

Experts surprised as missing MAS plane has ample safety features
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There are ample safety features in the Boeing 777-200 aircraft, prompting several aviation experts to question what really happened to the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) flight which went missing early this morning after taking off from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

"The airplane by certification has to have battery back-up power – they still have to be able to utilise certain flight instruments and communication tools to complete the flight safely," said Greg Feith, a former investigator with the United States' National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

"So you could lose all the generators, you could have both engines out, but the battery back-up – which will only work for a certain time – is intended for emergency situations," he told CNN.

The plane left Kuala Lumpur at 12.41am and was scheduled to land in Beijing at 6.30am this morning.

It lost contact with the Subang air traffic control at 2.40am.

There are 239 passengers and crew onboard, comprising 15 different nationalities, including 153 Chinese nationals and 38 Malaysians, as well as citizens from Indonesia, Australia, France, The United States, New Zealand, Ukraine, Canada, Russia, Italy, Taiwan, India, the Netherlands and Austria.

While Vietnam officials said that the plane might have crashed into the Gulf of Thailand, Malaysian authorities said the claim could not be confirmed.

Earlier, MAS group chief executive officer Ahmad Jauhari Yahya said the flight was piloted by 53-year-old Malaysian Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, who joined the airlines in 1981, has 18,365 flying hours under his belt. He was assisted by Fariq Ab Hamid, 27.

Another expert who had covered MAS recently said the aircraft would have been at the safest point of the flight when it was believed to have lost contact two hours after take-off.

"So, in that particular point of the flight, this is the safest part, nothing is supposed to go wrong. The aircraft is at altitude on auto-pilot, the pilots are making minor corrections and changes for height as the plane burns off fuel – the plane will be going higher and higher – so this is extremely serious that something happened at this point in the flight," said CNN international business correspondent and aviation industry specialist Richard Quest.

Meanwhile, Mary Schiavo, former Inspector General of the US Department of Transportation, did not rule out survivors in the event the plane is located.

Saying the airliner was equipped with different ways to show its location, she, however, warned of a complex search operation if there were faulty transmitters, comparing it to the Air France plane, which crashed into the Atlantic Ocean in June 2009, killing all 228 people on board.

"If they are not working then, sadly, there are similarities with the Air France plane, which was travelling from Brazil to Paris, France, and was lost in the ocean. That was very difficult to locate because of the depth of the ocean," she said, as quoted by CNN.

An aviation safety consultant with India's Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Committee, on the other hand, expressed surprise that the plane had yet to be located.

"The 777 is a very safe aircraft – I'm surprised," said Mohan Ranganathan.

The flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing takes five-and-a-half hours, one of the shorter routes worldwide for Boeing 777. – March 8, 2014

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