

Beat: Miscellaneous

AirAsia flight carrying 162 people goes missing off Indonesia

-, 28.12.2014, 11:17 Time

USPA News - An Indonesia AirAsia passenger plane carrying more than 160 people went missing early Sunday morning while flying over the Java Sea on a flight from Indonesia to Singapore, aviation officials said, prompting a major search and rescue operation. Indonesia AirAsia flight QZ8501, an Airbus A320-200, had taken off from Juanda International Airport near the Indonesian city of Surabaya at 5:35 a.m. local time (2235 GMT Saturday) and disappeared from tracking systems less than an hour later, at 6:12 a.m. (2312 GMT).

Contact with air traffic control was lost at 7:24 a.m. (0024 GMT Sunday), the airline said. The disappearance prompted a major search and rescue operation for the twin-engine aircraft, which was last picked up by tracking systems when it was off the coast of Kalimantan on Borneo island. Indonesia's Civil Aviation Authority is leading the search though vessels and aircraft from other countries were expected to join later in the day. AirAsia said the aircraft had requested a deviation from its scheduled flight plan due to severe weather over the Java Sea, but no distress signal was received before contact was lost. "The aircraft was requesting deviation due to enroute weather before communication with the aircraft was lost while it was still under the control of the Indonesian Air Traffic Control," the airline said in a statement. A total of 162 people were on board the flight, including two pilots, four flight attendants and one engineer. It includes 156 Indonesian nationals, three South Koreans, one French national, one Malaysian national, and one Singaporean national. Sixteen children and one infant are among the passengers, the airline said. "My only thoughts are with the passengers and my crew. We put our hope in the SAR (search and rescue) operation and thank the Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysian governments," AirAsia Group CEO Tony Fernandes wrote on Twitter, adding that he was on his way to Surabaya where most of the passengers are from. The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) said Indonesia's search and rescue agency BASARNAS had accepted Singapore's offer to assist in efforts to locate the aircraft, but only one C130 aircraft had been requested by late Sunday afternoon. "We have offered our planes and ships to assist in the search," a CAAS spokeswoman said. AirAsia said both pilots were experienced, with the captain in command having a total of 6,100 flying hours and the first officer having a total of 2,275 flying hours. The aircraft had undergone its last scheduled maintenance on November 16 and had accumulated approximately 23,000 flight hours during some 13,600 flights. If confirmed to have crashed, it would mark the world's third major air disaster so far this year. The worst accident happened in July when Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 crashed in eastern Ukraine after being shot down, killing all 298 passengers and crew in the world's deadliest aviation disaster since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Another accident happened in March when Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which was carrying 239 people on board, vanished on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Although the aircraft remains missing, investigators believe Flight 370 crashed in the southern Indian Ocean west of Perth. A third accident happened on July 24 when Air Algeria Flight 5017 crashed in Mali, killing all 116 passengers on board.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-3159/airasia-flight-carrying-162-people-goes-missing-off-indonesia.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619