

**As leads fail to pan out, search for MH370 stretches from Sumatra to Hong Kong**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
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Searchers are scouring more than 500,000 square nautical miles from the shores of Sumatra to Hong Kong to look for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 today as lead after lead failed to pan out over the past three days since the passenger jet vanished.

The flotilla of naval ships and some three dozen aircraft will comb both sea and the jungle-clad Malaysian-Thai border for the lost Boeing 777-200ER jet with 239 people onboard.

One thing the search and rescue team know is that the twin-engine aircraft is not in the air as it had only 7½ hours of fuel left when it vanished 40 minutes into the six-hour flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on Saturday.

The teams trying to find the passenger jet, which has a 61m wingspan, will scour data for radar signatures while seeking to detect pinging from black boxes as the search for visible wreckage proves elusive, Bloomberg reported last night.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) and Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) said yesterday that none of the debris found were linked to the plane while an oil slick close the flight path proved to be bunker fuel, not jet fuel.

American experts said the first 72 hours was crucial for anyone to survive a plane crash but authorities are hopeful as nothing has turned up to suggest MH370 has met a watery end.

**Search and rescue mission**

"It is still a search and rescue mission," director-general of Civil Aviation Datuk Azharuddin Abdul Rahman told reporters at KLIA in Sepang last night.

"Unfortunately, ladies and gentlemen, we have not found anything that appears to be objects from the aircraft, let alone the aircraft," he had said at an earlier briefing.

He announced the expanded search area after an international search and rescue mission failed to turn up any clues to what he called "an unprecedented aviation mystery".

Authorities were sending ships to investigate a report of debris found south of Hong Kong, but it would likely be today before authorities know if there was anything to those reports, he said.

But aircraft lost in waters kilometres deep have been found by remote-controlled submarines, or experts have gathered enough clues to determine what happened, accident reports since 1970 show.

"The capability is there," Ronald Schleede, a former investigator with the United States National Transportation Safety Board, said in an interview with Bloomberg.

"I think they'll find it."

In the case of the Malaysia Airlines aircraft, the waters beneath the area where it seems most likely to have gone down are about 50m deep, Bloomberg reported, versus 3,900m in the case of Air France flight 447, where wreckage was found and removed almost two years after the A330 jet disappeared.

### **Technology to the rescue**

While a signal from the wide-body Boeing 777 transponder appears not to be working, local agencies would ordinarily have tracked the plane, said Paul Hayes, a safety expert at London-based Ascend, which logs air crashes.

“One assumes that Malaysian air-defence radars would be watching approaches to their airspace and they need to be asked to have a look,” he said.

Emergency beacons from the jetliner’s so-called black boxes would be another potential tool. Investigators have said they aren’t hearing any “pinging” from the flight data and voice recorders, though that may be because the search area was currently so ill-defined, Hayes said.

Honeywell International Inc makes the boxes for most Boeing 777 planes but company officials in Asia declined to comment on whether the Malaysian plane was carrying its equipment.

The recorders would normally begin sending signals if an aircraft broke up or hit the water, with the pinging lasting for 30 days until independent power supplies run out, Bloomberg reported.

Searchers can also use underwater microphones to help find the boxes, with Honeywell’s equipment emitting signals that can be heard from 4.5km deep, according to company reports in 2009 during the investigation of the Air France A330 disappearance over the Atlantic en route from Rio de Janeiro to Paris.

The recorders are also designed to withstand 3,400 times the force of gravity on impact, making it highly likely the boxes will have withstood any breakup of the plane.

But at this point, it was impossible to know if the plane exploded at altitude or could have broken up on hitting water, though the struggle to locate surface wreckage was perplexing, said Hayes.

### **The long, wide search**

The Malaysia Airlines aircraft took off from Kuala Lumpur at 12.41am on Saturday with 227 passengers and 12 crew members to Beijing. It never arrived.

Since then, teams of searchers from Vietnam, China, Singapore, Indonesia, the United States, Thailand, Australia, the Philippines and New Zealand have been working alongside Malaysians to scour the Gulf of Thailand, part of the South China Sea that lies between several Southeast Asian countries.

The focus has now shifted to the Andaman Sea, near Thailand's border, after radar data indicated the plane may have turned around to head back to Kuala Lumpur.

But the pilot apparently gave no signal to authorities that he was turning around, Malaysia Airlines chief executive officer Ahmad Jauhari Yahya had said over the weekend.

Hours after it vanished, search planes flew from 7am to 7pm over the vast waters of the Gulf of Thailand while ships searched through the night. Nothing has turned up.

### **Stolen passports**

CNN reported that it was perplexing enough that a jet seemed to have vanished without a trace. Adding to the mystery was the news that at least two people onboard were travelling on passports stolen from an Austrian and an Italian.

The two passengers who used the passports in question appear to have bought their tickets together.

Azharuddin said yesterday the authorities had reviewed security footage from the airport and the men who travelled on the stolen passports "are not Asian-looking men".

The Financial Times reported that an Iranian had arranged for their tickets in the Thai resort town of Pattaya, bringing focus to Thailand as a hub for crime rings selling stolen and fake passports for drug runners and human trafficking syndicates.

Interpol tweeted on Sunday it was examining additional "suspect #passports".

The passport mystery raised concerns about the possibility of terrorism, but officials cautioned that it was still too early to arrive at any conclusions. – March 11, 2014.

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