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PM: Flaperon from MH370

REDIRECTION? Experts re-crunching numbers to narrow down search area

KUALA LUMPUR

THE long-awaited answer to one of the world's greatest aviation mysteries may soon be at hand after investigators confirmed that a piece of plane debris retrieved from La Reunion Island belongs to missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, during a press conference early today, said international experts in France had confirmed that the debris found on La Reunion was from MH370.

"Today, 515 days since the plane disappeared, it is with a heavy heart that I must tell you that an international team of experts has conclusively confirmed that the aircraft debris found on Reunion Island is indeed from MH370.

"We now have physical evidence that, as I announced on March 24 last year, Flight MH370 tragically ended in the southern Indian Ocean," Najib said in a five-minute press conference at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

He said the confirmation, though tragic, would bring certainty to the families and loved ones of those on board MH370.

"I would like to assure all those affected by this tragedy that the Malaysian government is committed to (doing) everything within our



means to find out the truth about what happened."

On July 29, a piece of aircraft debris was found washed ashore on La Reunion, east of Madagascar. The debris, believed to be from a Boeing 777, was sent to Toulouse, France, for analysis the following day.

On March 8 last year, the Boeing 777-200ER, carrying 239 passengers and crew, was en route from here to Beijing, when it disappeared off radar screens just as it was about to enter Vietnamese airspace at 1.20am, some 40 minutes after taking off.

Six days later, satellite company Inmarsat acknowledged that it recorded transmissions with MH370 for several hours after the aircraft disappeared from radar.

Analysis of the Inmarsat information led investigators to conclude that the southern Indian Ocean was



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, flanked by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai (right) and Deputy Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Jallani Johari, during the MH370 press conference in Kuala Lumpur earlier today. Pic by Mohammad Shahril Badri Saali

MH370's final resting place.

Meanwhile, even as investigators in Toulouse were analysing the flaperon, analysts were working to narrow down the search area.

They pulled out their drift, tide and current charts, and re-crunched numbers to calculate the general area in which the Boeing 777 could have impacted the waters of the Indian Ocean.

Prior to this, all they had to go on were the periodic "pings" or electronic "handshakes" from the jetliner's satellite navigation, or Satnav, system that was "communicating" with the constellation of Inmarsat satellites in Earth's orbit before the signal was lost.

Aviation expert Associate Professor Captain Dr Mohd Harridon Mohamed Suffian said investigators would have to "work backwards" using drift charts, an analysis of ocean currents and wind conditions, among others, and plot the likely route the flaperon would have taken

after it broke off the main wing upon impact with the ocean.

"We can plot where MH370 may have gone down. But, it is not an exact science. It's a guesstimate, at best," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Tied in together with what investigators know from the "pings", the new calculations would provide a better picture of the jetliner's final resting place.

Harridon said oceanographers could carry out computer modelling, but it might take a couple of months.

Already, a team of scientists, led by Swedish physicist Dr Henrik Rydberg, has been crunching the numbers. He is confident that the wreckage will be found at the opposite end of where the search is currently being carried out.

Rydberg, who has been independently investigating MH370 with his team, on Monday said the wreckage was in the southwest of the southern Indian Ocean, but further north of

the current search area. He believes that the debris found on La Reunion last Wednesday may have washed up on the island three months ago.

"The most likely origin of the flaperon is currently a 120-square-nautical-mile area, centred at (34S, 94E)."

Universiti Malaya's National Antarctic Research Centre director, Professor Datuk Dr Azizan Abu Samah, said MH370 debris could have scattered to various places, including Western Australian beaches, Madagascar and La Reunion.

"It's been a long time, and there are a lot of debris and garbage in the gyre. A Boeing 777 is huge and we have only found a small part of the wing. If it did break apart upon impact, parts of the wreckage could be scattered all over the southern hemisphere."

The gyre is a circular pattern of currents in an ocean basin, in which the Aotsam and jetsam thrown into the ocean are carried along.