Crisis Management – Malaysian Aviation Tragedies

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Abstract

Disaster is defined as calamitous events, especially those that occur suddenly and causing much suffering and loss of life, damage, or hardship and this is inclusive of airplane crashes. Malaysia faces the worst aviation tragedies in the course of five months – the loss of Flight MH370 and the shot down of Flight MH17. This study aims to address the research gap of the exploring the roles of local government in managing disaster. This involves exploring the treatments and services taken by the Malaysian government in facing these adversities and the impact of these actions on the families of the victims, society and the nation. The immediate response and actions of the Malaysian government exhibits its capabilities in managing crisis.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of ITM-2014.

Keywords: Crisis Management, Malaysia, Aviation Tragedies, Key Functional Success Factors

Introduction

Flight MH370

At 12.41 midnight on the 8th of March 2014, Malaysia Airline Flight MH370 an international passenger flight departed from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (henceforth, KLIA) for Beijing carrying 227 passengers from 14 nations and 12 Malaysian crew members. The manifest for Flight MH370 is as below (please refer Table 1):

Table 1:
The Manifest for Flight MH370
Flight MH370 was scheduled to arrive in Beijing, China at 6.40 am. However, at 1.30 am Flight MH370 signal disappears from the Malaysia’s Department of Civil Aviation. The aircraft however, did not enter Chinese airspace or contacted the Chinese controllers. At 12.00 noon, MAS group chief executive officer Ahmad Jauhari Yahya held a press conference announcing that the last point of contact of flight MH370 was at 120 nautical miles east of Kota Bharu. A multinational search effort was launched beginning from the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea involving the government of Malaysia, Vietnam, China, United States of America and Australia. The search soon was extended to Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea where flight signal was lost on secondary radar. The focus of the search was then shifted to the southern part of the Indian Ocean when military data revealed that the aircraft had diverted from its intended course. On the 24th March, the Malaysian government announced that the final location determined by the satellite communication revealed that it met its fate in the southern Indian Ocean. To date, despite the intense search there has been no confirmation of any flight debris and no crash site has been found. The timeline of Flight MH370 is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Timeline of Flight MH370

Search operations in the massive Indian Ocean is still underway involving the government of Australia along with a Dutch engineering company and a Chinese naval
vessel. It is speculated that the missing aircraft had landed in the most region of the Indian Ocean.

**Flight Mh17**

Five months on, on the 17th of July 2014 Flight MH17 departed from the Amsterdam’s Schipol Airport at 10.15pm and was to arrive in Kuala Lumpur International Airport on the 18th of July at 6.10 am. Boeing 777-200 ER carrying 280 passengers from 13 nationalities and 15 Malaysia crew was shot down over eastern Ukraine. This sent shockwaves around the world. The manifest for Flight MH17 is as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Manifest for MH17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Passengers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(including 15 crew and two infants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(including one infant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While travelling over the conflict hit Ukraine region it disappeared from radar. Flight MH17 was hit by pro-Russian separatists using a long-range surface-to-air Buk missile as it mistaken it for another aircraft. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri NajibTunRazak announced that he was shocked by the reports of the crash and would launch an immediate investigation. He also related that there was no distress call before the plane went down. Debris from the aircraft is strewn over several kilometres of the crash site. The aircraft, Boeing 777-200ER, was the same model as Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 and it had a clean maintenance record. The Russian government, however, is denying all allegation of supplying weaponry to the rebels. The timeline of Flight MH17 is as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The Timeline of MH17
Disasters are part and parcel of our daily lives which may result in sufferings, loss of life, damage, or hardship. More importantly, disasters call for effective crisis management making crisis management an important discipline today (Junaidy, 2007). Local government plays a crucial role in managing the disaster especially during and after the disastrous event. More importantly, the role of local government in managing disaster is under explored. Realising the importance of local government in managing disaster and crisis the current study aims to explore the treatments and services taken by the Malaysian government in facing these adversities and the impact of these actions on the families of the victims, society and the nation.

