

Classified data shows plane may have crashed in Bay of Bengal or Indian Ocean
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Classified intelligence analysis of electronic and satellite data has indicated that the missing Malaysia Airlines (MAS) flight 370 likely crashed either in the Bay of Bengal or somewhere in the Indian Ocean, an exclusive report by the CNN said.

If this information is true, it would offer the first glimpse of concrete details about what happened to the Beijing-bound flight which went off the radar early last Saturday.

It had enough credibility for the United States to move its guided missile destroyer, the USS Kidd, into the Indian Ocean, and Indian officials to expand its search effort into the Bay of Bengal.

An aviation industry source told CNN that the flight's automated communications system appeared to be intact for up to five hours, because "pings" from the system were received after the transponder last emitted a signal.

The CNN report said taken together, the data points toward speculation in a dark scenario in which someone took the plane for some unknown purpose, perhaps terrorism.

That theory is buoyed by a New York Times (NYT) report that the MAS plane made several significant altitude changes after losing transponder contact.

The paper said MH370 altered its course more than once as though it was still under the command of a pilot.

Quoting US officials and others close to the investigations, the report said the radar signals indicate that the jetliner climbed to 45,000 feet, above the approved limit for the Boeing 777-2000.

This happened right after it disappeared from civilian radar and made a sharp turn to the west.

The plane then descended unevenly to 23,000 feet, below normal cruising levels, as it approached Penang.

MH370 then turned from a southwest-bound direction, climbed to a higher altitude and flew northwest over the Strait of Malacca and towards the vast Indian Ocean.

While the Malaysian government has not released this radar information, it has shared it with the US and China.

The NYT report also stated that investigators have examined data transmitted from the plane's Rolls-Royce engines, showing it descended 40,000 feet within a minute. It added that they were not likely to view the readings as accurate because for the jetliner to have fallen such a distance, it would have taken longer than one minute.

CNN also reported on the theory that MH370 could have landed in a remote Indian Ocean island chain, based on analysis of radar data made known recently - and that whoever was piloting the plane was following navigational waypoints that many have taken the plane over the Andaman Islands.

It quoted FBI assistant director James Kallstrom as saying that while this "movie plot theory" appeared complicated and was unlikely, law enforcement had to check such a possibility.

"You draw that arc, and you look at countries like Pakistan, you know, and you get into your 'Superman' novels, and you see the plane landing somewhere and (people) repurposing it for some dastardly deed down the road," he told CNN.

Aviation experts contended that although highly unlikely, it was possible that someone could have hijacked and landed the jetliner undetected.

The international airport in Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman, is said to have a runway that is long enough to cater to a 777.

However, as the area is highly militarised due to its importance to India, Indian officials said the region was an unlikely target for hijackers trying to sneak in an airplane which had a wingspan of more than 200 feet, reported CNN.

Denis Giles, editor of the Andaman Chronicle newspaper, said there was no chance that an aircraft of that size could have landed in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

When the US sent the USS Kidd to scout the Indian Ocean, Cmdr William Marks of the US 7th Fleet said of the scale of the search: "I, like most of the world, really have never seen anything like this.

"We went from a chess board to a football field," he told CNN.

Meanwhile, Reuters reports that analysis of electronic pulses picked up from the missing airliner shows it could have run out of fuel and crashed into the Indian Ocean after it flew hundreds of miles off course, quoting a source familiar with official US assessments.

The source, who is familiar with data the US government is receiving from the investigation into the disappearance of the Malaysia Airlines plane, said the other, but less likely possibility, was that it flew on towards India, said Reuters.

Reuters also reported that the data obtained from pulses the plane sent to satellites had been interpreted to provide two different analyses because it was ambiguous, quoting the source, who declined to be identified because of the ongoing investigation.

But Reuters notes that it offers the first real clues as to the fate of Flight MH370, which officials increasingly believe was deliberately diverted off its scheduled course from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. The Boeing 777-200ER was carrying 239 people.

Reuters reported that two sources familiar with the probe earlier said Malaysian military radar data showed a plane that investigators suspect was Flight MH370 following a commonly used navigational route toward the Middle East and Europe when it was last spotted by radar early on March 8, northwest of Malaysia.

The electronic pulses were believed to have been transmitted for several hours after the plane flew out of radar range, said Reuters, quoting the source familiar with the data.

The most likely possibility is that after travelling northwest, the airliner did a sharp turn to the south, into the Indian Ocean where officials think, based on the available data, it flew until it ran out of fuel and crashed into the sea, added the source.

The other interpretation from the pulses is that Flight MH370 continued to fly to the northwest and headed over Indian territory, said Reuters, quoting the source.

Reuters also quoted the source as saying that because of the fragmentary nature of the data, US officials don't know for sure which analysis is correct, although they believe the turn to the south is more likely.

The source added that it was believed unlikely the plane flew for any length of time over India because that country has strong air defence and radar coverage and that should have allowed authorities there to see the plane and intercept it, said Reuters.

Malaysian Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said yesterday he could not confirm the last heading of the plane or if investigators were focusing on sabotage, reported Reuters.

Reuters added that there has been no trace of the plane nor any sign of wreckage as the navies and military aircraft of more than a dozen countries scour the seas on both sides of peninsular Malaysia.

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