

Indonesia, Dec 31 (AP) - Bad weather hindered efforts to recover victims of AirAsia Flight 8501 Wednesday, and sent wreckage drifting far from the crash site, as grieving relatives "surrounded in darkness" gathered in an airport and prayed for the strength to move forward. The massive hunt for 162 people who vanished Sunday aboard the Airbus A320 from Surabaya, Indonesia to Singapore, was severely limited due to heavy rain, wind and thick clouds. Seven bodies, including a flight attendant still wearing her red AirAsia uniform, have been recovered, said Indonesia's Search and Rescue Agency chief Henry Bambang Soelistyo. The weather prevented divers from retrieving bodies in the Java Sea on Wednesday, and helicopters were largely grounded, but ships were still scouring the area. Sonar images identified what appeared to be large parts of the plane, but strong currents were moving the wreckage. "It seems all the wreckage found has drifted more than 50 kilometers from yesterday's location," said Vice Air Marshal Sunarbowo Sandi, search and rescue coordinator in Pangkalan Bun on Borneo island, the closest town to the site. "We are expecting those bodies will end up on beaches." The airliner's disappearance halfway through the two-hour flight triggered an international search for the aircraft involving dozens of planes, ships and helicopters from numerous countries. It is still unclear what brought the plane down. Recovering bodies was expected to remain difficult for the near future. Indonesia's meteorology and geophysics agency predicted that the conditions would worsen, with more intense rains, through Friday. The aircraft's cockpit voice and flight data recorders, or black boxes, must be recovered before officials can start determining what caused the crash. Items recovered so far include a life jacket, an emergency window, children's shoes, a blue suitcase and backpacks filled with food. Simple wooden boxes containing bodies, with signs numbered 001 and 002, were unloaded in Pangkalan Bun, with flowers placed on top. Nearly all the passengers were Indonesian. The country is predominantly Muslim, but most of those aboard were Christians of Chinese descent. Just one Surabaya church - Manwar Sharon Church - lost 41 members in the crash. On Wednesday, around 100 relatives gathered for a prayer service in an hall at the Surabaya airport where the Rev. Philip Mantofa urged the crowd to hold onto their faith, despite their pain. "Some things do not make sense to us, but God is bigger than all this," he said. "Our God is not evil ... help us God to move forward even though we are surrounded by darkness." Before breaking up, those gathered stood together and sang with their hands reaching upward: "I surrender all. I surrender all. I surrender all to God our savior. I surrender all." About 125 family members had planned to travel to Pangkalan Bun, 160 kilometers (100 miles) from the area where bodies were first spotted, to start identifying their loved ones. However, Surabaya airport general manager Trikora Hardjo later said the trip was canceled after authorities suggested they stay to avoid slowing down the operation. Instead, some relatives gave blood for DNA tests in Surabaya, where the bodies will be transported, and submitted photos of their loved ones along with identifying information, such as tattoos or birth marks that could help make the process easier. Nearly all the passengers from Indonesia were frequent visitors to Singapore, particularly on holidays. It was 13-year-old Adrian Fernando's first trip to the city-state and was supposed to be a fun vacation with his aunt, uncle and cousin before he went back to school. "He is my only son," said mother Linca Gonimasela, 39, who could not join them because of work. "At first, he didn't want to go, but later on he was persuaded to join them for the New Year holiday." Malaysia-based AirAsia's loss comes on top of the still-unsolved disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in March with 239 people aboard, and the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July over Ukraine, which killed all 298 passengers and crew. The jet's last communication indicated the pilots were worried about bad weather. They

sought permission to climb above threatening clouds but were denied because of heavy air traffic. Four minutes later, the jet disappeared from the radar without issuing a distress signal.