

'Almost certain' debris is from MH370 model

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MH370 More than 16 months after Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 mysteriously vanished, a possible breakthrough has emerged.

This is after an aircraft part was washed up on Reunion Island, a French overseas territory off the coast of Madagascar and 175km from the Mauritius islands.

It is too soon to determine whether the discovery is indeed from the ill-fated aircraft with 239 people on board.

The find is on the opposite end of where the search operation is still going on in the Indian Ocean, southwest of Australia.

However, it does not necessarily mean that the search operation is in the wrong region as the debris would have been washed apart over a period of more than a year.

Malaysiakini compiles the latest developments here as the situation unfolds.

5:15 pm : Australian news portal The Canberra Times reported that remnants of a badly damaged suitcase have been found close to where plane debris was found on Reunion Island.

The portal cited that Journalist Julien Delarue, who works for local paper Journal de Lile de la Reunion, reported on Twitter that what appears to be a suitcase, has been found on the Indian Ocean island, less than a day after islanders discovered a two-metre long piece of debris.

The report included photographs of a local man holding a badly damaged object that appeared to be a "suitcase on wheels".

French language website Linfo.re reported that a gardener found the bag near where the debris was discovered.

The photographs show the object has two rusted zippers, netting, and frayed cloth that resembles the lining seen on standard items of luggage.

3.01PM: Malaysia's Deputy Transport Minister Abdul Aziz Kaprawi says it is "almost certain" the debris washed up at Reunion Island was from a Boeing 777, the same model as missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370.

"It is almost certain that the flaperon is from a Boeing 777 aircraft. Our chief investigator here told me this," Australia's ABC News quotes Aziz as saying.

However, Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss warned that the discovery on Reunion Island would not be very helpful in finding the main wreckage, as it had been washed apart over 16 months.

"This wreckage has been in the water. If it is from MH370, for well over a year, so it could have moved so far that it's not going to be that helpful in pinpointing precisely where the aircraft is," Truss is quoted as saying by ABC News.

However, Truss says, it was also an indication that the search area was "roughly" in the right place.

1.30PM: The discovery of debris on Reunion Island is consistent with ocean current models according to oceanographic experts.

Reuters reports that a huge, counter-clockwise current, called a gyre, covers much of the southern part of the 70.5 million sq km Indian Ocean, running east along the Southern Ocean near Antarctica, up the west Australian coast and westward below the equator towards Reunion and Madagascar, before turning south.

"Our model results that we did last year predicted that within 18-24 months after the crash, it was a possibility that it would have ended up within that region," said Charitha Pattiaratchi, Professor of Coastal Oceanography at the University of Western Australia.

The point of origin "will definitely be in the Southern Hemisphere, it would be to the east, it would cover definitely the area of the physical search at the moment", he added.

Pattiaratchi's modelling shows debris could drift as far west as Madagascar within two years but also as far east as Tasmania or beyond.

Dave Gallo, who co-led the search for Air France Flight 447 that crashed in the Atlantic Ocean in 2009, however warned that retracing the debris' drift through sea-current models could lead investigators astray.

12.15pm: The next-of-kin of several MH370 victims have greeted the news of the aircraft part's discovery with mixed feelings, according to media reports.

"Initially it was happiness then sadness [...] Now it's just up and down all the time, I don't know," said Kaylene Mann who lost her brother and sister-in-law on the plane.

Fairfax Media quoted the Australian national saying that until the piece found is proven to be linked to MH370, she does not know what to make of the find.

Meanwhile, Stuff.co.nz quoted Danica Weeks complaining that there had been too many 'red herrings' in the search for MH370.

"I've called the Australian authorities and, look, I'm just not ready to comment on anything

yet. It's just too early to call. Until we know; there's been so many red herrings, the pings, the oil [slick], the debris on the west coast, [there's] just been so many that I'm not willing to speak about it until we know for sure that it's actually from the plane.

"I could say everything ... it could be that, it could be this, that's what it's always been, so I just want to wait and see if it is a piece of a plane," she reportedly said.

She added that she has been in contact with the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, and said the bureau is hoping that it could confirm or deny the aircraft part's link to MH370 in 24 hours.

As for Sarah Bajc whose boyfriend Philip Wood was on the plane, she apparently shares Weeks' scepticism in the find and said she is still angry with Malaysia's handling of the crisis.

"I am still very angry at the country for their lack of efforts to hold anyone responsible for this [...] They have failed the world," the US broadcaster NBC quoted her as saying.

Bajc, Weeks, and Mann also stressed that if the find turns out to be an MH370 part, the task of finding the rest of the aircraft and uncovering what happened still remains.

"It is important to know where the plane is and retrieve the black boxes and why it happened and to make sure it never happens again, ever to anybody.

"The relatives of all the passengers on that plane have gone through 16 months of agony and pain and they shouldn't have to," Mann said.

11.00am: Going by photographic evidence, analysts are split on whether the wing belongs to Flight MH370.

According to Canberra Times, US investigators believe the object to be from a Boeing 777, based on photographic and video evidence.

"The investigators noted that no other Boeing 777 was known to be missing, suggesting that the piece was part of the missing aircraft," says the report.

However, French aviation security expert and criminologist Christophe Naudin thinks that the object is too small to be from Flight MH370.

"I am unable to say what type of plane that this may correspond to. But it could be a light twin-engine. I would not be surprised," Reunion-based news agency L'info a La Reunion quotes Naudin as saying.

He adds it could be from a small Piper plane crash in 2006.

7.45am: Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai announces that a team has been despatched to

Reunion Island to ascertain whether the debris belonged to Flight MH370.

"I have sent a team to verify the wreckage... we hope that it can identify (the wreckage) as soon as possible," Reuters quotes Liow as saying after attending a meeting of the United Nations Security Council in New York.

2.30am: First reports emerge that aircraft debris have washed up on Reunion Island, sparking speculation that it may be linked to Flight MH370.

According to French news agency DPA, the object washed ashore was a two-metre-long piece of wing.

It was reportedly discovered near Saint-Andre, on the eastern side of the island.

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