

Hisham 'awed' by PM's courage in Donetsk deal
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Day 5 of the MH17 tragedy

Latest developments

Malaysian PM says the deal with separatists was an 'extraordinary measure' taken in 'extraordinary circumstances'

European monitors say plane wreckage have been 'cut into'

Remains arrives in Kharkiv

Australian PM claims cover up, tampering

Missile attack deduction still possible, says ex-investigator

UN Security Council passes resolution

Separatists hand black box to M'sia

Follow us as we bring the latest updates and coverage on Flight MH17:

Hisham awed by cousin's courage

10.37pm: Malaysia Airline's general enquiry number for MH17 +60378841234 will be deactivated at midnight.

"Families of passengers and crew of MH17 may still contact the airline's Family Support Centre hotline."

10.21pm: Having gained international fame for his handling of the MH370 crisis, Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein is now "awed" by his cousin, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's performance in handling the MH17 tragedy.

"I am awed by the prime minister's courage not to be swayed by the geopolitical landscape in that region and to only focus on the objective, which is to bring home the bodies of Malaysian passengers, take hold of the black boxes and bring those responsible to justice.

"When the prime minister announced that the separatists had agreed, it was an achievement that had required wise leadership," Bernama reports.

Malaysian experts deployed to tag bodies

7.20pm: Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai says that Malaysia has sent 18 disaster victim identification personnel to Kharkiv, where the bodies have been transferred.

The remains will be tagged and transferred into planes en route Amsterdam.

M'sia took risks to negotiate with Borodai

6.30pm: Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak describes Malaysia's deal with separatists in Ukraine to secure Flight MH17's black boxes and the dead as "extraordinary circumstances which called for extraordinary measures".

"There were risks involved in pursuing this agreement. But we felt an obligation to explore all avenues to break the impasse, and secure the return of the remains and the black boxes," he says.

He adds that Malaysia will hold on to the black boxes until an international investigation panel is formed after which it will be handed over.

Read more here.

Large pieces of wreckage cut into

6 pm - The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) says that parts of the MH17 plane wreckage have been changed at the site, compared to when they were last seen.

BBC news quotes OSCE spokesperson Michael Bociurkiw as saying that large pieces of the plane have been cut into.

Two days ago, Google had supplied satellite images from space showing that MH17 came down very close to the village of Grabovo, in eastern Ukraine.

Experts had then said debris traveled up to 3.2 kilometres away from the crash site.

Remains to be flown to Netherlands

5pm: A sombre Dutch King Willem-Alexander addresses his nation briefly today after meeting relatives of those who died on MH17 at the central city of Utrecht. He is accompanied by Queen Maxima.

"This terrible disaster has left a deep wound in our society," the king is quoted saying by The Guardian.

"The scar will be visible and tangible for years to come."

Prime Minister Mark Rutte, speaking at the same event, acknowledged the nation's growing outrage.

"All of the Netherlands feel their anger.

"All of the Netherlands feels their deep grief. All of the Netherlands is standing with the next of kin," Rutte says.

A total 193 Dutch passengers were on MH17.

4.45pm: The train ferrying the remains of some 300 MH17 crash victims arrives in Kharkiv, the country's second largest city, from the rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine.

Reuters reports that from here, the remains will be flown to the Netherlands as majority of those killed in the tragedy are Dutch.

Protests at embassies

4.11pm: Hundreds turn up at the Russian, Ukrainian embassies as well as the United Nations office in Kuala Lumpur today calling for justice for the victims of the MH17 crash.

The protestors at the BN-organised demonstration are all clad in black T-shirts and carry banners which read "Justice 4 MH17".

Read more here.

4.00pm: NGO Just World president Chandra Muzaffar urges Kiev, Moscow and Washington to de-classify and release raw military data manifest of the incident area on July 17.

He says that this will help investigators determine why the plane fell, and if it was shot down and by whom.

