**MH370 PRESS BRIEFING BY HISHAMMUDDIN HUSSEIN,**

**MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND ACTING MINISTER OF TRANSPORT**

**16 MARCH 2014 5.30PM**

I know many of you have submitted questions, and I will try to answer some of those questions in my statement today.

Every day brings new angles, especially as we are refocusing and expanding the search area – and as always, we have a responsibility to release only information that has been corroborated and verified. We cannot respond to every request immediately, so I ask you to bear with us.

Search area
As the Prime Minister said yesterday, the operation has entered a new phase. The search was already a highly complex, multinational effort. It has now become even more difficult.

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.

The search and rescue operation continues to be a multi-national effort, one led and co-ordinated by Malaysia.

In the last 24 hours, the Prime Minister has spoken to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the President of Turkmenistan, the President of Kazakhstan and Prime Minister of India.

Yesterday the Foreign Ministry of Malaysia briefed representatives from countries along the northern and southern corridors.

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. These include Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, China, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia.

Malaysian officials are requesting support from these countries – as well as others. This support includes general satellite data, radar playback – both primary and secondary – provisions for ground, sea and aerial search, and assets as appropriate.

We are currently discussing with all partners how best to deploy assets along the two search corridors. At

this stage, both the northern and southern corridors are being treated with equal importance.

We are asking countries that have satellite assets, including the US, China and France amongst others, to provide further satellite data. And 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.

Police investigation

As the Prime Minister said yesterday, up until the time the aircraft left military primary radar coverage, its movements were consistent with deliberate action by someone on the plane.

I cannot comment on speculative theories as to what might have caused the deviation from the original flight path, as I do not wish to prejudice the on-going investigation.

I understand the hunger for new details. But we do not want to jump to conclusions. Out of respect to the families, and the process itself, we must wait for the investigation to run its course.

The Malaysian authorities are refocusing their investigation on all crew and passengers on board MH370, as well as all ground staff handling the aircraft.

Yesterday, officers from the Royal Malaysia Police visited the home of the pilot. They spoke to family members of the pilot and experts are examining the pilot's flight simulator. The police also visited the home of the co-pilot. According to Malaysian Airlines, the pilot and co-pilot did not ask to fly together on MH370.

I would like to stress that Malaysia has been working with international law enforcement agencies since day one.

Aircraft maintenance

Malaysia Airlines has confirmed that the aircraft was subjected to the required maintenance program: the Boeing Maintenance Planning Document. Checks are done according to this program. The aircraft had been fully serviced and was fit to fly.

New involvement

The Inmarsat team arrived yesterday and will support the investigations team, which includes the Malaysian authorities, and the UK and US teams.

Concluding remarks

I would like to conclude by reiterating that the search for MH370 has entered a new phase.

The information released yesterday has provided new leads, and given new direction to the search process.

We will provide more detail on the redeployment of assets when it becomes available. Facts must be corroborated and verified before being released.

When possible, we will keep the media fully briefed, but our priority remains the search and rescue operation. To that end, we have been engaged in diplomatic and investigative efforts over the past 24 hours.

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