Literature Review

There are various studies that have been conducted on crisis management, such as the study by Almeida, Paraguay and Reichmann (2008) on aircraft accident in Brazil, or the study by Williams (2006) on Japan’s response to Asian tsunami crisis. It is interesting to see that these studies focus on the crisis management of the government.
For example the study conducted by Almeida, Paraguay and Reichmann (2008) which focuses on mid-air collision between two aeroplanes - Boeing 737-800 and a Legacy executive jet in September 2006 which killed 148 passengers and six Boeing crewmembers. The study aims to explore the media coverage of the collision and for this purpose, the data and information reported in the media, printed and online journals in connection with the accident from September 2006 and August 2007 were accumulated and discussed. The analysis shows that there are four main themes that have been highlighted in the press and articles. The first theme highlighted is the occurrence of the accident; second, seeking the person to be blamed for the collision; third, the police inquiry that was conducted after the accident and finally, the political disputes that interferes with the investigation. The researchers related that an accident of this scale should open up an opportunity for discussion on the improvement of safety. However, the analysis shows that these opportunities are threatened and lost when the Federal policy and parliamentary inquiry commissions created a threatening climate which hinders cooperation from any segment involved in the mid-air collision.

Zare and Afrouz (2012) also examine the crisis management of the earthquake and tsunami that occurred on 11th March 2011. A magnitude of 9.0 Richter Scale earthquake hit large parts of Japan and some part of east China and Russia. The earthquake which lasted for 3 minutes caused 130km long by 159km wide rupture zone on the Pacific plate and this is followed by a huge tsunami with 40m waves. 15, 854 were believed to be dead, 3, 167 missing and 26, 991 injured. The study aims to explore how Japan faced this disaster and its effects. The study reveals that the management of the government has some deficiencies and this is due to the unexpected magnitude of the tragedy that strikes the nation which was beyond the expectation of the nation. Five key lessons were identified of the event that should be seen as a sea of change for the nation. First, the effectiveness of disaster management should be restudied in all hazardous; second, the significance of high-tech early warning systems to reduce risks; third, reconsidering the extreme of expected or possible hazard and risk levels is essential; fourth, morality is one of the key factor in disaster management and; finally, sustainable development should be the basis for the nation reconstruction.

Das (2012) review the tragedies that struck India in 1984 (Bhopal disaster), 1999 (super cyclone that hit Orissa), 2001 (the earthquake in Gujarat) and 2004 (tsunami in the Indian coasts). India is vulnerable to a number of natural and manmade disasters. In fact, 58.6% of the landmass in India is susceptible to earthquakes, cyclones and tsunamis. The government of India realised that these disasters have devastating effects resulting in a huge human and economic losses to the nation. Hence, these tragedies call for a change in India’s disaster management. The aftermath of the disasters brought about policy review and hence, National Policy in Disaster Management (henceforth, BDMA) was framed and approved by the Union Cabinet in 2009 which inclusive of two phases - i.e. the pre-disaster phase and post disaster phases. Additionally, there was a paradigm shift in institutional structure where National Disaster Authority (NDMA), headed by the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and District Magistrate to spearhead and adopt a holistic and integrated approach to disaster management to minimise loss of life, livelihood and property during any disasters. Besides that, the Government of India has framed the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) at the national and state levels. The United Nations Development Programme in partnership with the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented a Disaster Risk Management Programme (DRM) from 2002-2007 in multi-hazard districts.
From this review we can conclude that that disaster cannot be disconnected from the development of a nation. More importantly, disasters bring about a sea of change in disaster and crisis management of countries. The current study aims to explore the treatments and services rendered by the government of Malaysia in handling the aviation tragedies of MH370 and MH17. In addition, the study endeavours to assess the impact of these treatments and services on the families of the victims, society, and nation.

Research Questions

This study endeavours to answer the following research questions:

• What are the treatments and services provided by the Malaysian government in managing the aviation tragedies of MH370 and MH17?

• How these treatments and services impact on the families of the victims, society, and nation?

Methodology

As aforementioned, the study aims to examine the treatments and services provided by the government of Malaysia in managing both aviation tragedies. Additionally, the study will also explore the impact of these treatments and services on the families of the victims, society and the nation. To achieve this, the press coverage of both aircrafts was analysed. Data and information in the media regarding MH370 and MH17 from 8th March 2014 to 30th July 2014 were collected and discussed.

Based on the data collected, a framework was conceptualised. The conceptual framework underpinning this study is as shown in Figure 1.

