

New report makes first official claim of power failure aboard MH370 Malaysian Insider Dec 10, 2015

In the first official acknowledgement of one of many speculations of what went wrong before Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 vanished last year, a new report by Australian authorities says the Boeing 777 hit a sudden power failure before it cruised over the Indian Ocean as a "zombie plane", a US news portal reports.

"It is the first official acknowledgement of what had previously been only speculation – that there was a sudden loss of electrical power capable of disabling vital systems," said the Daily Beast, citing a lengthy report issued last week by the Australian Transport Bureau.

"As well as portraying a sudden crisis of control in the cockpit, the report greatly undercuts theories that the pilots themselves went rogue – far from harming the airplane it is much more likely that they were struggling to save it in a situation that most pilots would find hard to master."

It said before losing electricity, the crew had regular contact with air traffic controllers and the airplane was able to automatically transmit its position.

But the pilots stopped communicating after the transponder, which showed the plane's position, and a separate automatic system that reported the aircraft's critical systems at half-hourly intervals, stopped working.

The report from the bureau was to reinforce confidence that the undersea search for MH370, which disappeared on March 8 last year while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, is being carried out in the right part of the Indian Ocean and has a high chance of success.

The flight, with 239 passengers and crew, should have reached its destination five and a half hours later, but seven hours and 38 minutes after departing Kuala Lumpur, it was somewhere over the southern Indian Ocean.

The Daily Beast said the Australian report gave four possible causes for the loss of power, the first being a sudden failure that caused the plane's Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) to kick-in to restore emergency power.

The second possible cause was an action carried out in the cockpit using overhead switches; third, someone accessing the Main Equipment Centre (MEC) below the flight deck, pulling out circuit breakers and, later, resetting them; and lastly, intermittent technical failures.

"Clearly, these possibilities suggest a choice between actions that required deliberate human intervention, or the sudden onset of technical failures that the airplane's backup systems were able to restore, at least in part.

"In making this range of possibilities clear the report demonstrates that there is no data that could make a persuasive argument for either scenario. That can only be settled when, or if, the remains of the airplane are found and recovered."

On conspiracy theories blaming the pilots, the portal quoted an unnamed Boeing 777 expert as saying that it was "extremely unlikely, even bordering on the absurd".

The expert said few pilots would know how to get to the lower deck during a flight or find the circuit breakers to compromise the flight.

The report could support the theory that a fire might have wiped out many of the internal systems on MH370, leaving the pilots unable to fly the plane but allowed the aircraft to continue cruising until it ran out of fuel, The Daily Beast said.

It did not exactly state when MH370 lost power, but could have happened in the 56 minutes between the final scheduled transmission from the Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System (Acars) and an unsuccessful attempt by the airline's dispatchers to contact the crew.

The Daily Beast added the power loss must have happened in the time between the attempt from the ground to contact the airplane and the last normal contact, adding that it was "very likely it happened very rapidly after the captain signed off—when the transponder failed".

"However, whatever the extent of the power loss, the report (from Australia) makes clear that, remarkably, at least one system was able on its own to recover power and continue functioning.

"Twenty-one minutes after the airline's dispatchers tried to contact the flight, MH370 was able to transmit a scheduled electronic 'handshake' (pings) to a satellite."

The portal said if a fire had taken place in the cargo, it would have damaged the MEC, where the plane's main computers were stored, while the flames and smoke incapacitated the passengers and crew.

The Satellite Data Unit would have been able to continue functioning, sending hourly pings throughout the rest of the flight, because it was in the roof of the cabin.

The pings had guided searchers to an area deep in the southern Indian Ocean, more than 1,500 miles from southwestern Australia. – December 10, 2015.

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