

PM ordered search in Malacca Straits from Day 1
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The Malaysia government has revealed that it had ordered its forces to search for missing Flight MH370 to be extended to the Straits of Malacca on the same morning of the plane's disappearance following the detection of the plane on military radar hours earlier.

Acting Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein (left) said that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, when informed of the possible turnback by the plane, immediately ordered search and rescue operations be initiated in the Straits of Malacca, alongside that being carried out at the South China Sea.

This contradicted earlier reports the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) had previously said the search for the aircraft had been focused around the waters between the east coast and Vietnam.

In a statement, Hishammuddin, who is also defence minister, reiterated that action was initially not taken when the plane was tracked on military radar as it was "categorised as friendly".

However, the data was reviewed when played back at 8.30am, some seven hours after air traffic control lost contact with the Beijing-bound flight, and Hishammuddin was informed about it at 10.30am.

"The minister (referring to himself) then informed the prime minister, who immediately ordered that search and rescue operations be initiated in the Straits of Malacca, along with the South China Sea operations which started earlier in the day," the statement read.

"During this time, KD Mahamiru, the mine counter measure vessel, and KD Laksamana Muhamad Amin, the corvette vessel of the Royal Malaysian Navy, were already in the Straits of Malacca on patrol duties. They were immediately retasked to conduct the search and rescue operation."

He said a military aircraft was also sent to join the ships at 10.54am that day.

The statement, however, did not mention whether the international search team focussed on the Gulf of Thailand were immediately informed of this, nor did it explain why the main search efforts continued in that area for an entire week.

Hishammuddin and the Royal Malaysian Air Force had previously rubbished a report by CNN which stated that military search aircraft were scrambled to the Straits of Malacca at around 8am that day and that the DCA was only informed three days later.

On March 15, Najib announced that search in the South China Sea has ended, to focus of two corridors from the border of Kazakstan and Turkmenistan to northern Thailand and a southern corridor stretching approximately from Indonesia to southern Indian Ocean.

Search was later narrowed down to the south Indian Ocean at the end of the March after analysis of satellite data and groundbreaking calculations predicted the plane headed there.

This earned Malaysia much flak from the international community, accused of wasting time and assets for focussing in the wrong area.

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