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# Can

## Malaysian authorities manage a crisis?

[Michelle Chen](#)

| March 8, 2017

Many doubt it when they consider the handling of the MH370 tragedy and the Kim Jong Nam murder.

COMMENT



From missing planes to Cold War-style assassinations, Malaysia has seen its share of emergency situations over the past four years. And through it all, one question keeps popping up: Is Malaysia capable of crisis management?

Quite a number of people would give “No” as an answer.

The MH370 tragedy alone demonstrated what media reports have dubbed a “masterclass in crisis mismanagement”.

For starters, authorities took far too long to issue any kind of statement on the matter. They delayed even acknowledging the plane’s disappearance. It took Malaysia Airlines (MAS) five hours to admit that it had lost contact with the flight.

The government was also criticised for its sluggish development of a clear consensus on the search area, as well as its hesitation in asking for international aid.

An expert in aviation crisis management, James Lee, said much of this had to do with national pride. “They don’t have the technology, they don’t have the experience and they don’t have the resources,” he told the International Business Times. “They want to hang on to the lead because they feel a moral obligation.”

PR experts said things ran more smoothly after Australia took the lead in search operations.

### **Mishandling of relatives**

After news broke of the plane’s disappearance, family members of passengers flocked to the Beijing airport, desperate for information on loved ones. However, the flight number continued showing as “delayed” for hours.

Robert Jensen, president of Kenyon International Emergency Services, said this was a mistake. Speaking to Canadian media, he said the first thing MAS should have done was to take MH370 off the arrival board and set up a reception area for family members.

However, relatives were left without any clear communication from authorities for days. MH370 went missing on Saturday. Some relatives said it was Monday before airline staff spoke to them.

But perhaps the move that will go down in history as the airline’s biggest mistake was its decision to deliver official condolences to family members through text message.

The full text of the message, delivered on March 24, 2014, read: “Malaysia Airlines deeply regrets that we have to assume beyond any reasonable doubt that MH370 has been lost and that none of those on board survived.”

This, experts say, was “a recipe for turning a terrible event into an irredeemable destroyer of brand image”.

### **Breakdown in communication**

Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein, who was acting transport minister at the time, and then-Malaysia Airlines CEO Ahmad Jauhari Yahya, came under scrutiny for publicly contradicting each other on details related to the search.

Soon after MH370 disappeared, Hishammuddin said the plane’s communications system was disabled at 1.07am. This was reportedly before MH370 transmitted its final verbal sign-off. The next day, though, Jauhari said the final transmission might have occurred before any communication was disabled.

Hishammuddin insisted that what he said was based on verified facts, but the clash of information did nothing to boost confidence in the investigation.

Throughout much of the search, authorities continued providing patchy information, sometimes retracting statements or issuing corrections to earlier assertions.

This led to a breakdown in relations with China, which had lost 153 citizens on the flight. State press agency Xinhua lashed out at Malaysia for what it said was a lack of transparency. It said: “It is known to all that inaccurate, or at least incomplete, information led the initial search in the South China Sea nowhere and thus that precious time was wasted.”

Although Prime Minister Najib Razak issued a statement on March 15, PR firms pointed out that the initial spokesman assigned by the airline was not the CEO but someone more junior in rank.

“It should always be the CEO, and if he’s not available, perhaps because he’s in flight, then the number two,” travel PR agency Rooster chief James Brooke told PR Weekly.

Geoffrey Thomas, editor in chief of AirlinesRatings.com, agreed, adding that the MAS PR team appeared to be missing in action.

Following the recent announcement that search efforts would be abandoned, Deputy Transport Minister Abdul Aziz Kaprawi said the government would reward any private company able to find the main body of the Boeing 777.

However, Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said that statement was incorrect. He said it represented his deputy's personal view and did not reflect the government's stand.

### **The blame game**

While accepting some responsibility for the response to the tragedy, representatives from Malaysia Airlines said the Department of Civil Aviation, not the airline, was responsible for search, rescue and repatriation efforts.

According to the British newspaper Express, the airline's crisis director, Fuad Sharuji, said Malaysia Airlines had no control over these functions and that it could only communicate with the government and provide any assistance required.

Sharuji added that the airline's team was kept in the dark about much of the government's efforts, despite having given authorities information each time a tip on possible sightings was received.

"It was like groping in the dark," he was quoted as saying.

"From the public's perspective, they thought that there was a lot of cover-up and we were withholding information, which is actually not true because we also didn't know."

### **Locked in a tussle**

It appears doubtful that Malaysia has learned much from its experience with MH370.