MAS 'all risk' insurance policies

3.45pm: Malaysia Airlines (MAS) could potentially claim hundreds of millions in search-and-rescue (SAR) costs from its insurers due to an unusual omission in its insurance policy, the New York Times (NYT) reports.

It states that aircraft "all risk" insurance policies normally have a sub-limit for SAR costs, but for reasons unknown, this is not the case for MAS, the daily claims, quoting unnamed sources.

This means the claims are only limited by an overall cap of US\$2.25 billion (RM7.15 billion) per crash – an industry high because MAS operates large Airbus A380 aircrafts and wants adequate coverage for it and up to 494 passengers on board.

For comparison, Australia estimates the search for MH370 would cost AU\$60 million (RM179 million) over two years.

However, the paper notes the issue only arises if governments decide to bill MAS for the SAR, which is normally not done.

Another silver lining for MAS, NYT says, is that MAS pays relatively low insurance premiums because of its young fleet of Boeing and Airbus aircraft.

2.22pm: Utusan Malaysia reports relatives of MH17 victims in Malaysia have given their DNA samples as bodies of the crash victims begin their long journey home from eastern Ukraine, where they have been stored in refrigerated train wagons..

The tests are being done at two venues, namely Marriott Hotel in Putrajaya for the passengers' next-of kin, and Shangri-La Hotel for families of the MAS pilots and crew members.

'After crime comes the cover up'

1.45pm: Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott says the MH17 downing was no accident, but a crime, and warns that the crime scene should not be tampered with.

"After the crime, comes the cover-up. What we have seen is evidence tampering on an industrial scale and obviously that has to stop," Abbott tells reporters in Canberra, Reuter reports.

The report says Abbott, however, praised Russia President Vladimir Putin for keeping his promise over the last 24 hours by approving a UN Security Council resolution guaranteeing safe access to international monitors trying to secure the scene.

Airlines still flying over conflict zones

1.30pm: Despite the shooting of MH17 in Ukraine, Malaysian Airlines and several other carriers are still flying over conflict zones in the Middle East, the Wall Street Journal reports.

In a report yesterday, it stated Flight MH004 from Kuala Lumpur to London had flown over Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Middle East Airlines had flown over civil war-torn Syria as well, while Etihad, Qatar Airways, and British Airways have flights over Iraq.

The report adds that while governments can close airspace that are deemed unsafe, airlines have the discretion to plan their flights in where it is believed to be safe, however, this can be "pricey" and add to flight times.

MAS, meanwhile clarifies that the London-bound aircraft flew over Syrian airspace on July

20, in accordance to International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO) approved routes and Syrian Civil Aviation Authority.

MAS appeals for trust in Australasia

12.55pm: Struck twice by tragedy in less than five months, Malaysian Airlines (MAS) vows to its customers in the Australasian region that it would strive to rebuild trust.

"We are determined to rebuild trust in Malaysia Airlines as one of the best full-service carriers in the world and we appreciate the support of travel agencies, passengers and our valued employees," the Malay Mail Online quotes the airline's regional senior vice-president for Australia, New Zealand and the South-west Pacific, Lee Poh Kait, as saying.

He adds that MAS' capacity in Australia and New Zealand has grown by a third in February, and the airline has invested more than RM2 billion in a fleet of Airbus 330 aircraft.

In addition, he reportedly said the Malaysian government, as the airline's shareholder, is still committed to ensure MAS' long-term future as a national carrier.

Borodai dismisses Internet as full of lies

12.30pm: Alex Borodai, the leader of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), throws his head back, rolls his eyes and vehemently denies talk the separatists shot down MH17.

His men, Borodai (left) tells CNN's Chris Cuomo in an exclusive interview, have neither the motive nor the weapon to kill the 298 people on board the Malaysian Airlines flight.

"It is very simple to disprove it. All the information that comes through the Internet, in my opinion, are practically all lies," Borodai says.

