

14 nationalities onboard missing MAS aircraft

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By Lee Shi-lan

Family members of passengers onboard MAS flight MH370 arriving at the holding area centre in KLIA today. The airline still has no details on the cause of the crash. The 239 passengers and crew onboard the missing MH370 bound for Beijing this morning were from 14 different countries, including the United States, Canada, France and Malaysia.

Malaysia Airlines group chief executive officer Ahmad Jauhari Yahya said they only issued a statement at 8.30am because the flight had sufficient fuel to fly until this time.

"MAS confirms that flight MH370 lost contact with the Subang air traffic control at 2.40am. However, it had sufficient fuel to fly to Beijing and beyond," Ahmad Jauhari said at a press conference at the Sama-Sama Hotel in Sepang.

He said there was speculation that the aircraft had landed at Nanning but the report had yet to be verified.

The B777-200 aircraft left the Kuala Lumpur International Airport at 12.41am and was expected to land in Beijing at 6.30am.

It was carrying 239 passengers, comprising 227 passengers (including two infants) and 12 crew members, before it was reported lost in airspace controlled by Vietnam in the early hours of the day.

Ahmad Jauhari said the passengers comprised of citizens from China (152 plus an infant); Malaysia (38); Indonesia (12); Australia (7); France (3); United States of America – 3 pax plus 1 infant; New Zealand (2); Ukraine (2); Canada (2); Russia (1); Italy (1); Taiwan (1); Netherlands (1) and Austria (1).

"This flight was a code share with China Southern Airlines. We are working with authorities who have activated their search and rescue team to locate the aircraft," said Jauhari.

The flight was piloted by Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, a Malaysian, aged 53. He had a total flying hours of 18,365 hours. He joined Malaysia Airlines in 1981.

First officer Fariq Ab Hamid, a Malaysian, is 27. He has a total flying hours of 2,763 hours. He joined Malaysia Airlines in 2007.

Ahmad Jauhari said the last reported position of MH370 was 120 nautical miles off Kota Baru, around the South China Sea.

"There was no indication of any distress signal from the aircraft."

He said that contact had been made with Vietnamese authorities to request their assistance to locate MH370.

The Boeing 777-200 was 11 years and 10 months old.

Asked whether MAS would ground its fleet of Boeing 777-200, Ahmad Jauhari said this depended on whether there was any evidence of technical failure.

Moreover, the manufacturer has to make that recommendation, he added.

Malaysia Airlines (MAS) have begun contacting the next-of-kin of passengers and crew on board the missing flight MH370, which lost contact with air traffic controllers early this morning.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all affected passengers and crew and their family members."

Acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, through his Twitter account, urged family members of the passengers and crew to remain calm.

"To the family members of the passengers on board, stay calm & only get info fr validated sources. We'll keep all informed. Prayers with all," he tweeted.

China's Xinhua news agency had reported that the aircraft did not enter airspace controlled by China and did not make contact with Chinese controllers.

Screens at the airport in Beijing indicated that the flight was "delayed".

"This news (of the missing MAS plane) has made us all very worried," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in a statement quoted by Reuters.

"We hope every one of the passengers is safe. We are doing all we can to get more details."

MAS says it will be providing regular updates on the situation. The public can call 03-7884 1234 for information.

The next-of-kin of passengers and crew may head to the Support Facility Building at KLIA's South Support Zone. For directions, call 03-8787 1269. – March 8, 2014.

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