

Russia confirms bomb attack brought down plane in Egypt

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Moscow: President Vladimir Putin vowed vengeance as Moscow on Tuesday confirmed that a bomb attack brought down a Russian passenger jet over Egypt last month, killing all 224 people on board.

Putin pledged to ramp up Moscow's bombing campaign in Syria in response to the attack but stopped short of blaming any one group as the country's security agency announced a USD 50 million reward for information leading to capture of those responsible.

"It is not the first time that Russia confronts barbarous terrorist crimes", Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a meeting with his security chiefs.

"The murder of our people in Sinai is among the bloodiest crimes in terms of victims. We will not wipe away the tears from our soul and hearts. This will stay with us forever but will not stop us finding and punishing the criminals," he said in comments released today.

"We will search for them anywhere they might hide. We will find them in any part of the world and punish them," he said.

The confirmation of the attack - the deadliest against a Russian target since the Beslan school massacre by Islamist rebels from the North Caucasus in 2004 - comes days after a chain of attacks claimed by the Islamic State group killed at least 129 people in Paris.

Russia's security chief Alexander Bortnikov told Putin that the passenger jet carrying tourists back from Egyptian resort Sharm el-Sheikh on October 31 was brought down shortly after take-off over Sinai peninsula by a home-made bomb containing explosives of "foreign production" with a force equivalent to one kilo of TNT.

"We can say unequivocally that this was a terrorist attack," Federal Security Service (FSB) head Bortnikov said.

The FSB later said it would pay "USD 50 million for information helping to arrest the criminals."

A group linked to IS had earlier claimed responsibility for downing the plane, and Russia had halted all flights to Egypt despite refusing to endorse growing suspicions in the UK and the US that the plane was blown up by a bomb.

Putin did not expressly blame IS for the attack on the passenger jet but pledged to step up air strikes in Syria where Moscow is conducting a bombing campaign it says is targeting the IS and other "terrorist" groups.

"The combat work of our aviation in Syria must not only be continued. It must be intensified so that the criminals understand that vengeance is inevitable," Putin said.

Putin ordered Russia's foreign ministry to contact all Moscow's partners for assistance and said that it was counting on "our friends" to help find and punish those responsible for the plane attack.

The security meeting and the announcement on the bomb attack came shortly after Putin returned from discussing the Syria conflict with world leaders including President Barack Obama at the G20 summit in Turkey.

- AP