

MH370: Almost 400 Days Later, Malaysia, Search Team Are Not Giving Up Bernama

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KUALA LUMPUR, April 17 (Bernama) -- The endeavour by Malaysia and the search team to widen the area of their search for Malaysia Airlines (MAS) flight MH370 in the Indian Ocean shows that they are not ready to give up.

It has almost been 400 days since the disappearance of the flight which was reported to have ended in the Indian Ocean, yet there has been no clue or lead to its actual location.

Three countries, Malaysia, Australia and China are involved in the search.

Yesterday, Malaysia through Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai announced that the search team would be widening the search area to the second phase covering an additional 60,000 km if the search in the current location did not yield results.

Airline experts interviewed by Bernama said the joint effort was a clear indicator that the search team was not trying to raise the hopes of those affected, but was a firm commitment to resolve the biggest mystery in the history of global aviation.

Captain Abdul Rahmat Omar Tun Mohd Haniff said the move was a normal procedure in every search and rescue operation but it was not an easy process.

"Nobody has conducted a search in such an isolated location. To look for an object which is 1,400 sq metres in size in an area which is 60,000 sq km by 6,000 million sq metres, at a depth of about 6,000 metres is not an easy task.

"Even now, the search in its first phase has not covered 60,000 sq km. What I can say is that the government is very generous for extending the search area if the MH370 is still not found after the end of the first phase," said the former Royal Malaysian Air Force officer.

He said despite the harsh conditions such as huge waves, and the valleys and hills on the seabed of the Indian Ocean, the operations should be continued to ensure that all parties were satisfied.

"In the case of Air France, debris was found, but even then, it took two years for the aircraft to be discovered.

"In the case of MH370, we are only guided by the Inmarsat calculations, which may not be very accurate. So if a search has been conducted in an area and the aircraft is still not found, then the area needs to be widened," he said.

The Air France flight 447 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean in Brazilian waters while on a flight from Rio de Janeiro to Paris on June 1, 2009 killing all 228 passengers and crew.

Meanwhile, Captain Datuk Nik Ahmad Huzlan Nik Hussain said it was appropriate for the first phase of the search operation concluding in May to continue with the second phase.

Asked about the condition of the aircraft if it indeed crashed or was last detected in the Indian Ocean, Nik Ahmad Huzlan clarified that it could still be intact and its interior free from water for the time being as the plane was still in its original condition.

"It could still be intact as the body metal of aircraft would not easily rust or disintegrate even in sea water.

"Look at the Titanic, despite being built of iron which was not as sophisticated as current aircrafts such as MH370 or Boeing 777-200ER, the structure was still strong after 100 years...its body is still there," said the former MAS chief pilot.

"An aircraft is made of aluminium composite which is far stronger," he said.

However, Dr Mohd Harridon Mohamed Suffian said an aircraft which had been in the ocean bed for 400 days, would deteriorate.

"The ocean pressure is very high and under continuous pressure, the aircraft structure would have crumbled and several components might have ripped apart from the fuselage.

"Salt water will corrode the aircraft, more so after such a long time," said the Universti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) Aircraft Research and Innovation head.

The first phase of the search mission which began in October last year is expected to end at the end of this month and phase two is expected to kick in till the end of the year.

The Boeing 777, flight MH370 carrying 12 crew members and 227 passengers including two babies disappeared from the radar while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, about one hour after departing Kuala Lumpur International Airport on March 8 last year. It was scheduled to arrive in Beijing at 6.30 am on the same day.

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