

Experts: Only black box can shed light on MH370 mystery

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MH370 The Malaysian government's confirmation that the two-metre-long aircraft wing part, which was discovered on Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean, belonged to MH370 will inspire searchers to intensify their operations to look for more debris in the waters surrounding the island.

Last Thursday, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak announced that international experts had affirmed that the maintenance record seal on the aircraft part, known as a flaperon, provided the conclusive proof that it belonged to MH370.

The Beijing-bound Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, which took off from the KL International Airport at 12.41am on March 8 last year with 239 passengers and crew members on board, had vanished from the radar about 49 minutes after takeoff.

While the search for more aircraft parts and debris - and of course the main body of the Boeing 777 plane - continues, special emphasis will also be given to locating the black box, which would contain a recording of various vital aspects of the flight and, if found and analysed, may shed some light on the events leading to the plane's disappearance.

Intensified search operations

For instance, the black box belonging to Air France's ill-fated Flight 447, which crashed into the Atlantic Ocean on June 1, 2009 - killing all 228 people on board - was only found a good two years later.

Universiti Kuala Lumpur's Malaysian Institute of Aviation Technology principal specialist, Ahmad Maulan Bardai, said search efforts should be intensified to detect the main body of the MH370 plane.

"Once the plane itself is found, there's a possibility of locating the black box, too," he told Bernama, when contacted.

Pointing out that any damage to the box would depend on the impact of the crash, he said if it was still in satisfactory condition, there was a good chance for investigators to retrieve and analyse its data.

Durable

Meanwhile, a trainer attached to Advanced Technology Training Centre's Aircraft Maintenance Department, Ismail Ibrahim, explained that the black box was very durable as it was made of a hard-wearing metal which could withstand massive impact, and coated with a fire-resistant substance.

The black box, which actually consists of a cockpit voice recorder and data recorder, can withstand an impact equivalent to 3,400 times the gravitational pull and temperatures of up to 1,100 degrees Celsius.

“It can withstand both high and low temperatures... right now, we don’t know where it’s lying but it is important to go on searching for the voice recorder.

“Once it’s found, it may become easier for investigators to finally find the answers to the various questions that have been haunting the authorities all these months,” he said.

Ismail said since it weighed about 10kg, it was highly improbable for the black box to be found floating on sea but, he added, it could not have necessarily remained in one place under the sea either as strong waves could have swept it from one place to another.

“If the black box was thrown out of the aircraft (upon impact), it will not be able to float but it can move.

“It’s different with the flaperon as it is made from composite material and is light and wide in shape, making it easier for it to float,” he said.

Getting closer

Head of the National Council of Professors’ Political, Security and International Affairs Cluster, Prof Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak, said the current phase of the search operations should be intensified to uncover more trails which could lead to the actual location of the plane.

“The search mission’s seriousness (in finding the missing MH370) had somewhat ebbed in recent months. But now the time has come for them to enhance and mobilise their efforts.

“Perhaps we are getting closer to locating the plane’s body. But finding it is not going to be easy, more so because it may be located on the seabed,” he added.

Mohamed Mustafa also agreed with Ahmad Maulan on the importance of tracking down the black box, which could hold the key to unravelling the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the MAS Boeing 777-200ER aircraft from the radar that fateful day.

On March 24 last year, 17 days after it vanished, Najib announced that flight MH370 had ended in the southern Indian Ocean, based on United Kingdom-based global satellite communications firm Inmarsat and UK air accident investigators’ analysis of the data relayed between the plane and ground station by satellite.

- Bernama

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