The conceptual framework of the current study is divided into four main levels – Input, Treatments/Services, Outcome and Impact. Input denotes the alterations or changes that are initiated during and after both tragedies to activate manage the crisis. This consists of Society, Media, Aids and Infrastructure. Treatments and Services refer to the actions taken by the Malaysian government in managing the worst air disaster that hit the nation. Outcomes denote the consequences triggered based on the treatment and services provided by the government. Impact signifies the impact of the treatment and services provided by the Malaysian government on the families of the victims, society and the nation.
Analysis & Findings

The analysis of the current study is divided to four levels – Input, Treatments/Services, Outcome and Impact. Input will be further divided into the society, media, aids and infrastructure. The analysis will evolve treatments and services rendered by the Government of Malaysia in managing the crisis at hand – the aviation tragedies of MH370 and MH17. This analysis will highlight the capabilities of the local government reflecting its critical key functional success factors. The analysis will begin with the discussion on the MH370 Tragedy and followed by Flight MH17.

Input

Society

MH370 Tragedy

It is felt that insurance agencies, family members and Malaysian citizens fall under the umbrella of society. Compensations are paid to the family members by Malaysia Airlines' insurer, a consortium led by Germany's Allianz. It is hoped that the burden of families of Flight MH370 will be lightened with the initial compensation of USD50,000. The Malaysian government has assigned the Deputy Foreign Minister, Dato' Hamzah Zainudin to head a
committee that supports the next-of-kin of the passengers. It should be noted that under the International Civil Aviation Organisation, in a plane crash, passengers’ families are allowed to claim up to USD175,000. The committee is currently entertaining all the claims made by the families and full hardship payment will be made in batches. This exhibits the sense of responsibility and concerns of the Malaysian government in ensuring that the wellbeing of the next-of-kin of passengers Flight MH370 is well taken care of.

Furthermore, the Government of Malaysia also understands that the emotional turmoil on the families of Flight MH370 can be heart-rending. Hence, counselling services are provided by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and these unlimited counselling services are for the families of the passengers, crews of the MH370 and public who are in need of them. These services emphasised on crisis counselling with which focuses on direct and action-oriented approaches that would enable family members find resources within themselves to deal with crisis and emotional toll. Counsellors are ready to meet families of passengers and crews at any time and at locations such as the hotels where families are residing, the airports and in hospitals and clinics around the clock.

Society also includes Malaysian citizens. Malaysians comprehends the emotional toll on the families and friends of the missing passengers can be agonising. This can be seen from overwhelming public sympathies for the distraught families of the passengers and this is channelled via social networks like Facebook, tweeter, Instagram. Moral support from all Malaysians is crucial as it calms them and makes them strong to face this ill-fate incident. Interestingly, besides channelling their wishes via social networks, Malaysians are given opportunity to display their supports to the missing passengers and nation by signing on wishing boards provided in various public spots such as the airport, hotel lobbies, supermarkets and other venues.
Such display of supports exhibits the solidarity of Malaysians to the families of the passengers and more importantly to the nation. The whole nation stands united in the face of adversity.

*MH17 Tragedy*

The moment the news of the downing of Flight MH17, world leaders began to demand an international investigation into the tragedy which killed 298 passengers on board. For example, President Barack Obama demanded an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and a credible investigation into the tragedy. Additionally, the Prime Minister of United Kingdom, David Cameron, condemned the government of Ukraine and described the air disaster as appalling and horrific. Cameron also called for those responsible should hold account to their crime. The same goes for the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who echoed other leaders and requested for a full credible international investigation into the incident. The United Nations Security Council has unanimously adopted a resolution that demands immediate surrender of control of the crash site of Flight MH17 so that repatriation of victims can be conducted and an international investigated could be taken place. The Dutch Foreign Minister, FransTimmermans, also condemned the downing of the civilian airplane Flight MH17 as an act of crime. He mentioned that the demise of 200 Dutch citizens in the incident has left a hollow in the heart of the nation. This has caused grief, anger and despair – grief for the loss of loved ones, anger for the outrage of the downing of the Flight MH17 and despair for the slow process of securing the crash site and recovering the remains of the victims. Besides that, the congregation of foreign ministers of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea,
Turkey and Australia or also known as MIKTA has solemnly expressed their strong condemnation of the downing of Flight MH17 and felt that the act was a serious violation of international law. All these show the unanimous agreement of the world leaders that the downing of Flight MH17 was a heinous crime and more importantly these also display the sound international support towards Malaysia.

