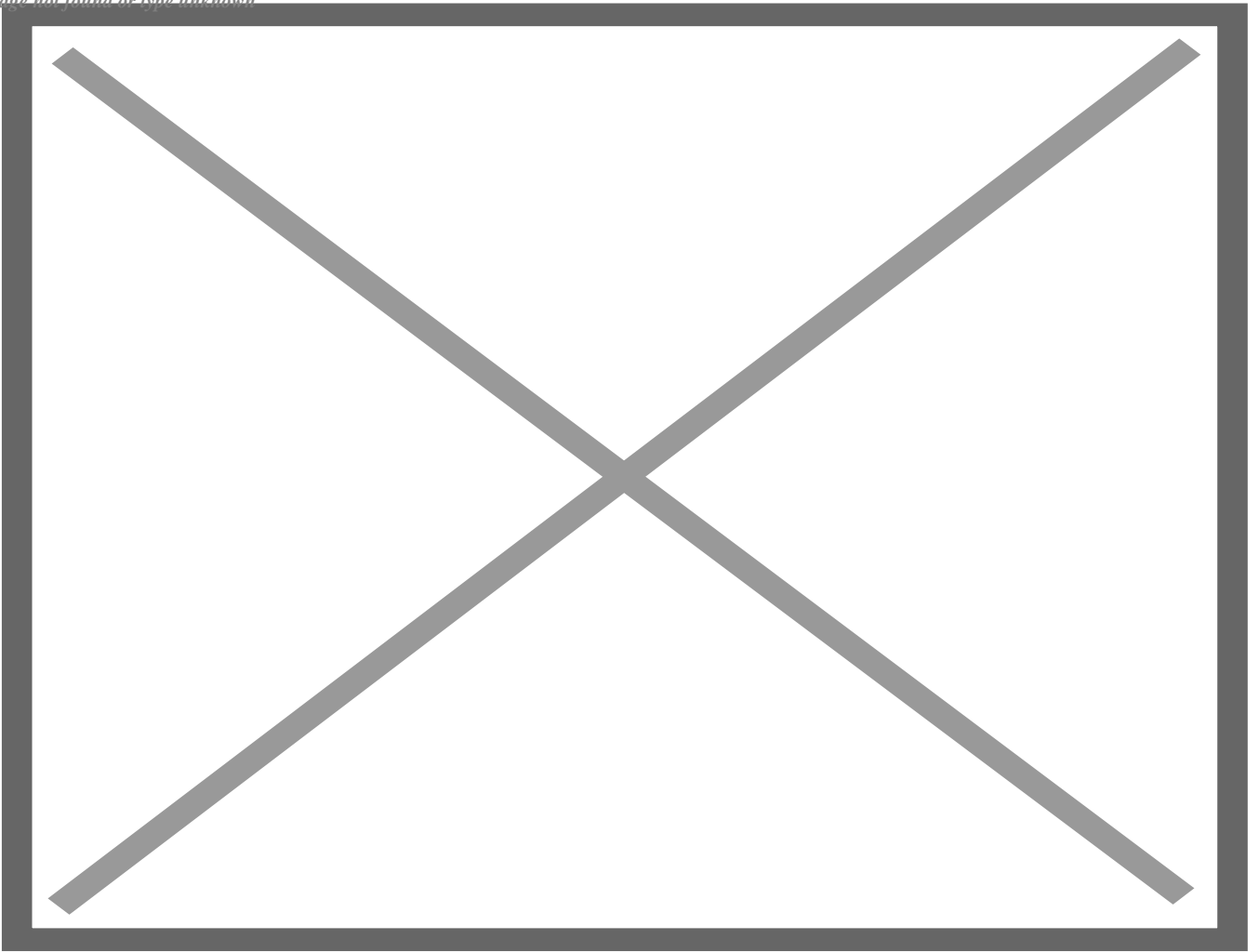


Lula attends Pele's funeral in his first official engagement outside Brasilia

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Brasilia, January 3 (RHC)-- Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva attended the funeral of soccer legend Edson Arantes do Nascimento, better known as Pelé, on Tuesday in the port city of Santos. Lula on Monday sent a wreath in Pele's honor. "Our most sincere homage to the great Brazilian, our king

Pelé," the president wrote in a card.

The president, who traveled accompanied by his wife and several authorities, went to the tent where Pele's body rests and warmly greeted his relatives.

Lula is a great admirer of the soccer player and after learning of his death on December 29, he wrote on the social networks: "I had the privilege that younger Brazilians did not have. I saw Pelé play live in Pacaembu and Morumbi. Not play, no. I saw Pelé put on a show. Because when he hit the ball he always did something special, which often ended in a goal."

Pele's funeral began on Monday at the Vila Belmiro stadium in Santos, the place where 'O Rei' made his debut in November 1956 and scored 288 goals. The burial will end at 10:00 local time this Tuesday after 24 hours of uninterrupted ceremony.

When the ceremony ends, a procession with the three-time world champion's coffin will take place through the streets of the city and will pass through the area where Celeste Arantes, Pele's 100-year-old mother, lives.

A private burial will then take place at the Memorial Necropolis Ecumenica, a vertical cemetery that since 1991 has been listed as the highest in the world in the Guinness Book of Records, and where the player bought 19 years ago, when he was 62 years old, a niche overlooking Vila Belmiro and on the ninth floor in honor of his father, 'Dondinho' -- who wore the jersey with that number when he was a footballer.

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