

Two Weeks On, RMAF's MH370 Searchers Keep Spirits High

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From Mohd Razman Abdullah

PERTH, April 11 (Bernama) -- The group of 78 Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) officers, pilots and ground maintenance staff involved in the search for a missing Malaysia Airlines plane are still in high spirits despite having been here for two weeks since March 29.

For them, the mission to find Flight MH370 that vanished early last month is the sole motivation that keeps them going, and in the process accepting the situation of being apart from their families.

They are the team for the three RMAF C-130 Hercules operating out of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Pearce here.

The RMAF 20th Squadron chief, Major Muhammad Jafri Suboh, told Bernama that all of them were committed to the endeavour.

"We're proud to be involved in this mission along with the teams from the other countries," he said of the multinational search, reportedly the most expensive in aviation history.

Muhammad Jafri admitted that it was a tough duty but the Malaysians, just like many of the other searchers, were harbouring the hope of finding the plane, whatever it takes.

Flight MH370 with 239 people aboard disappeared from radar screens while over the South China Sea, about an hour after departing from KL International Airport at 12.41 am on March 8. The Boeing 777-200 was to have arrived in Beijing at 6.30 am on the same day.

After 35 days, the search for the missing plane has drawn a blank despite six underwater 'ping' signals consistent with black box locator beacons having been detected in the search area located in the northwest of Perth, in the southern Indian Ocean.

Search teams are banking on such acoustic signals to help locate the plane in a race-against-time effort as the batteries on the black box tracking beacons have a normal lifespan of about 30 days.

A multinational search was mounted following MH370's disappearance, first in the South China Sea before being expanded to the Strait of Melaka, the Andaman Sea and now in the southern Indian Ocean.

Analysis of satellite data later indicated that the aircraft flew along what is called the 'southern corridor', and that its last position was in the middle of the Indian Ocean, west of Perth.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak then announced on March 24, seventeen days after the disappearance of the aircraft, that Flight MH370 "ended in the southern Indian Ocean".

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