In addition to this, it is heart-rending to know that numerous airline retailers such as the Trailfinders and Stella Travel Services, have rallied to further support the Malaysian Airline System (MAS) despite the downing of Flight MH17. Knowing that MAS is a government-back airline, the economic stability of the company is unquestionable.

The Government of Malaysia through the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, offered grief counselling services to the family members of the stricken Flight MH17. Just like Flight MH3700, families of the passengers and crew members of Flight MH17 could contact the counsellors provided by the Ministry at any time. It is heart-warming to know that the families of the passengers and crew members of the missing Flight MH370 also offered counselling to the relatives of those who died on the downed Flight MH17 as they fully comprehend the emotional turmoil that the family members are enduring. The painful and hard experience that both families share could be shouldered together.

Malaysian crisis management has notched with Flight MH17 as within an hour after the crash of the airplane, MAS sent a tweet confirming the flight lost contact over the Ukraine airspace. The speedy respond was followed by a tweet from the Prime Minister saying an immediate investigation will be launched. Mas then released a statement detailing the exact waypoint when the Ukrainian air traffic control lost contact with Flight MH17. In other words, the disappearance of MH370 has been a turning point for the Malaysian government and MAS in its crisis management.

On the 19th July 2014, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri NajibTun Abdul Razak, secured a major breakthrough by reaching an agreement with Ukrainian rebels to hand over the two black boxes from MH17. The agreement also included transporting the remains of the victims by train from the rebel-controlled town of Torez in eastern Ukraine to the government-controlled city of Kharkiv. Due to the agreement, rescuers found 251 bodies and 86 fragments of bodies at the crash site and moved them to trains cars, Dutch forensic team began examining the bodies. The brave actions of the Prime Minister received global praised by world leaders as the black box was handed over to the Malaysian officials. His role in brokering an agreement with the separatists exhibits his astounding leadership in handling crisis. This also shows how Malaysia leaders are willing to walk an extra mile for fellow Malaysians.

Public sympathies poured via social networks such as Instagram, Tweeter and Facebook. Again, wishing boards were set up at important venues providing space for Malaysians to express the sympathies for the family members of Flight mh17. Besides the
poring sympathies, the Malaysian citizens and other international Facebook users urged others to support Malaysian Airlines by continuing to fly with it saying the MAS could have foreseen the terrible strategy.

    Malaysian King and Queen, Yang di-PertuanAgongTuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah and Raja PermaisuriAgongTuankuHajahHaminah, met the family members of the passengers and crew of the ill-fated aircraft at the Marriott Hotel. The King and Queen spent about 45 minutes with them as they expressed condolences for their loss. This shows that the whole nation is mourning for the loss of Malaysian citizens in the ill-fated Flight MH17.

    Media

MH370 Tragedy

    The missing Flight MH370 received non-stop media coverage from various media agencies since the day it was announced lost in the Indian Ocean. Various mainstream Western and local agencies such as CNN, CNBC, Reuters, Bernama, BeritaHarian, New Straits Times and others have been offering continuous updates on the search of the missing plane.

    The government of Malaysian conducted daily press conference in order to provide daily updates to the nation and the rest of the world. This press conference was initially conducted every half an hour, then dwindled to daily as the progress of the search for the missing was noticeably slow.

MH17 Tragedy

    The MH17 tragedy also received relentless media coverage from traditional media outlets and on social media. There are significant differences in the coverage of both crashes. The media coverage of Flight MH370 focuses on the mystery of its disappearance leaving rooms for speculations and conspiracy theories since there are still no convincing explanations to date regarding the missing flight. The coverage of Flight MH17, on the other hand, highlights on the terrible and criminal event. International media focuses largely on the questions who is responsible for the heinous crime. It is interesting to see that less attention was given the Malaysian angle of the story since Malaysia seems to recover from both airline tragedies.

    AIDs

MH370 Tragedy

    The Malaysian Bar Council, consisting of a team of lawyers, provided legal aid to the next-of-kin of the passengers of the missing Flight MH370. The legal aid provided will be pro bono as it is a normal practice under the Malaysian Legal Aid Scheme. The legal team offered legal advice on issues pertaining to insurance, liability, procedure, compensation,
possible causes of action and limitation of period. The legal aid provided aims to assist and ease the burden of the families of those on board the missing of Flight MH370.

