

Search area for MH370 may be doubled

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MH370 The search area for the missing Malaysia Airlines jet MH370 will be doubled if current search efforts fail to locate the aircraft, the ministers from China, Australia and Malaysia announced today.

“So the search is continuing based on expert analyses and will cover a combined area of 120,000 sq km, thereby covering 95 percent of the aircraft’s (probable) flight paths,” Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai told a joint press conference today.

The wider search area, if commenced, is expected to take the rest of 2015 and possibly up to a year to complete, while the current search is over 61 percent completed and is expected to finish by the end of May.

The area is comprised of the periphery of the current search area in the South Indian Ocean – essentially meaning that the current search area would be expanded outwards in all directions, like a balloon.

Search 67km from 'seventh arc'

According to Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) chief Martin Dolan, the current search is up to 67km from an imaginary line known as the “seventh arc” on the southern end, and 45km on the northern end.

He told a technical briefing after the ministers’ press conference that this will be extended to 90km of both ends of the arc.

The seventh arc is a long, curved line representing MH370’s possible position when it made its seventh and last satellite communication after deviating from its intended flight path, where the aircraft is believed to have run out of fuel.

The new search would add up to estimated A\$50 million (RM142 million) to the search costs, on top of the A\$120 million (RM340 million) already committed to the current search efforts, and will use the same search vessels and equipment already being used.

However, Liow warned that the A\$50 million figure is only a “ballpark figure” and a more detailed estimate is yet to be done.

Australian Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss explained that the next 60,000 sq km of the search is expected to be cheaper than the first 60,000 because the four search vessels to be used are already in position.

“The cost of mobilization was quite expensive,” Liow added.

Both Liow and Truss also reiterated that Malaysia and Australia would continue to share the search cost equally.

When asked how China would contribute to the efforts, Chinese Transport Minister Yang Chuantang said the country would be providing technical expertise to the investigation and care of the next-of-kin of MH370 victims.

In addition, he said China would be mobilizing its vessels to participate in the search, and is looking to refit existing equipment so that it is up to the task.

Yang did not elaborate on the number and type of assets that China is planning to send.

Flight MH370 had been missing since March 8 last year, and all 239 persons on board are presumed dead. Of these, 152 are Chinese nationals.

The Boeing 777-200ER aircraft was en-route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing at the time, but then mysteriously terminated communications and deviated from its flight path.

Although Malaysia is responsible for investigating the incident under the Chicago Convention, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea stipulates that Australia is responsible for recovering the aircraft as it falls under its search and rescue zone.

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