

Plane debris found in Indian Ocean won't solve MH370 crash mystery: Australia

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Melbourne: Debris found in the Indian Ocean even if it is from MH370 would not help pinpoint the final resting place of the plane that mysteriously vanished over a year ago with 239 people on board, Australia cautioned on Friday.

Aviation experts say a two-metre piece of debris washed up on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion, off the east coast of Africa, is very likely a flap from the trailing edge of the wing of a Boeing 777 airliner - the same type of plane as MH370.

Australia which is leading the search for the missing jet, however, cautioned that even if the piece is from MH370, the task of finding the plane remains enormous.

"Reverse modelling of ocean currents to determine the origins of an aircraft wing believed to be from Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 is "almost impossible", Transport Minister Warren Truss said.

While the wreckage found on Reunion Island would not help pinpoint the resting place of the Boeing 777, Truss said it would be a major lead.

Australia will continue to search for MH370 within the existing search area, Truss said.

If it (debris) was proven to be from the plane, it would strengthen the case that the Australian-led search for MH370 was being conducted in the right part of the southern Indian Ocean.

"After 16 months, the vagaries of the currents [make] reverse modelling almost impossible. So I don't think it contributes a great deal as far as our knowledge of where the aircraft is located at the present time," he said.

"However, the fact that wreckage is in Reunion Island ... is consistent with some of the modelling we have done in relation with current movements."

Truss said any confirmation that the wreckage was from MH370 would also eliminate some of the wilder theories about its fate, and establish beyond any doubt that the aircraft was resting in the Indian Ocean and "not secretly parked on land in another part of the world".

The ill-fated Malaysia Airlines jetliner was carrying 239 crew and passengers when it disappeared on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing in March last year.

Truss also has played down speculation that a suitcase that washed up on the French island was from MH370.

A lack of marine life attached to it indicated it had not been in the water for a long period of time, he said. "We are less certain that the bag has anything to do with MH370," Truss said.

The government would continue to concentrate Australia's efforts on seeking to locate the aircraft in the southern end of an identified area in the Indian Ocean.

The plane wreckage found on Reunion Island is to be sent to a laboratory in France for forensic examination to determine whether it is from MH370, as part of a coordinated effort with authorities from Malaysia and Australia.

Meanwhile in Beijing, families of Chinese passengers on board MH370 are concerned the discovery of debris possibly belonging to the missing Malaysian aircraft may disrupt the international search operation.

In a statement issued yesterday, a group of family members urged all parties committed to the search to keep up their efforts while the origin of a plane part washed up on the French Indian Ocean island of La Reunion is determined.

They also called for Malaysia to reopen a help center for Chinese victims' families that was closed on May 7, and for a third party to supervise the investigation into the plane's disappearance, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing carrying 239 people, including five Indians, vanished on March 8, 2014. The ongoing search operation has found no verified sign of the plane.

Malaysia Airlines said yesterday that it would be premature to speculate on the origin of the debris, while the Malaysian government said it has sent a team to determine whether it comes from MH370.

- PTI