Financial aids are also provided to the families. The first round of financial aid was given out by the Malaysian Airline System amounting about US$5,000 and the 2nd round of financial aid will be dispersed to the families at a later date. The 2nd financial assistance would be given to all 239 people on board and the families are requested to indicate the amount needed as financial aid. The Malaysian government realised some of the families lost their breadwinners and, hence, the financial burden may be difficult.

In the search of the missing Flight MH370, eight countries have been assisting – i.e. Australia, China, New Zealand, South Korea, The United Kingdom, the United States and France. This multinational search, led by the Malaysian authorities, has begun since the day the Flight went missing on the 8th of March 2014. Australia is overseeing the day-to-day search operations at the Indian Ocean. China’s Civil Aviation and France Office of Investigation and Analysis for the Safety of Civil Aviation are also involved in the investigation. The British company Inmarsat and with the aid of the UK Air Accident Investigation Branch provided detailed satellite data analysis to assist the search for the missing aircraft. This shows the robust bilateral ties between Malaysia and other nations who are ever willing to lend a helping hand in the time in need.

MH17 Tragedy

As compared to the aids providing for the missing Flight MH370, aids for Flight MH17 came in the form of multinational support from various countries to expedite the repatriation process of the remains of the passengers and crew of Flight MH17.

For example, on the 20th September 2014, the United Nations Security Council has adopted the resolution which was brought by Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia. The resolution demanded that a safe access should be provided to allow the recovery of the victims of MH17. The armed groups in control of the crash site were ordered to ceasefire and they were also requested to stop any actions that might compromise the integrity of the site. The resolution also demanded that all victims of the ill-fated Flight MH17 be treated with dignity and brought home to their respective homeland to be laid to rest. Russia was also requested to use its influence over the separatists to ensure safe return of the victims and to stop the conflict in Ukraine. This resolution was supported unanimously by the members of the United Nations Security Council.

The European Union Foreign Ministers, threatened Russia with economic sanction if cooperation was not given in handing over the black box of MH17 and the bodies of the victims to the proper authorities. The EU would impose a significant financial sanction against Russia if Russian-backed separatists continue to obstruct the investigation into the crash of the airliner. In fact, the EU commission officials have considered the options of including the banning Russian banks with more than 50% state ownership from raising
capital on European markets and this could be potential blow to the economy of Russia. This again shows the strong support provided by our international counterparts.

On the 10th of August 2014, MAS has offered a payment of GBP2980 to families of the passengers and crew members of Flight MH17. This payment serves as financial assistance and will not be part of the compensation that each passenger and crew members will receive. Moreover, MAS and the government have also taken steps to arrange contractual benefits for the crew members aboard the ill-fated flight which will be paid to their families. MAS will further provide goodwill payment to help meet the needs of the families. This exhibits how noble the Malaysian government is to the Malaysian citizens who have sacrificed themselves in line of duty.

Infrastructure

MH370 Tragedy

The family members of local passengers of the ill-fated MH370 were given the privileges to stay at the Everly Hotel in Putrajaya throughout the search of the flight. Meals and accommodation are sponsored by the government of Malaysia. About 153 passengers on board MH370 are from China. Hence, family members were allowed to reside in the Lido Hotel while the search for the missing flight in ongoing. At least 100 police and several ambulances were on the stand-by at the hotel. Family members from Beijing, China were transported to Kuala Lumpur with a MAS flight. In Kuala Lumpur, they have been put up in hotel accommodation. Constant meetings with family members of local passengers and those from China were carried out to ensure smoother communication between MAS, the Malaysian government and the family members, particularly in communicating latest updates regarding the search of the missing flight. This shows that Malaysia is sensitive to what the families are going through and committed in ensuring their wellbeing.

