

Headline	A human tragedy		
MediaTitle	New Straits Times		
Date	19 Jul 2014	Color	Black/white
Section	Local News	Circulation	149,000
Page No	14	Readership	447,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	210 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 3,798
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 11,394



# A human tragedy

**NEW STRAITS TIMES:** Malaysia and the world mourn the loss of lives on board MH17

**E**VERY Malaysian's reaction would have been the same: surely not again? And yet, yes, again, in a matter of just months. In March, Malaysia Airlines (MAS) literally lost MH370 under mysterious circumstances, an unprecedented air disaster that remains unsolved. Now, another Boeing 777 is apparently shot out of the sky over eastern Ukraine, a region of that country being torn apart by a bitter civil war escalating out of control. Such a likelihood is unthinkable under normal circumstances, but it has happened. Who would have thought that such an enormous tragedy would hit the same airline twice in quick succession? In March, 239 passengers and crew disappeared with the missing aeroplane and now, 298 lives are lost needlessly with the crash of MH17.

Shot down at 14.15GMT, when contact with the aircraft was lost, the perpetrators are still unknown and neither is it known with complete certainty what downed the wide-bodied jet. Investigators and recovery teams hope to uncover some answers from the crash site soon. Nevertheless, the certainty is that so many innocent lives, including children, have become victims to a violence firmly anchored on land, but taken to the air by unforgiving warring factions. Following its usual flight path that was declared safe by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), MH17 flew over Ukrainian airspace and was about to enter Russian airspace when, according to eyewitness accounts, it broke in two and fell out of the sky from a height of 11,000 metres, producing billows of black smoke with debris strewn

over an area of some 15 kilometres.

At last count, passengers and crew from 10 countries were on board, more than half of the passengers Dutch nationals. Another sizeable group were to be participants in an HIV/AIDS conference in Australia.

Falling near the capital of Donetsk, not far from the town of Torez, this horrible incident has left Malaysia and the world grieving, as prayers are offered to all those who perished on MH17. International diplomacy will also be tested in the days ahead, as nations seek answers to the fatal crash and the fate of their nationals, with potentially far-reaching repercussions that could extend beyond the borders of where the aircraft's remains now lie. Speculation about the advanced weaponry needed to shoot down the aircraft at such an altitude, for example, raises concerns that the Ukraine conflict has entered a more dangerous phase that may justify tougher sanctions or response from Europe and the United States. The fate of MH17 may unwittingly be caught in what is the beginning of another American cold war. Malaysia and other nations have demanded that those responsible be brought to book for what many have already described as a criminal act. That will take its course. In the meantime, the authorities and the national carrier will have to mobilise and manage the bereavement of those left behind, even as the wounds from MH370 remain fresh in our hearts and minds.

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