

No Hint Of MAS Plane Missing For More Than 12 Hours
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 8 (Bernama) -- A Malaysia Airlines (MAS) plane flying from here to Beijing has been missing for more than 12 hours without any hint of where it is.

Flight MH370 took off from the KL International Airport at 12.41 am Saturday and was scheduled to land in Beijing at 6.30 am (Beijing time) but lost contact with the Subang air traffic control at 2.40 am when it was in airspace over the South China Sea between Malaysia and Vietnam.

The Boeing 777-200 was carrying 227 passengers of 14 nationalities and 12 crew when it disappeared.

Malaysian and Vietnamese search-and-rescue teams are scouring the area of the South China Sea where the signal from the plane was last received by radar. China has also sent vessels to help in the search.

Soon after the plane was reported missing, there was a report that it had made an emergency landing in Nanming, China, but Chinese authorities said afterwards that the plane had never entered China's airspace at all.

MAS Group CEO Ahmad Jauhari Yahya told a news conference that the last signal detected from Flight MH370 was at a point 120 nautical miles east of Kota Baharu over the South China Sea, and there had been no indication of distress from the plane.

Ahmad Jauhari said 153 of the passengers were from China, 12 Indonesia, seven Australia, three each from France and the United States, two each from New Zealand, Ukraine and Canada and one each from Russia, Italy, Taiwan, the Netherlands and Austria.

He said the plane was piloted by Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, 53. Zaharie joined MAS in 1981 and has chalked up 18,365 flying hours.

The first officer of Flight MH370 was Fariq Ab Hamid, 27. Fariq has 2,763 flying hours to his credit, having joined MAS in 2007, he added.

The Boeing 777-200 aircraft that went missing is 11 years and 10 months old, said Ahmad Jauhari.

There have also been reports and speculation that wreckage had been found 100 kilometres from Ho Chi Minh City and on an island in Vietnam, but these could not be confirmed.

All such information was dismissed by acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein at a news conference. He said there had been no verified news on the whereabouts of the plane.

Hishammuddin also tweeted that all the relevant agencies, including the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF), were working together to locate the missing plane.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said he had asked "all measures possible to be taken" to locate the aircraft.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the family members of Flight MH370. I've asked all measures possible to be taken," Najib tweeted.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) announced that it had deployed one aircraft and three ships in a search-and-rescue operation following the disappearance of the MAS plane.

MMEA C3i (Command, Control, Communication and Information) director Capt (Maritime) Hamid Mohd Amin told Bernama the operation was launched at 8.30 am. Several family members of the passengers had gathered at KLIA to wait for updates on the search-and-rescue operation

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