

Pain lingers on for MH370 next of kin

Families call for funding, want search to go on

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KUALA LUMPUR: "How will I bury my son now?" asked the father of a passenger on the ill-fated Flight MH370.

As families heard about the suspension of the hunt for the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) aircraft, almost three years after it disappeared, some next of kin accepted that there was nothing much they could do about it.

But the pain of having no closure remains.

All that Selamat Omar, father of Mohd Khairul Amri Selamat, 29, wanted was something of his son's with which to bid him farewell.

"I would be fine if they only found his shirt. At least then I will know. And I can make the proper arrangements. How will I say goodbye now? I can only pray for him," the 63-year-old retiree said.

Selamat made a personal plea to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to consider allocating some funds to keep the search going.

Selamat's sentiments were echoed by the rest of the MH370 next of kin, who issued a statement under their collective group Voice370.

The families said they were "dismayed at the news" to suspend any future efforts until new credible leads come to light.

They called on the search team to reconsider the suspension and focus on a new 25,000 sq km area north of the present one, as suggested by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau in a December report.

"In our view, extending the search to the new area defined by the experts is an inescapable duty owed to the flying public in the interest of aviation safety," the families said.

In a MH370 Tripartite Joint Communiqué yesterday, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong

Lai, Australian Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester and the People's Republic of China Minister of Transport Li Xiaopeng announced that the search for the Boeing 777 would be suspended in the southern Indian Ocean.

"Despite every effort using the best science available, cutting-edge technology, as well as modelling and advice from highly skilled professionals who are the best in their field, unfortunately, the search has not been able to locate the aircraft," the statement said.

"The decision to suspend the underwater search has not been taken lightly nor without sadness.

"It is consistent with decisions made by our three countries in the July 2016 Ministerial Tripartite meeting in Putrajaya, Malaysia."

Liow said the decision to suspend the search was taken last week, but clarified that the search could be restarted if new credible clues surface.

He added that the victims' families had been informed of the decision.

MH370 went off the radar on March 8, 2014, en route from here to Beijing with 239 passengers and crew on board – among them 50 Malaysians and 153 Chinese nationals. The search has cost the three countries about RM650mil.

MAS, in a statement, said it shared in the sorrow that the search had not produced the outcome that everyone had hoped for.

"MAS remains hopeful that in the near future, new and significant information will come to light and the aircraft will eventually be located."

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who are affected by this tragedy."

MH370: Timeline of major developments

2014

March 8: Air traffic control loses contact with the plane 40 minutes into a flight from KL to Beijing. An air-and-sea search starts.

March 15: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announces the plane was flown for hours in a manner "consistent with deliberate action" after dropping off radar.

March 24: Najib announces MH370 "ended" its journey in the Southern Indian Ocean based on Inmarsat satellite data.

2015

Jan 29: Malaysia formally declares Flight 370 an accident and says all 239 people on board are presumed dead, allowing families to obtain death certificates and start legal claims.

March 8: An interim statement released on the first anniversary of MH370's disappearance suggests a battery in the underwater locator beacon on the plane had expired in December 2013.

April 16: The Joint Agency Coordination Centre doubles the area of the search to 120,000sq km.

July 29: Flaperon from MH370 found on Reunion Island. Other debris has since been recovered on coastlines along the Indian Ocean.

2016

July 22: Countries involved agree that should the aircraft not be located in the current search area, and in the absence of credible new evidence leading to the identification of a specific location, the search will be suspended.

Dec 20: A report by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau says aircraft is unlikely to be in the 120,000sq km search area and is more likely in a 25,000sq km area to the north.

2017

Jan 17: Last vessel departs the underwater search area.



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