

**Clueless politicians and rivalry make search for MH370 even harder, says ex-Najib aide
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With the world's eyes following every move it made in the search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, Malaysian authorities could have done better in devising a comprehensive major emergency response mechanism, said an opinion piece published today in China's Global Times.

The opinion piece written by Oh Ei Sun, a senior fellow with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, said that at times conflicting statements issued by various Malaysian authorities, ranging from transport to the military, had only caused confusion and further grief.

Oh was also a former political secretary to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"This negative perception of Malaysian handling of the present incident may be caused by two features in Malaysia's political environment that are alien to most Chinese," Oh said in the piece titled "Malaysia's political rivalries bedevil search for lost MH370 flight".

First, said Oh, Malaysia's public service system distinguished between civil servants who were career professionals and members of the administration, who were politicians.

Serving civil servants could not become the political heads of their departments, he said, adding that members of the administration were ministers, deputy ministers and political secretaries.

However, all served at the pleasure of the prime minister, who was, in turn, answerable to a democratically elected Parliament, Oh said.

"Such politicians obviously are often not professional or even well versed in the particular ministry they happen to head.

"And unlike China or the United States, Malaysia has not installed a 'spokesperson' system. The press conferences are chaired by the various politicians in person. When facing the onslaught of the international media, some politicians shine while others wane," Oh said in his Global Times piece.

The second factor, said Oh, was that on the surface, Malaysia practised a centralised political system in which the prime minister or ruling party president devised policies and subordinate departments executed them.

In reality, to make it to the top of the Malaysian political hierarchy, Oh said, politicians needed to have a group of influential supporters.

"These political supporters, in turn, grab more supporters, and the same pattern persists all the way down to the level of the average voters.

"In order to retain their support, high-level politicians have to dish out various types of political largesse, most prominent of which is a ministership. Once appointed a minister, the politician will typically develop his ministry into essentially a personal fiefdom.

"And since rivalry is rife among most politicians, inter-departmental cooperation or even just coordination is extremely difficult, even in the face of a major crisis."

Oh said this could explain why it took almost a week before a lead agency was appointed to coordinate the handling of the MH370 search efforts.

"Malaysian political reality dictates that some ministers will not accept being led by others, for fear of losing face.

"But paradoxically, as the resolution of the present incident may drag on and thus attract further criticism of weak leadership, understandably none of the ministers concerned is particularly keen to shoulder the lead." – March 24, 2014.

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