EGYPT REPLACES SHARM EL-SHEIKH AIRPORT CHIEF

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The head of **Egypt**'s Sharm el-Sheikh airport has been **replaced** amid growing international concern that the Russian plane which crashed soon after leaving the Red Sea resort the airport was downed by a bomb.

But Adel Mahgoub, chairman of the state company that runs Egypt's civilian airports, said Abdel-Wahab Ali had been "promoted" to become his assistant and the move late last night had nothing to do with media scepticism surrounding the airport's security.

Mr Mahgoub said Mr Ali was being replaced by Emad el-Balasi, a pilot.

All 224 aboard the Metrojet Airbus A321-200 were killed in the crash on Saturday morning. The US and Britiain have said they suspect the plane may have been brought down by a bomb and Britain has suspended flights to and from the Sinai Peninsula as a precaution.

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But officials in Egypt insist Sharm el-Sheikh airport is safe and say they wished Britain had waited for the result of the crash investigation before halting flights.

A top aviation source said teams from Russian and British airlines assessed **Sharm el-Sheikh airport** security procedures yesterday and "left without making a single remark about it".

Egypt's presidential spokesman Alaa Youssef added: "We were wishing they would wait for the result of the ongoing investigation."

Hany Ramsay, deputy head of Sharm el-Sheikh airport, said Britain's conclusion that the plane may have been brought down by a bomb came "too soon" and may be aimed at damaging the country's vital tourism sector.

"Other countries might soon follow them. They want to hurt tourism and cause confusion," Mr Ramsey said. He suggested that ulterior political and commercial motives may be behind the British statement.

A US official briefed on the matter said American intelligence agencies had assembled preliminary evidence that a bomb brought down the Russian airliner.

The source said intercepted communications played a role in the tentative conclusion that the Islamic State (IS) group's Sinai affiliate planted an explosive device on the plane.

The official and others said there had been no formal judgment rendered by the CIA or other intelligence agencies, and that forensic evidence from the blast site, including the plane's black box, were still being analysed.

Ireland later followed the British lead and directed its airlines to suspend flights to Sharm el-Sheikh.

The Irish Aviation Authority urged airlines not to fly to or from Sharm el-Sheikh airport or in the Sinai Peninsula "until further notice".

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