

**India scours uninhabited jungle islands for lost MH370 jetliner**  
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Indian aircraft searched Andaman and Nicobar for signs of the missing MH370 airplane, following evidence that suggests the plane last headed towards the direction of the archipelago. Indian aircraft combed Andaman and Nicobar, made up of more than 500 mostly uninhabited islands, for signs of the missing Malaysia Airlines MH370 jetliner that evidence suggests was last headed towards the heavily forested archipelago.

Popular with tourists and anthropologists alike, the islands form India's most isolated state. They are best known for dense rainforests, coral reefs and hunter-gatherer tribes who have long resisted contact with outsiders.

The search for flight MH370 turned west toward the islands after Malaysia's air force chief said military radar had detected an unidentified aircraft suspected to be the lost Boeing 777 to the west of Malaysia early on Saturday.

Two sources yesterday told Reuters the unidentified aircraft appeared to be following a commonly used navigational route that would take it over the islands.

The Indian navy has deployed two Dornier planes to fly across the island chain, a total area of 720 km by 52 km, Indian military spokesman Harmeet Singh said in the state capital, Port Blair. So far the planes, and a helicopter searching the coast, had found nothing.

"This operation is like finding a needle in a haystack," said Singh, who is the spokesman for joint air force, navy and army command in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

The Defence Ministry said the Eastern Naval Command would also search across a new area measuring 15 km by 600 km along the Chennai coast in the Bay of Bengal.

The shape of this area, located 900 km west of Port Blair, suggested the search was focusing on a narrow flight corridor.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said China appreciated India's search efforts. Most of the passengers on Flight MH370 are Chinese.

The 2004 tsunami devastated much of Andaman and Nicobar. In the wake of that disaster, a member of the reclusive Sentinelese tribe was photographed firing arrows at an Indian coastguard helicopter.

Another nomadic tribe, the Jarawa, are increasingly in contact with outsiders. Tribal rights group Survival accuses travel agencies of organising "human safari" tours to view the Jarawa, who are fish and turtle hunters and number about 400.

On standby is India's most advanced maritime air surveillance plane, the P-8I Poseidon, a long range anti-submarine variant of the US Navy's P-8A. India, the first overseas customer for the aircraft, has ordered eight P-8Is.

Indian ships are also helping the search by more than a dozen nations for the missing plane, one of the most baffling mysteries in the history of modern aviation. The ships are searching an area north of Sumatra, in the south Andaman Sea.

Andaman and Nicobar is of strategic importance for India, because of its location near the busy Malacca Straits shipping route. Over the past decade, India has built up its military presence on the islands with the joint command. – Reuters, March 14, 2014.

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