

Malaysia steps up search for missing flight MH370, enlists help of 25 countries
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Some 25 countries have joined the search and rescue operation as Malaysia ramped up its efforts to locate the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, amid fresh criticism from China.

Acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said Malaysia was asking countries that have satellite assets, including the US, China and France, among others, to provide further satellite data as the search stretches across two corridors, from the Caspian Sea to the southern Indian Ocean.

"We are contacting additional countries who may be able to contribute specific assets relevant to the search and rescue operation. Surveillance aircraft are required, and maritime vessels are needed, particularly for the southern corridor," he told a media conference today.

China complained that Malaysia "squandered" precious time and resources by releasing dramatic information on the plane's fate a full week after it vanished.

Hishammuddin said at 2pm today, the Foreign Ministry of Malaysia briefed representatives from 22 countries, including those along the northern and southern search corridors, as well other countries that may be able to help.

He said these included Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, China, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia.

Although countries have been coordinating individually, the broad formal request marks a new diplomatic phase in an operation expanding across two hemispheres and overshadowed by mounting Chinese criticism of the Malaysian-led search efforts.

"The search area has been significantly expanded. And the nature of the search has changed. From focusing mainly on shallow seas, we are now looking at large tracts of land, crossing 11 countries, as well as deep and remote oceans.

"The number of countries involved in the search and rescue operation has increased from 14 to 25, which brings new challenges of co-ordination and diplomacy to the search effort.

"This is a significant recalibration of the search," he said.

Hishammuddin also said that there are lessons to be learnt from MH370's disappearance but did not elaborate further.

"This is an unprecedented case. What we're doing here is being watched around the world and it may change aviation history.

"There are lessons to be learnt for everybody from this," he added.

Malaysian officials earlier briefed envoys from about 20 countries on progress in the investigation after calling off the search in the South China Sea for the jet that vanished from radar screens more than a week ago, with 239 people on board.

T. S. Tirumurti, India's high commissioner to Malaysia, told Reuters, "The meeting was for us to know exactly what is happening and what sort of help they need. It is more for them to tell us, 'please put in all your resources'."

The diplomatic initiative could become significant as nations ponder whether to share any military data on the Boeing 777's fate, and it fills a void left by the failure of Southeast Asian nations to work as a bloc on the crisis, one diplomat said.

"There are clearly limits to military data but there is an awareness this is a commercial matter," the diplomat added. – March 16, 2014.

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