

COMMENT | Should the search for MH370 resume?

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P Gunasegaram

COMMENT | Even before the company which wants to resume the search for missing MH370 has made its briefing, Transport Minister Anthony Loke has already expressed his intention to push the cabinet to agree to this dubious venture.

According to Malaysiakini, Loke said he will seek the cabinet's approval for the government to sign a new contract with US-based marine robotics company Ocean Infinity Ltd for the resumption of the search.

"The Malaysian government's position is consistent - we will consider a further search operation when new information and credible evidence is ascertained. To this end, I have instructed the Transport Ministry to invite Ocean Infinity to Malaysia to brief me on their latest 'no cure, no fee' proposal."

That's a rather premature move considering that it will again stir up emotions among those who have lost relatives and loved ones in the crash. It will continue to needlessly put a negative spotlight on Malaysia Airlines hindering the nascent

recovery of the airline which was badly hit by the incident.

Remember, Malaysia first signed an agreement with Ocean Infinity in January 2018 to begin a new search for MH370, after extensive search operations were stopped earlier. It embarked on a three-month “no cure, no fee” search covering about 112,000 sq km in the southern Indian Ocean, which concluded with no discovery.

In 2022, then transport minister Wee Ka Siong said Ocean Infinity was prepared to resume the search for the missing flight if called upon to do so, but the government’s stand was that there must be “new credible evidence” before another search can begin, Malaysiakini reported.

Nothing was heard about it until now when Loke has said that he intends to propose to the cabinet that the search be resumed.

There are lots of holes.

Search conditions unclear

Ocean Infinity CEO Oliver Plunkett said in January 2018 at the time of the signing: “The primary mission by Ocean Infinity is to identify the location of the debris field, wreckage and or both of the flight recorders - cockpit voice recorder and

flight data recorder - and present considerable and credible evidence to confirm the exact location of the main items," he added.

Yes, there will be no payment if there is no find. However, his statement does not make it clear what the search conditions are. If it does not unambiguously include the flight recorders the search serves no purpose, even if it can identify the location of the debris field.

And even if the flight recorders can be located, after 10 years in the ocean, there may not be any information that can be adduced.

And why give permission to resume the search now, in 2024, some six years after the first search was concluded? If they come back six years later for another search attempt if this one fails, will Loke still agree to consider it? How many more will he agree to?

If the debris is spread over a large area and the flight recorders are not emitting any more signals - after 10 years, it's unlikely there's a signal anymore - it serves no purpose to identify the crash site. Everything would have been dispersed anyway because of strong currents and erosion over the years.

Obviously, Ocean Infinity is not doing this for charity and is looking for a quick gain through contract loopholes which will expose Malaysia. As Loke himself says

rather naively: "If they can find the plane, the cost is something which the government has to bear."

That seems to imply that so long as the wreckage is found, the government will have to pay. Big mistake.

Even if there is wreckage and it is found, recovering it from the depths of the ocean with strong currents and inhospitable weather conditions will be well nigh impossible and too costly. We will still have no clue as to what happened if we can't find the flight recorders in working condition.

For all you know, Ocean Infinity may already be testing its marine robotics search capabilities in this area. If they do strike gold, by finding the aircraft then they get a huge payoff. Why must Malaysia cater to them?

The evidence is already there. The investigations show that the plane crashed and there is evidence of the rough area that it crashed into based on analysis of satellite information.

On top of that, many pieces of debris from the crash have been recovered. Some of these have been confirmed to be from the plane without a doubt while others are listed as almost certainly from the plane. These indicate that the plane most likely broke up on impact, making it unlikely anything substantial can be

recovered even if the main body if there is one, is found.

Time to lay it to rest

The best thing for Malaysia is to put MH370 behind it, giving the family and friends of the 239 who perished in the crash respite, relief, rest, and resolution from this constant irritation of old wounds every time the anniversary of the flight comes on March 8.

It's a matter of great regret that Malaysia's transport minister, of all people, is succumbing to this resumption of search, entertaining the far-fetched hopes of a fortune for those who might find the location of the crash, and raising false hopes among the family and friends of the victims who can now only hope for an explanation of the crash - nothing more.

The result of this futile exercise can only be pain for those who know people who lost their lives in the crash and financial cost to the government - and the outside chance of a fortune for a few opportunists.

After 10 long years, it's high time we laid to rest the haunting ghost of MH370 - forever.

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