Malaysia has mobilised assets to assist the unprecedented multi-nation search for Flight MH370 in the southern Indian Ocean. The Defense Minister, Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein has deployed the Royal Malaysian Navy vessels, KD Mutiara and Bunga Mas 6 in the effort to search the aircraft. Equipped with multi-beam echo sounder, KD Mutiara joined the search effort to assist in the current bathymetric survey process. KD Bunga Mas 6 is assisting with logistical support and data transfer for the vessels located within the search area. Besides these, commercial assets are also deployed. Petronas, the leading Malaysian oil company together with DEFTECH and Phoenix International mounted a Prosas Side Scan Sonar on a mother vessel and additionally, Boustead Heavy Industries together with iXBlue Australia mounted a deep-towed side scan sonar with a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) on a mother vessel called John Lethbridge. C-130 Herculas was also deployed and operated out RAAF Pearce air base near Perth along with two Chinese
Ilyushin II-76s. This shows that the Malaysian government is doing its utmost best in the search of MH370 in hope of giving closure to the kin of the missing passengers.

As for other countries, the Australian government deployed two naval vessels – Ocean Shield and the UK’s HMS Echo – specialising in detecting ultrasonic ‘pings’ from the aircraft’s black box flight recorder. The Australian government also mobilised the mini-submarine Bluefin21 for the purpose of creating detailed sonar mapping of the sea bed. Aircrafts that are also involved in the search are US Navy P-8 Poseidon and Australian, New Zealand, South Korea and Japanese P-3 Orion surveillance places. HMAS Success, an oil tanker from Australia, is equipped with a crane which could be used to recover any possible wreckage in the Indian Ocean. Besides deploying two Ilyushin II-76s, China has also mobilised a number of other vessels to map the ocean floor and among them is the survey ship Zhu Kezhen. This exhibits the close bilateral ties of Malaysia with other countries.

Furthermore, the Australian Hotels Association made arrangements to accommodate the families of the passengers of Flight MH370 the moment the Malaysian Airlines (MAS) received approval from the investigating authorities to bring the families to the recovery area. Contacts were made with the Malaysian Consulate General and the Consulate General of Peoples Republic of China in Perth to coordinate the hotel accommodation. MAS is responsible for transporting about 1000 family members of the stricken Flight MH370 to Perth so that they are able to witness for themselves the recovery area and to be at the closest place where the plane is believed to have plunged into the ocean. This again reveals the bilateral ties between both governments and not mentioning the endless efforts taken by the Malaysian government to keep the families abreast with the news of the search of the missing flight.

MH17 Tragedy

Family members of Flight MH17 were put up at the JW Marriott Hotel in Putrajaya where they are provided with updates of the event and counselling services.

On the 8th of August 2014, The Minister in the Prime Minister Department Tan Sri Joseph Kurup said the Malaysian government sent representatives of various religions to the Netherlands to handle the funeral arrangements for victims according to the religious rites. Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism representatives were sent to Amsterdam to facilitate the repatriation of the remains of non-Muslims. This shows how sensitive the Malaysian government is towards the different religious needs and rites of its citizens.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin declares Aug 22 a national day of mourning in honour of the passengers and crew killed in the MH17 crash. He said the bodies would be flown back that day on a special flight and a ceremony would be held. The nation will observe a moment of silence upon the arrival of the 16 victims, which includes one Dutch national. A total of 20 Malaysians have been identified. The repatriation of the
five other remains will be announced later. 22nd of August 2014 marked the National Mourning day for Malaysia as the bodies of 20 Malaysian citizens were flown home from Amsterdam with full state honours and landed in Kuala Lumpur International Airport at 10.00 am local time. A dignified ceremony was held as the coffins of the victims were carried by armed forces personnel and they were placed in special hearses. A moment of silence was observed throughout the nation once the final coffin was placed in a hearse.

Outcome

Based on the conceptual framework in Figure 1, the outcome of the Malaysian Aviation tragedies can be divided into four – Strong ties between governments, family emotional stability, crisis management stability and charismatic leadership.

It is undeniable that the aviation tragedies that hit Malaysia have deepened bilateral ties between the nation and other countries. The mysterious disappearance of MH370 in March and the downing of MH17 in Ukraine in July have brought countries together.

