Search teams seek ‘ping’ for third time

Australian Joint Agency Coordination Centre chief coordinator Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Angus Houston said the signal was detected 1,600km from Australia’s west coast.

Houston said “we have been through a real rollercoaster ride. As usually, some leads are much more positive than others. Speaking with Houston today, I’m more optimistic (on the latest lead) than some of the leads we have had.”

As of press time, the search team is focused on reacquiring the ping for a third time. Once search and recovery crews “provenance” this contact, it will narrow further the possibility that the object sending out the pings was indeed up in deeper water.

It is a race against time for the crew on board Ocean Shield as the beacon in MH370’s flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder, commonly known as black boxes, will be running out of batteries.

Houston said if the signals were indeed from MH370, the batteries which keep the beacons running, however, would be running on “extra battery life”.

On average, the batteries last for 30 days. Houston hoped that the pings would continue longer.

The aircraft, carrying 297 passengers, departed from Kuala Lumpur International Airport for Beijing before disappearing from radar at 2.54am on March 8.

The area that Ocean Shield is focused on is nine square miles.

It is also 600km away from the vessel’s last position from where the Chinese vessel Hai Shun 01 had earlier picked up two electronic pulse signals on 37kHz.

The first signal, described as “fleeting” by Houston, was detected on Friday by a handheld ping locator.

A day later, the vessel reportedly detected the signal again, this time lasting 90 seconds, some 2km away from the first contact.

Hishammuddin, who is also acting transport minister, told a press conference here that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had received a call from his Australian counterpart Tony Abbott, who updated him on the latest findings.

When Malaysia would declare MH370 as “lost with no survivors”, Hishammuddin said he preferred to ask the families themselves to decide on the right time to do so.

Malaysia Airlines chief executive officers Ahmad Jauhari Yahya said the rational carrier would strive to rebuild its image sooner than the usual recovery period.

First and foremost, the incident has affected the airline but the investigation is still ongoing and we have a lot of work to do.

“The airline obviously needs to get itself together. Based on the experience of other carriers, it takes up to six months to recover from what we call ‘a major reputation issue’. We intend to do that quicker,” he added.