In fact, Borodai says it was like "a horror movie or black humour" the day the plane crashed and bodies spilled all over Donetsk.

He adds headless bodies were crashing through the roofs of people's homes and the separatists were asked to remove the dead but they refused.

Borodai affirms they welcomed international help now to clean up what CNN dubbed the "world's biggest crime scene."

Borodai further emphasises that he was only speaking as a local chief and not on behalf of Russia.

DPR detains journalists

12pm: New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reports at least 10 foreign correspondents have been briefly detained and threatened by the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in their attempts to cover the crash site and see the dead bodies.

Those held by separatists included journalists with the BBC, the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter, the US-based news website The Daily Beast, Time magazine, the Dutch TV broadcaster Nieuwsuur, and the Kremlin-controlled broadcaster Russia Today, the report says.

They were taken to the Ukrainian national security agency building, which is under DPR control, according to Anna Nemtsova, one of journalists rounded up over the weekend. All of the journalists were released after several hours.

Meanwhile, CPJ also notes at least six media workers were killed in Ukraine since violence erupted with the February ousting of former President Viktor Yanukovych.

WSJ reporter slammed for 'poor English' comment

11.40am: Wall Street Journal's Moscow correspondent Paul Sonne deletes a tweet he made concerning the English proficiency of the Malaysian delegation in the Donetsk People's Republic, after netizens questioned him on the basis of his claim.

"The documents were in Russian and English, and I'm pretty sure the Malaysian delegation's English wasn't very good. Wonder what they signed," he says in a 8.07am tweet, referring to a delegation led by Colonel Mohamed Sakri of the Malaysian Security Council.

Mohamed was in Donetsk to receive MH17's black boxes from DPR leader Aleksander Borodai, after which he signed a document that Borodai said finalised 12 hours of negotiations.

In wake of his tweet, netizens criticise Sonne of being snobbish and trying to put down Malaysians, while others point out that Malaysian senior civil servants are often educated in the UK and that several members of the delegate were believed to be proficient in Russian.

"Hello Paul Sonne, in case you didn't know Malaysians often speak more than three languages here and some people are very good at Russian language too," says a Twitter user under the handle @arieylbzza

In his defence Sonne explains he knew the delegation had poor English because he had tried to speak to them, but others rebutted that speaking skills do not equate to reading skills, especially if accents are taken into account.

MAS refutes MH17 deviated from flight path

11.25am: MAS maintains once again Flight MH17 did not deviate from its flight plan. If anything, the plane may have only swerved to cater for wind changes, the company says in a reply to the New Straits Times (NST).

"As confirmed by Malaysian Airlines' director of operations, Captain Izham Ismail, during the press briefing at Sama Sama Hotel on July 19, MH17 did not deviate from its flight plan route.

"To maintain its assigned track, the flight computer system will adjust the heading to cater for wind changes," MAS is quoted saying by NST.

Yesterday, a news report claimed that an Air India flight was just 90 seconds behind MH17, passing through Ukraine, when it heard orders given to MAS pilots to use a different route.

The report was later refuted.

Russia: Ukraine jet approached MH17

11.20am: Reuters, Wall Street Journal and Pravda report that during at a press briefing, Russia's Defence Ministry sought to further strengthened its case and put the blame for the MH17 tragedy on Ukraine. Among the claims made were:

MAS Flight MH17 flew off course, deviated from its course by close to 14.5kilometres near Donetsk, and was attempting to return to its course when it crashed.

Contrary to reports from Ukraine, Russian claims it detected a Ukrainian fighter aircraft SU-25 flying in the vicinity of the MH17 jetliner prior to its crashing. There was allegedly less than five-kilometre distance between the two aircraft.

Russia reiterates it does not supply sophisticated weapons including the surface-to-air missile alleged to be used by the separatists to down the plane.

MAS faces delisting

11.10am: Bloomberg today reports the possibility of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) being de-listed following the loss of flight MH370 and also the downing of MH17.

