

Nothing to suggest terrorism behind MH370 disappearance, says MAS
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There is no information confirmed thus far to suggest terrorism is behind flight MH370 vanishing into thin air, Malaysia Airlines said today in Beijing as air and sea search teams ended the second day without finding the passenger jet.

The flag carrier has said it will begin flying Chinese relatives of the 239 people on board the missing plane to Kuala Lumpur tomorrow. It had earlier asked relatives to prepare for the worst and have engaged the services of a US disaster recovery firm.

Malaysia Airlines' Ignatius Ong, who heads the carrier's team in Beijing, said today information currently available showed that the provided passenger list matched booking information for the flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Malaysian authorities have not ruled out terrorism and investigation into the fate of the plane has been complicated further by revelations that two passengers appeared to have boarded the plane with stolen passports, prompting airline executives and aviation officials to say that foul play cannot be ruled out.

Inspector-General Khalid Abu Bakar told reporters in Terengganu that while police investigators "don't dismiss the possibility" of terrorism, they were not considering it the most likely cause for the disappearance of flight MH370.

Meanwhile, more than 100 relatives of the Chinese passengers on board have been anxiously waiting for information at a hotel that Malaysia Airlines has asked them to gather at in Beijing, China's Xinhua news agency reported.

The company has informed the relatives that if they want to go to Malaysia, it will make efforts to assist them, it quoted Ong as saying.

Ong, who is MAS's Firefly airline chief executive, said that the airline has started to arrange for the first batch of relatives to set out for Malaysia.

The carrier has communicated with the Malaysian and Chinese governments to assist the relatives to go to Malaysia. The departure time is expected to be Monday at the soonest if their passports and visas can be handled smoothly, Ong said.

For those already holding passports, the airline has negotiated with Malaysian authorities to accelerate the visa application procedures, he added.

Only two direct relatives of each passenger will be allowed on the first flight to Malaysia due to limited seat numbers.

Despite continuing search efforts from Malaysia, Vietnam, the United States and China, the plane's whereabouts have not been ascertained thus far. Ong said the airline has told passengers' families to "prepare for the worst result" and has drafted in a group of disaster relief experts from Atlanta in case of the possible worst situation.

According to the latest announcement, the airline has set up emergency response command centres in Kota Kinabalu, in Sabah, Malaysia and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

Ong promised the centres would be immediately initiated to support rescue operations as the next step as soon as the plane is located, and vowed that the centres will meet all the needs of family members.

The missing Boeing 777-200 aircraft operated by Malaysia Airlines left Kuala Lumpur International Airport for Beijing at 12.41am on Saturday.

Contact with the plane along with its radar signal was lost at 1.20am when it was flying over the Ho Chi Minh air traffic control area in Vietnam.

The aircraft was carrying 12 Malaysian flight crew and 227 passengers, including 154 Chinese and Taiwan nationals. – March 9, 2014.

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