

## **Search widens in international effort to find missing plane**

**Malaysian Insider**

**8 March, 2014**

**By Lee Shi-lan**

Najib and Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin consoling the family members of passengers and crew onboard MAS flight MH370, at the holding area in KLIA today. - Pic from PMOMalaysia tweet, March 8, 2014. Rescuers from several countries have widened the search area for the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370.

Hundreds of personnel from the Malaysian armed forces, Vietnam, China, the United States navy, Singapore and the Philippines are widening their search and rescue efforts from the area where the signal from MH370 was last detected before it disappeared off the radar 120 nautical miles from Kota Baru.

There has been no news of the Boeing 777-200 aircraft since it left from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport at 12.40am. The flight was scheduled to land in Beijing at 6.30am.

The aircraft was carrying 239 passengers and crew members including 153 Chinese nationals and 38 Malaysians.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak told a press conference this evening that the search and rescue operations would continue until the aircraft is found.

Najib said the Vietnamese navy had also contacted their Malaysian counterparts and confirmed that MH370 did not crash into the sea near the Tho Chu island.

"It is too early to draw any type of conclusion, there are several theories but it will remain as such until there is concrete evidence," he said at the Sama-Sama Hotel in Sepang.

Najib said the initial search had been focused on the area where MH370's signal was last detected before it disappeared off the radar.

He said Malaysia had not used satellite imaging as the aircraft cannot be found if it is below the water.

Najib said the equipment deployed for the operation had also been increased, including two Agusta helicopters and six vessels from the Royal Malaysian Navy.

The US navy is sending a destroyer, USS Pinckney, other resources to aid in the search for MAS flight MH370. Meanwhile, at the same press conference, Department of Civil Aviation director-general Datuk Azharuddin Abdul Rahman said they lost contact with MH370 at 1.30am.

"At 2.30am, we informed Malaysia Airlines that DCA had lost contact with MH370. Aviation authorities in the region were also informed," he said.

Azharuddin said the DCA's rescue control centre was alerted at 5.30am but could not be deployed at that time because it was still dark.

"At first light, all our search and rescue personnel were deployed to locate MH370," he said.

"The last location of MH370 was that it was near the Malaysia-Vietnam border and it may have entered Vietnam's coastal waters," Azharuddin said.

MAS group chief executive officer Ahmad Jauhari Yahya said the United States Federal Aviation Administration and Boeing had offered their assistance.

"MAS has also assembled a technical team. However, nothing can be done until MH370 or its wreckage has been found."

He said the families of those on board had been told to bring their international passports to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in case they wished to travel to China.

"MAS will facilitate their travel," Ahmad Jauhari said.

MH370 was a code share flight with China Southern Airlines.

It was piloted by Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, a Malaysian aged 53. He had recorded a total of 18,365 flying hours, since joining Malaysia Airlines in 1981.

First officer Fariq Ab Hamid, a Malaysian, is 27. He has a total of 2,763 flying hours under his belt. He joined Malaysia Airlines in 2007. – March 8, 2014.

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