

Chinese satellite finds 'suspected crash area at sea'
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A satellite image of possible debris from missing MH370 taken on Sunday by a Chinese satellite and released yesterday. Chinese satellites searching for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 have "observed a suspected crash area at sea," a government agency has revealed.

The Chinese have released days-old images of potential wreckage in the South China Sea in what is possibly the first indication of a crash site five days after the Boeing 777 disappeared with 239 people onboard.

China's State Administration for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence announced the discovery, including images of what it said were "three suspected floating objects and their sizes".

The images were captured on Sunday – the day after the passenger jet went missing – but were not released until today, the Sydney Morning Herald reported today.

Former US National Transportation Safety Board managing director Peter Goetz told CNN that China may have been reluctant to release the images earlier because "they may not want to reveal what kind of satellite capabilities they have".

"It's where it's supposed to be," Peter Goetz, a former National Transportation Safety Board managing director, told CNN's Jake Tapper, noting that there had been scepticism about reports the plane had turned around to go back over Malaysia.

This possible narrowing of the focus of search and rescue operations comes on the same day that officials, rather than narrowing the search area, more than doubled it from the day earlier to nearly 27,000 square nautical miles.

"I think the size of the pieces ... everything we've heard ... gives good cause to believe that we've now (refocused) the area," former Federal Aviation Administration official Michael Goldfarb told CNN. "And that's a huge relief to everybody ... I think it's a high chance that they're going to confirm that these (are) pieces of the wreckage."

But not every expert was convinced this is it. Clive Irving, a senior editor with Conde Nast Traveler, said that the size of the pieces -- since they are fairly square and big -- "don't conform to anything that's on the plane."

Regardless, time is of the essence. The flight data recorders should 'ping,' send out a signal pointing to its location for about 30 days from the time the aircraft set off, noted Goldfarb. After that, Flight 370 could prove much harder to find.

The latest Chinese report is likely to be met with caution after images released early this week of suspected aircraft wreckage in the Gulf of Thailand proved to be wrong. Since then, the search area has grown from the Gulf of Thailand to include the Straits of Malacca and Andaman Sea east of the Malay peninsula.

There has also been a report of a New Zealander working on an oil rig off the coast of Vietnam allegedly seeing a burning object in the sky about the time the missing Malaysia Airlines flight was believed to have crashed.

Flight MH370 vanished 40 minutes after taking off from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing early Saturday, under clear night skies and with no suspicion of any mechanical problems. There were 239 people on board, including 12 crew members.

Media reports have spoken about an email sent by New Zealander Mike McKay, who works on the "Songa Mercur" oil rig in the South China Sea, to his bosses detailing what he saw that night. In the email McKay said that he "observed the plane burning at high altitude... in one piece," about 50km to 70km from his location.

He gave coordinates for the location of the rig, which recently moved from Cuba to the shores of Vietnam.

Doan Huu Gia, deputy general director of Vietnam's air traffic management, confirmed they had been sent the email, the BBC reported.

"We received an email from a New Zealander who works on one of the oil rigs off Vung Tau. He said he spotted a burning [object] at that location, some 300 km southeast of Vung Tau." The Vietnamese authorities sent a plane to investigate the sighting, but it found nothing, Vietnamese naval officer Le Ming Thanh told ABC News.

Officials still do not know what went wrong with the aircraft, and several leads pursued so far have proven not to be linked to the plane. – March 13, 2014.

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