

Beat: Technology

Search for missing Malaysian airliner to resume next month

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USPA News - A deep-sea search for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 is expected to commence in September and will focus in particular on southern areas of the search area, Australian and Malaysian officials said on Thursday, nearly six months after the airliner vanished with 239 people on board. Surveyors will face a year-long operation starting next month to examine the ocean floor in the 1.1 million square kilometers-wide search area, of which 87,000 square kilometers has already been surveyed.

A new analysis of information will point the first stages of the search towards the southern parts of the search area. "Over the last few weeks and months continuing work is being done on refining the information that we have in relation to the most likely resting place for this aircraft," said Australian Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss. "The search area remains the same, but some of the information we now have suggests to us that areas a little further to the south - within the search area but a little further to the south - may be of particular interest and priority in the search area." The focus on southern parts of the search area results from an analysis of a satellite phone call from Malaysia Airlines to the aircraft after it disappeared from radar on March 8. While the phone call was unsuccessful, a recent analysis of the call has provided new details about the aircraft's position and heading. Senior government officials from Australia, Malaysia and China met in Australia on Thursday to discuss the next phase in the search, which has already been described as the biggest search operation in history with the surface search covering more than 4.5 million square kilometers. Despite no physical evidence having been found after nearly six months, officials remain optimistic. "Ministers remain cautiously optimistic that the missing aircraft will be found," the ministers said in a joint statement. "Ministers reiterated that the passengers and families of MH370 have not left their thoughts, and while they cannot begin to comprehend the suffering of the next of kin, reiterated their commitment to do all they could to assist them to find closure and understand the mystery of MH370." Although the survey of the sea floor has so far yielded no clues about Flight 370, the analysis of the data has significantly expanded knowledge of the area, indicating depths up to 1,500 meters deeper than previously known. Surveyors have also identified two previously unknown underwater volcanoes and other geographic features that will assist in navigating the sea floor. "The combination of undersea search equipment, world-class experts and cutting edge technology that is being used will be our best chance of finding MH370 and we are hopeful in our prospects of doing so," Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said. "I want to assure the loved ones of the passengers and crew on-board MH370 that we are resolute in our efforts to search for this aircraft." Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, a Boeing 777 with 239 people on board, was operating a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing 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 before crashing in the southern Indian Ocean west of Perth. An area in the southern Indian Ocean where `acoustic pings` were detected was previously discounted as being the crash site after a Bluefin-21 autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) carried out a weeks-long underwater search that covered hundreds of square kilometers. The `acoustic signals` in the area in early April were initially believed to be signals from the aircraft's black box, but that turned out to be wrong.

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