

US officials, including FBI, to assist in investigations into flight MH370
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The US National Transportation Safety Board said it has dispatched a team to Asia to help in investigations into the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 that is presumed to have crashed and claimed 239 lives.

Reuters reported that the NTSB team is accompanied by technical advisers from the US Federal Aviation Administration, the US air safety regulator and Boeing Co, which made the 777-200ER jet that was lost while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

"Once the aircraft location is identified, International Civil Aviation Organisation protocols will determine which country will lead the investigation," the NTSB said.

Because of the travel time to Asia, the team departed from the United States on Saturday night so it could be in place to assist without delay, the NTSB said.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Times quoted a top federal law enforcement official in Washington as saying that the FBI is deploying agents and technical experts to assist in investigating the disappearance of the aircraft as there were three US citizens on board.

The official said a fourth passenger, whom he described as an infant flying with the three Americans, also may be a US citizen.

"But so far what happened is a mystery," the official was quoted as saying.

The Los Angeles Times report also said that US officials were looking at whether it could be an act of terrorism, as they would with any plane crash until proved otherwise.

Though two passengers apparently used stolen passports, "there is no indication this is a terrorist attack; stolen passports are certainly not indicative of a terrorist attack," a senior counter terrorism official quoted by the Los Angeles Times said.

The official said there was "no evidence" of terrorism thus far.

The federal law enforcement official said FBI personnel will assist in reviewing video of the airport in Kuala Lumpur for images of passengers at the ticket counter, the security sections and the boarding area.

He said images they find can be used with the bureau's vast counter-terrorism technology to look for matches with known members of al-Qaeda or other terrorist organisations.

But he emphasised that no known terrorist link has surfaced, and no organisation has claimed responsibility for the missing plane, which was en route to Beijing with 239 people aboard when it disappeared from air traffic control monitoring.

It has been reported that Vietnamese military aircraft participating in a search-and-rescue operation for the plane spotted two oil slicks off the coast of southern Vietnam that were consistent with a plane crash but there has been no verification that they were associated with the missing jet. – March 9, 2014.

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