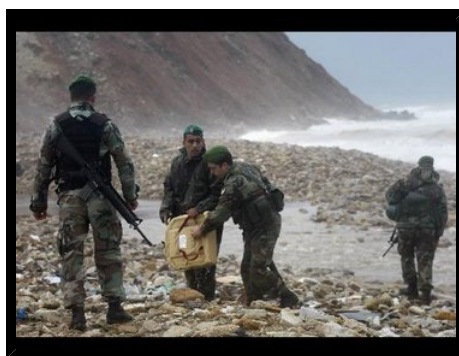


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## Ethiopian Airlines Boeing Crashes in Storm Off Beirut (Update2)

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By Massoud A. Derhally and Jason McLure



Jan. 25 (Bloomberg) -- An **Ethiopian Airlines** Boeing Co. 737 with 90 people on board crashed into the Mediterranean Sea off Beirut after departing the Lebanese capital in stormy weather early this morning. There were no reports of survivors.

Twenty-one bodies have been found, with the search focused 8 kilometers (5 miles) offshore. The jetliner's voice and data recorders are likely to be recovered and should reveal what brought it down, **Elias Murr**, Lebanon's defense minister said.

"In principle the weather factor is the cause of the crash," Murr said at a press conference in Beirut, which has been lashed by heavy rain and high winds for much of the past two days. "There is no evidence of foul play."

Flight ET409 left the city's **Rafik Hariri International Airport** for Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, at 2:35 a.m. and lost contact with air traffic control shortly afterward. The crash is the fourth fatal accident involving the new generation of Boeing 737s introduced 12 years ago and Ethiopian Airlines' first since 1988, excluding a fatal hijacking in 1996, according to data compiled by London-based aviation consultant Ascend.

Water at the crash site is between 50 meters and 100 meters (164-328 feet) deep, Murr said. Local military personnel are being assisted by a U.S. ship, a helicopter from Britain's Royal Air Force and forces from France and the United Nations.

"Weather conditions are very harsh," Lebanese army Brigadier Saleh Haj Suleiman said in a telephone interview, adding that no survivors have so far been found.

No Terror Link

Flames were seen coming from the aircraft before the crash near Na'ameh town, south of Beirut, according to the state-run Lebanese National News Agency. Terrorism is unlikely to have been a factor, Lebanese President **Michel Suleiman** said in Beirut. **Saad Hariri**, the country's prime minister, declared Monday a day of mourning for the victims of the event.

"It was manageable weather, otherwise the crew wouldn't have taken off," Ethiopian Airlines Chief Executive Officer **Girma Wake** told reporters at a briefing in Addis Ababa. The plane's passengers included 51 Lebanese and 23 Ethiopians, the carrier said on its **Web site**. The eight crew were all Ethiopian.

The crashed 737-800 was built in 2002 and operated with Irish discount carrier Ryanair Holdings Plc until April last year, when it went to CIT Group Inc.'s aerospace unit before being leased to Ethiopian Airlines in September, according to Ascend. It was powered by engines from the CFM International joint venture of General Electric Co. and France's Safran SA.

Boeing is working with the **U.S. National Transportation Safety Board** to assist Lebanese authorities with the probe, spokeswoman **Sandy Angers** said in an e-mailed reply to questions. Addis Ababa-based Ethiopian Airlines, which is state owned, said it had sent investigators to the

scene of the crash.

#### Safety Records

**Paul Hayes**, director of safety at Ascend, said both the airline and model of plane involved have sound safety records.

"Ethiopian Airlines is a small carrier that's generally seen as having a good reputation for safety, while the current generation of Boeing 737s has been in use in large numbers for 10 years and has an excellent record," he said by telephone.

The plane was also carrying two Britons and one person each from Turkey, France, Russia, Canada, Syria and Iraq, the airline said. The Lebanese National News Agency put the number of Lebanese citizens at 54, saying that some held dual citizenship.

#### Ambassador's Wife

The wife of the French ambassador to Lebanon was among those on the plane, said Anne-Charlotte Dommartin, a spokeswoman for the French embassy in Beirut. The flight was slightly delayed, having been due to take off at 2:10 a.m.

At Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, people have been told to wait for further information on possible survivors, said Tedros Abdissa, whose 35-year-old cousin Tegist Shokur was on the flight.

"She was a domestic servant and her employer beat her up so she chose to leave," he said in an interview at the airport.

Ethiopian Airlines operates a fleet of 37 planes, most of them Boeing aircraft, according to its [Web site](#). It also has orders outstanding for planes including 10 787 Dreamliners, 12 Airbus SAS A350s and 5 Boeing 777s, according to the site. The airline and Boeing announced a [deal](#) for 10 737s on Jan. 22.

The carrier hasn't suffered a fatal crash since November 1996, when 125 people died during the hijacking of a Boeing 767 en route to Nairobi, according to the [Flight Safety Foundation](#). The plane ditched off the Comoros islands as it ran short of fuel after the hijackers sought to divert it to Australia.

A 737-200 operated by the airline crashed after takeoff in 1988, killing 35 passengers, after the plane flew through a flock of birds which were ingested into its engines, according to Ascend.

To contact the reporter on this story: [Massoud A. Derhally](#) in Beirut, Lebanon at [mdershally@bloomberg.net](mailto:mdershally@bloomberg.net)

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