In the most recent incident to rock the nation, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was murdered at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 (klia2) on Feb 13.

Malaysia has been locked in a tussle with North Korea over the release of Jong Nam's body. Police say they will not release it without a DNA sample and fingerprints from his relatives.

On Feb 24, Deputy Inspector-General of Police Noor Rashid Ibrahim said a family member was expected to arrive in Malaysia to identify and collect the body. However, this was denied by Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar, who said his deputy had been "misquoted" on the matter.

Speaking on Malaysia's response to MH370, Kenyon International's Robert Jensen told PR Weekly, "The challenge you have with crisis communications is not to make it worse, because you can't make it better."

Investigations into Jong Nam's murder are ongoing. Amid a diplomatic spat with North Korea, here's hoping that Malaysian authorities take a leaf out of Jensen's book.

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**Sathia Vedamanickam**

Looks like our Authorities are very good and have perfected the art of " mis quoting "

Like · Reply · Mar 8, 2017 7:20pm



**David Jenni Khor** · Hong Kong

This bodohland can only manage well of cover up for DUmno scandals and arresting bloggers!

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**Yoongfatt Cheng**

The long-term effects of Jaguh Kampong Syiok Sendiri syndrome!

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**Mariam Abu Nawas**

Stupid government, we created stupid precedent. Next time any malaysian dead in foreign countries, our embassy cannot claim corpse on behalf. We have to transport next-of-kin to claim the body. We should maintain neutrality and just give back the body to North Korea. The dead man's country will deal with it. We should continue to be neutral. But someone balls' are being hold up tight due to his US\$ billions scandal. He must follow instruction to isolate North Korea. Nak tunjuk hero, ended up trapped..... next round, the balls-holder will instruct Malaysia to be in problem with Iran and Venezuela....

Like · Reply · 3 · Mar 7, 2017 9:35pm



**Jackal Pacific**

The stupid government did attempt to create conflict with Iran by arresting any person with that branch of religion but after at the huge side business with them, they finally decided to cease their stupid attempt. Now it's more like BAU.

Like · Reply · 1 · Mar 7, 2017 10:04pm



**Kam Teow Eng** · Penang, Malaysia

The accolade that must be given to the MALUSIAN AUTHORITIES should be a F grade. Those fools are a disgrace to their own country but they always praise themselves for a job well done. What kind of a rubbish are they!??

There is not a thing they did right, we cannot recall a single time they were praised by foreign countries for their efforts, determination and humanitarianism. Known for laziness and shoddy efforts are more associated with it than anything else.

Like · Reply · Mar 7, 2017 8:27pm



**Jc Soon** · Associate at Work from home

F? Fantastic?

Like · Reply · Mar 8, 2017 3:10am

**Hien Ching Lung**

This is the consequences of selection of loyalty over talents and competence policy in government. Malaysia bolih!

Like · Reply · Mar 7, 2017 8:25pm

**Jackal Pacific**

As fellow Malaysians, we wish that they can but unfortunately they can't and they failed badly. If they can't manage domestic Low-Yat riot case, what do you expect them to resolve MH370, MH17 and even the 1MDB scandal.

Mongrels like M01, Ismail and many of the cabinet ministers are elected, not due to their capability, performance or integrity but more of a case, of their ability to steal and distribute dedak to the naive craps in the kampung.

"Kenapa rakyat tak pujikan kerajaan atas harga Kangkong RM1" - By one stupid clown

Like · Reply · 5 · Mar 7, 2017 8:19pm

**Raymond Noel** · Chief Coffee Taster at Self-Employed

Malaysia's handling of the MH370 crises simply show-cased our fumbling stumbling leaders parading their lack of experience and expertise. Does Malaysia know how to handle a crises? The answer is an overwhelming "Yes" but the competent are not being allowed to. Instead the belih's, tambab's and the makku plastris are helming the crises response.

Like · Reply · Mar 7, 2017 7:58pm · Edited

**Asraf Panchu Bin Abdullah** · Operations Director at Rubicon Sapphire Technology Sdn Bhd

The government should have reviewed the risk analysis before deciding to throw out the NK ambassador. In the NSC we do have the RISK and BEAP policy but guess we did not reviewed it as usual. Expensive lesson learned with our citizens trapped in NK

Like · Reply · 1 · Mar 7, 2017 7:47pm

**Tan Iskandar**

They r only good at LYING n STEALING from the defenceless rakyat.. Ask Najib he will tell u more..

Like · Reply · 2 · Mar 7, 2017 7:46pm

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