

MAS plane still missing, reports of crash premature, says minister

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By Lee Shi-lan

Acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein says that there is no confirmation MAS flight MH370 crashed into the sea off Tho Chu island in Vietnam. Reports that Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 had crashed into the sea off Tho Chu island in Vietnam were premature as the claims had not been verified, says acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

"Please do not speculate about the fate of MH370 as all these claims and assumptions must be verified first," Hishammuddin told the media at Sama-Sama Hotel in Sepang today.

"As the report is quoting the Vietnamese navy, I have directed the Royal Malaysian Navy to verify the authenticity of the report," he said.

The last known position of MH370 before it disappeared off the radar was 065515 north (longitude) and 1033443 east (latitude).

Search and rescue operations are focused on this area to locate the missing aircraft but as of now, there was still no news of the plane's whereabouts.

Hishammuddin, who is also the defence minister, said the Malaysian armed forces have been deployed to locate the missing plane.

The navy, air force and army had been mobilised to conduct search and rescue operations, he added.

Hishammuddin said a C-130 Hercules had also been deployed to assist in locating the missing MH370.

Additionally, the military has also deployed vessels and helicopters to assist in the operations.

"I held a discussion with the senior members of our armed forces this morning and directed that all resources be deployed in this operation."

He said director-general of the Department of Civil Aviation Datuk Azharuddin Abdul Rahman had been appointed as the point man to relay information to the media.

"Press briefings will be held once every two hours to update the media."

Hishammuddin said there had been no sign of any plane wreckage found in the sea nor had they received any such reports.

"There has been no information of any terrorist involvement in the disappearance of MH370. However, we are not ruling out any possibilities."

Malaysia Airlines group chief executive officer Ahmad Jauhari Yahya said there were five Indian

nationals onboard MH370.

"Previously, there were 12 Indonesians reported onboard the aircraft. There were actually seven Indonesians and five Indian nationals."

Ahmad Jauhari said MAS had contacted about 80% of the families of the passengers and crew onboard MH370.

He revealed that MAS was also sending a team to Beijing to provide whatever assistance and comfort they could to family members there.

Ahmad Jauhari said all other MAS flights and services would continue as usual without any disruptions.

MAS has also requested the next-of-kin of passengers and crew members to standby at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport with a valid international passport.

Two members of each passenger will be allowed to go on the special flight to Vietnam although the destination has yet to be decided.

Information is slowly trickling in but the exact location of the plane has yet to be ascertained.

DCA and Malaysia Airlines representatives have said that this was only applicable to family members and not members of the media.

Flight MH370 went missing somewhere between Malaysian and Vietnamese airspace over the South China Sea at 2.40am.

The B777-200 aircraft had left Kuala Lumpur at 12.41am and was scheduled to land in Beijing at 6.30am.

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

The 239 passengers and crew onboard the missing MH370 bound for Beijing this morning were from 15 different countries, including the United States, Canada, France and Malaysia.

The flight was a code share with China Southern Airlines.

It 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. – March 8, 2014.

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