

Authorities probing entire MH370 manifest, at least 4 suspect passengers
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Acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein says an investigation will begin into the entire passenger manifest for flight MH370. Malaysian authorities are now investigating the entire passenger manifest of flight MH370 after it was found that at least four passengers with suspect identities flew on the plane that vanished yesterday morning.

Two men – an Italian and an Austrian – have already said they were not on the Boeing 777-200ER which took off from Kuala Lumpur International Airport for Beijing at 12.40am on Saturday.

It lost contact with airport traffic controllers at 1.30am and never arrived in Beijing.

"We are investigating the entire manifest, not just the four passengers," acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said at KLIA this morning.

The missing plane has yet to be found although Hishammuddin confirmed that oil slicks had been found in the search area in the waters between Malaysia and Vietnam.

"The disappearance of MH370 is not something which can be taken lightly and we cannot discount any possibilities. The intelligence agencies of relevant countries have been informed and we will be sharing information as investigations unfold," he said.

"Following discussions, intelligence agencies of various countries have agreed to work together to check the passenger manifest and the stolen passports."

Hishammuddin said closed-circuit television video footage at KLIA would also be reviewed.

"How the four individuals managed to board MH370 with stolen passports is being discussed.

"However, this is an international network and we cannot completely blame the Immigration Department."

Hishammuddin said authorities were examining the passenger manifest again and had also met Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI) officers based in Kuala Lumpur.

Asked whether this was a security lapse, Hishammuddin said they had not even ascertained whether it was a security risk, let alone lapse.

"Let us not jump to conclusions and make wild speculation. If it is a security lapse, then we have to ascertain where it occurred.

"We are looking at all possibilities but the main issue now is to locate the missing MAS MH370."

Hishammuddin said there was a possibility that MH370 may have had to do an air turn back (ATB), which meant that search and rescue (SAR) forces would have to widen their search.

An ATB means the aircraft had to return to the airport of origin as a result of a malfunction or suspected malfunction of any item on the aircraft.

"I met Singapore Defence Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen yesterday and they have agreed to deploy an additional three vessels, including a frigate with sonar capabilities."

He also confirmed that reports of an oil slick between Malaysia and Vietnam were true although no debris had been found at the location.

"The Vietnamese authorities have deployed vessels to the area to ascertain if the oil slick is aeroplane fuel and whether MH370 crashed in the area," Hishammuddin said.

Malaysia Airlines said that the plane took off at 12.41am Malaysian time and that it disappeared from air traffic control radar in Subang at 2.40am.

The 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 Fredrik Lindahl, the chief executive of Flightradar24, an online aircraft tracking service, had said that the last radar contact had been at 1.19am, less than 40 minutes after the flight began.

The authorities said yesterday that the last conversation between the flight crew and air traffic control in Malaysia had been about 1.30am. – March 9, 2014.

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