

Divers enter water in search of wreckage from AirAsia jet

January 7 2015, by Achmad Ibrahim



Officers of the National Search and Rescue Agency unload the body of a victim aboard AirAsia Flight 8501 from a helicopter upon arrival at the airport in Pangkalan Bun, Indonesia, Tuesday Jan. 6, 2015. Strong currents forced Indonesia to expand the search area for the crashed AirAsia plane Tuesday, as rough seas and bad weather pushed debris and made it difficult to reach suspected chunks of the fuselage on the ocean floor. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana)

At least two divers plunged into the choppy waters early Wednesday during a break in the bad weather to search for two large objects suspected of being chunks of the fuselage of the AirAsia plane that crashed more than one week ago, an Indonesian official said.

A U.S. Navy ship, the USS Fort Worth, detected the latest two objects on Tuesday at a depth of 28 meters (92 feet) near the Karimata Strait off Indonesia.

"We will start to identify the wreckage, which appears to be part of the jet's body, as quickly as possible," Indonesian search and rescue operation coordinator Tatang Zainudin said, adding that teams equipped with a remote-operated vehicle will also try to capture images of the objects.

So far, seven objects suspected to be parts of the plane have been detected by sonar on the ocean floor, but strong currents, silt and mud have kept divers from seeing or reaching them.

Zainudin said the bad weather that has held up the search was "frustrating."

Two more bodies were retrieved Tuesday, bringing the total to 39. But there are concerns that it will become harder to find the remaining corpses from Flight 8501, which crashed Dec. 28 with 162 passengers and crew aboard.

The crash has put a spotlight on Indonesia, where dozens of new airlines have popped up in recent years to meet booming demand, but a string of deadly accidents has raised concerns about safety.

Experts say poor maintenance, rule-bending and a shortage of trained personnel are largely to blame. Infrastructure has also failed to keep pace

with exploding demand.



Indonesian rescuers confer on an Air Force NAS 332 Super Puma helicopter during the search operation for the victims and the wreckage of AirAsia Flight 8501 over the Java Sea off Pangkalan Bun, Central Borneo, Indonesia, Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2015. The Singapore-bound plane crashed into the sea 42 minutes after taking off on Dec. 28. (AP Photo/Veri Sanovri, Pool)

The country's transportation ministry said it was cracking down after it was discovered that Flight 8501 did not have a permit to fly between Surabaya, Indonesia, and Singapore on the day of the crash. It suspended two ministry officials and five workers at Surabaya's main airport Tuesday for allowing the flight. Others are still under investigation.

All AirAsia flights on that route also have been canceled for the time being.

It is not known what caused the Airbus A320 to crash into the Java Sea 42 minutes after takeoff, though Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency says [bad weather](#) appears to have been a factor.

Just before losing contact, the pilot told [air traffic control](#) he was approaching threatening clouds, but was denied permission to climb to a higher altitude because of heavy air traffic. No distress signal was issued.



An Air Force officer arranges the remains of airline seats from the ill-fated AirAsia Flight 8501 on a table for investigation purpose, at the military airbase in Pangkalan Bun, Central Borneo, Indonesia, Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2015. The Singapore-bound plane crashed into the sea 42 minutes after taking off on Dec. 28. (AP Photo/Dewi Nurcahyani)

No pings have been detected from the plane's all-important cockpit voice

and flight data recorders. That's because high waves have prevented the deployment of ships that drag ping locators. The batteries in the pingers on the black boxes are likely to go dead in about 20 more days.

"We are confident that rescuers would be able to locate them in time," said Nurcahyo Utomo, an investigator for Indonesia's National Committee on Transportation Safety.



A crew member lifts his hands during a prayer for the victims of AirAsia Flight QZ 8501 inside an Indonesian Air Force NAS 332 Super Puma helicopter flying over the Java Sea off Pangkalan Bun, Central Borneo, Indonesia where the ill-fated jetliner went down, on Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2015. The Singapore-bound plane crashed into the sea 42 minutes after taking off on Dec. 28. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim, Pool)

The search for the remaining bodies has been exhausting for family

members anxiously waiting to identify and bury their loved ones.

Eight Islamic clerics flew in a helicopter over the site Tuesday and scattered rice into the sea, a local tradition, and prayed for those who perished.

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