

Conspiracy theories spiral around MH370's disappearance

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By Lee Shi-lan

Was one of the passengers aboard the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 travelling with a stolen passport?

Malaysian authorities have refused to confirm nor deny this report, which has spread like wildfire on the Internet.

On godlikeproductions.com, it was posted that 37-year-old Luigi Maraldi who was supposedly aboard MH370, is actually in Thailand.

Maraldi contacted his relatives in Italy to inform them that he was safe and sound and currently in Thailand.

Apparently, Maraldi had informed Italian authorities in August last year that he had lost his passport.

Maraldi is one of the names which appeared on the passenger manifest for flight MH370, which has been missing since 1.30am.

Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Kaprawi was asked about the possibility of terrorism as the cause for MH370's disappearance.

A foreign reporter asked Aziz whether MH370 had been lost due to foul play.

"We cannot reveal too many details about our security," Aziz said.

"We have reviewed the closed-circuit television video footage pertaining to passengers and their baggages."

"So far, we are satisfied with everything," he said.

However, Aziz said, authorities were not ruling out any possibilities at this juncture.

He said search and rescue operations were still ongoing and would continue around the clock.

The Royal Malaysia Air Force is conducting night searching as their aircraft are equipped with night vision facilities.

The search area has been widened to include both the east and west coast of Malaysia.

"Both the Malaysian and Vietnamese SAR forces are conducting searches in their respective coastal waters."

Aziz said authorities were quite sure that MH370 had disappeared at sea.

Regarding the 20km oil slick spotted between Malaysia and Vietnam, Aziz said they had asked Vietnamese authorities about it.

"But the Vietnamese authorities have yet to get back to us," he said.

Unless there are further developments regarding MH370, the next press briefing will be tomorrow at 9am.

Malaysia Airlines said that the plane had 227 passengers aboard, including two infants, and an all-Malaysian crew of 12.

The passengers included 154 citizens from China or Taiwan, 38 Malaysians, seven Indonesians, six Australians, five Indians, four French and three Americans, as well as two citizens each from New Zealand, Ukraine and Canada and one each from Russia, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria.

The airline said that it was notifying the next-of-kin of the passengers and crew.

Hundreds of family members gathered in rooms set aside for them at a Beijing hotel, and at least two medical personnel went in to monitor them, reported The New York Times.

Boeing said in a statement that it was assembling a team of technical experts to advise the national authorities investigating the disappearance of the aircraft.

Malaysia Airlines said that the plane took off at 12.41am Malaysia time, and that the plane disappeared from air traffic control radar in Subang, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur, at 2.40am.

That timeline seemed to suggest that the plane stayed in the air for two hours – long enough to fly not only across the Gulf of Thailand but also far north across Vietnam. But Lindahl of Flightradar 24 said that the last radar contact had been at 1.19am, less than 40 minutes after the flight began.

A Malaysia Airlines spokesman said on Saturday evening that the last conversation between the flight crew and air traffic control in Malaysia had been around 1.30am, but he reiterated that the plane had not disappeared from air traffic control systems in Subang until 2.40am. – March 8, 2014.

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