

Beat: News

Investigators: Missing airliner was flying faster than previously thought

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USPA News - Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 was flying faster than previously thought after contact was lost with air traffic control earlier this month, reducing the distance the aircraft could have traveled south over the Indian Ocean, Australian officials said on Friday after receiving a more detailed analysis of military radar data. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), which is leading the search and recovery operation in the southern Indian Ocean, said the new information had moved the search area about 1,100 kilometers (683 miles) to the northeast.

The area now covers approximately 319,000 square kilometers (123,167 miles) and is located about 1,850 kilometers (1,149 miles) west of Perth. "The new information is based on continuing analysis of radar data between the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca before radar contact was lost," AMSA said in an e-mailed statement. "The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), Australia's investigation agency, has examined this advice and determined that this is the most credible lead to where debris may be located." The new analysis of data from Malaysia's military radar showed the aircraft was traveling faster than had been previously estimated. The increased speed would have resulted in increased fuel usage and thereby reduces the possible distance the aircraft could have traveled south over the Indian Ocean. No explanation was immediately given for why it took nearly three weeks for investigators to determine the aircraft's actual speed while it flew between the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. "ATSB advises the potential flight path may be the subject of further refinement as the international investigative team supporting the search continues their analysis," AMSA added. "The Australian Geospatial-Intelligence Organization is re-tasking satellites to image the new area." The news came after AMSA said weather conditions had improved over the southern Indian Ocean, allowing aircraft and ships to return to the region to continue searching for plane wreckage. The lengthy search operation has been mainly based on satellite images that have repeatedly shown possible debris fields, but no objects have been recovered to confirm whether they belong to the missing airliner. Ten aircraft were expected to be involved in Friday's search, including aircraft from Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, China, and the United States. Six ships, including the Royal Australian Navy ship HMAS Success and five Chinese ships, are also participating in the search and were en-route to the new search area. Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, a Boeing 777, was operating a flight between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing with 239 people on board when it disappeared from civilian radar in the early morning of March 8. It was flying above the South China Sea when it was last detected by air traffic controllers, but investigators believe the aircraft continued to fly for nearly seven more hours under unknown circumstances. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said on late Monday that further calculations of satellite data indicated that the aircraft had crashed west of Perth with no possibility of survivors. "This is a remote location, far from any possible landing sites. It is therefore with deep sadness and regret that I must inform you that, according to this new data, flight MH370 ended in the southern Indian Ocean," he said at a news conference.

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