One of the main concerns of the Malaysian government is the family stability of the passengers and crew members of Flight MH370 and MH17. The presence of trained counsellors at the hotels where the families are residing have provided them the emotional comfort that they need enabling them to display a better level of acceptance so that they would be strong in facing life challenges. What differentiates between both tragedies is that in the second incident, the next of kin of the passengers and crew members were already aware of what transpired on the day of the incident – 17th July 2014 – and the incident occurred during the month of Ramadhan, hence, their level of acceptance was better. The emotional supports of other Malaysian citizens for the family members are also overwhelming. Besides that, compensation, financial aids and goodwill payment provided by the MAS to the family members who are emotionally and mentally affected by the incidents.

There are some criticisms in the manner MAS handles crisis. However, it should be noted that the only time MAS faced with an aviation tragedy was on the 4th of December 1977 where Flight MH653 was hijacked and crashed in TanjungKupang, Johor killing everyone on board. In addition, the response and crisis management of MAS and the government improved during the incident of MH17. Within an hour after the tragedy of MH17, MAS tweeted confirming the lost of contact with the aircraft over Ukraine airspace. The Prime Minister of Malaysia also tweeted demanding that an investigation will be conducted. The response was speedy. In other words, the Malaysia’s crisis management should be emulated and in fact the Prime Minister received global praises for his role in brokering an agreement with the separatists to bring back the remains of the loved ones.

The aviation disaster of MH370 and MH17 has put the leadership of the Prime Minister, Ministers and MAS officials to the test. It should be noted that the scale of the aviation tragedies would rock any nation, but the leadership in Malaysia remains strong.
global commendations received by the Prime Minister from the international counterparts prove his ability to manage crisis and his charismatic leadership. Even Malaysia top opposition leaders and harsh critics of the Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim and Lim Kit Siang, applauded him for the success in handling aviation crisis. The quick and coherent responds of all parties shows the leadership quality of the Malaysian leaders.

Such outcome brings about six impacts – i.e. unity, constructive empowerment, trust, believe, respect, and integrity and dignity.

Impact

One of the main outcomes of the tragedies is unity. The tragedies have certainly brought Malaysians together in facing the sadness of the nation putting aside political, religion and race differences. Unity and solidarity was clearly shown when the citizens of Malaysia exhibited their support to the families of the passengers and crew members of both flights. In fact, the family members of Flight MH370 land a helping consoling the families of Flight MH17. When the nation is tested with various challenges, unity of the people escalated.

Despite the massive international search, there is still no trace of the missing Flight MH370. The Malaysian government has reassured the families of the victims and the nation that the search for the vanished flight remains the top priority for the government. Still leading the search, the Malaysian government practised constructive empowerment allowing Australia to conduct the search. Both nations signed a memorandum of understanding to solidify the collaboration of both nations in the search of Flight MH370. The search for MH370 currently resumes off Western Australia and two towing submerged vehicles will scan the search area which is the size of Tasmania. The search is made even more complicated by underwater volcanoes and ocean trenches up to 4.8km deep.

The next outcome is dignity and integrity. As afore mentioned, the downing of Flight MH17 which occurred months after the disappearance of Flight MH370 would have rocked any nation. However, the dignified manner how the Malaysian government managed both crises displays the integrity of the nation. The country remains strong in the face of these adversities.

During the downing of Flight MH17, returning the remains of the victims from the crash site to their loved ones with dignity and respect was crucial. The government has taken the role in ensuring this and on the 22nd August, the first batch of remains of Malaysians on Flight MH17 was brought home. A dignified ceremony was held in Kuala Lumpur International Airport. The coffins of the victims were carried by armed forces personnel and they are placed in special hearses. In other words, the government has gained the trust of the citizens and the subject in return has placed their trust on the government.

Another outcome of the tragedies is the respect gained from our international counterparts. The Prime Minister of Malaysia had done something that had never been
possible – communicating with the rebel leader. The Premier mentioned that he initiated the negotiation with the rebels because he was touched and saddened after a meeting with the families of the victims. His effort received praises and indirectly respect from various parties.

Conclusion

The missing of Flights MH370 and the downing of Flight MH17 have challenged the nation in numerous ways. Undoubtedly, the twin tragedies will rock the airline. Hence, the government has decided to nationalised the company and the troubled career will be taken over by the country’s state investment company which would cost about GBP255. Measures have been taken to assist the airliner. First, it was removed from the Malaysia’s stock exchange so that an overhaul of the company can be done. Instead of crumbling and accepting fate after the aviation tragedies, Malaysia stands strong and face the adversity head on.

References


