

Will MH370's black box ever be found?

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PETALING JAYA: The search for MH370 continues not for the plane per se but the wreckage in the rough seas of the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless finding any debris linked to the plane will be a starting point to locate the most critical component called the black box.

The black box may hold vital and critical answers to the mystery surrounding flight MH370 that went off-course thousands of miles away from its original destination, Beijing, on the morning of March 8.

It has been reported that the black box has sufficient battery power to emit signals for at least 30 days. Thereafter it may stop emitting signals but it will maintain all data recorded.

“If the battery dies, the box doesn’t go anywhere, it would still be okay,” said Ron Bishop to The Guardian. Ron is a senior lecturer in aviation at the Central Queensland University.

The black box has two components – the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) and the flight data recorder (FDR).

According to Ron, the CVR would record everything that was transmitted inside and outside the aircraft for about the last two hours of the flight. He further said that it will reveal what was said between the pilot, co-pilot and crew.

“Sound recordings can reveal a lot more than one might think. Pilot’s voice can indicate duress and the hum of the engine can reveal its condition,” said Ron.

“Meanwhile the FDR records, among other things, the flight’s altitude, air speed, direction and engine temperature,” he said.

Ron also confirmed that it would not be possible to switch off the black box. “You might be able to disconnect the power from it, but then it would still be able to power itself.”

The black box is actually a bright shade called “international orange” to make it visible even at the bottom of the ocean.

The other great feature of the black box is that it’s virtually indestructible as it goes through a series of rigorous tests before it is released for use. Some of the tests include hammering the part of the box that contains the memory board with a steel pin having 227kg behind it.

It is also compressed at six major axis points by 5,000 pounds psi (per square inch) of crush force, cooked in a propane-source fireball at 1,100 degrees Celsius and immersed in different aviation fluids, such as jet fuel, lubricants and fire-extinguisher chemicals.

Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak said Monday that Flight MH370 had gone down in the Indian

Ocean with its 239 passengers and crew, citing new satellite data analysis.

But its exact location and the circumstances of its diversion remain a mystery. No distress signal was ever received.

Three scenarios have gained particular traction: hijacking, pilot sabotage, or a sudden mid-air crisis that incapacitated flight crew and left the plane to fly on auto-pilot for several hours until it ran out of fuel.

Malaysia has said it believes the plane was deliberately diverted by someone on board.

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