The two disasters, it says, are likely to end the flag carrier's days as a publicly-traded company.

It reports that MAS' options range from privatising the company to declaring bankruptcy, both of which involve delisting from Bursa Malaysia.

Bloomberg quotes a Maybank analyst Mohshin Aziz, saying MAS do not have the luxury of time.

"There's never even been an airline that had to go through two monumental tragedies in the space of four months," he says.

MAS shares closed at 20sen yesterday. State-owned Khazanah owning almost 65 per cent stake in the airline.

9.15am: Former aviation safety investigator David Gleave says images of MH17's wreckage appear to show that the aircraft was indeed struck by the missile, but its black box would be useless in providing more insight.

The Guardian quotes him saying that the images of the wreckage appear to show an explosion from the outside, as well as shrapnel damage on the aircraft fuselage.

More clues on this, however, would have to come from examination of the wreckage itself and human remains for chemical traces in hopes of determining the missile's manufacturer, which he said is still possible although investigators did not have immediate access to the crash site.

"I'm not convinced (the contamination of the crash site) is quite as bad as people say. If it's a missile then all the conventional stuff we need for data-gathering goes out of the window. A black box isn't going to tell you it was a missile," he says.

Meanwhile, the report states the train carrying 282 bodies and 87 "other body fragments" has left the separatists-controlled city of Torez towards the Ukrainian government-controlled city of Kharkiv at 7pm (midnight today in Malaysia).

The bodies will be flown to the Netherlands before being sorted by nationality.

MH17 tragedy 'violation of international laws'

8.25am: The International Air Transport Association (Iata) calls on governments to lead the way in reforming how airspace risk assessments are made.

"And the industry will do all that it can to support governments, through the International Civil Aviation Organisation, in the difficult work that lies ahead," its chief executive and director-general Tony Tyler is quoted as saying by Bernama.

He adds that it is a "complete violation of international laws" that MH17 was shot out of a busy air corridor despite complying with restrictions imposed by governments and air navigation service providers and was broadcasting its identity.

'Russie must use influence to end conflict'

8am: The UN Security Council unanimously passes a resolution calling for an independent investigation on MH17 on full access to its crash site.

“Armed groups in control of the crash site (must) provide safe access immediately to allow for the recovery of the bodies. These armed groups top any actions that compromise the integrity of the crash site. There must be a ceasefire in the immediate area around the site.

“Russia must use its influence (among) separatist (groups) to ensure this. (Russia) must use its influence to bring the conflict in east Ukraine to an end,” The Guardian quotes Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in describing the resolution.

7am: The self-proclaimed Prime Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic Aleksander Borodai has handed over two black boxes from downed MH17 to Malaysian experts early this morning during a press conference at his headquarters in Donetsk, Reuters reports.

“I can see that the black boxes are intact, although a bit damaged. In good condition,” says Malaysian National Security Council member Colonel Mohamed Sakri, before the duo signed a document finalising the handover.

This was part of a deal reached by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, announced early this morning, whereby the remains of the crash victims would be sent to Netherlands.

Read more here.

Background:

Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 with 298 people on board crashed in eastern Ukraine at around 10.15pm on July 17 (Malaysian time), near the Ukraine-Russia border. The Boeing 777-200 was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur and was due to arrive at 6am the next day.

A proxy war is taking place in the area pitting the Western-backed Ukraine government against Ukrainian separatists supported by Russia. It is said to be the worst crisis between the West and the former Soviet republic since the Cold War.

US says it is convinced the aircraft was shot down by a surface-to-air missile from territory controlled by Russian-backed Ukrainian rebels.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has blamed the tragedy on the Ukraine government for prolonging the war against the separatists, but has not directly addressed the perpetrators who downed the aircraft.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak says Malaysia will not assign blame until there is concrete evidence but wants "swift justice" against the perpetrators if it is proven that the passenger aircraft was shot down.

