

MH370: Malaysian investigators meet French officials ahead of wing analysis

PARIS: Malaysian aviation experts met French officials Monday to coordinate the investigation into missing flight MH370, days after the discovery of a washed-up plane part offered fresh hopes of solving the mystery.

The Malaysian team arrived at the Palais de Justice in Paris shortly before 2pm local time (1200 GMT) to meet a French judge, a group of experts and police charged with the investigation.

The meeting broke out after two hours and the Malaysian delegation left without comment to waiting reporters. They were due to release a statement after the meeting.

France is leading the current phase of the investigation after a two-metre-long flaperon, already confirmed to be part of a Boeing 777, surfaced last week on the French Indian Ocean island of La Reunion.

Technical experts, including from US aerospace giant Boeing, will begin from Wednesday examining the wing component, which is likely to have come from the doomed Malaysia Airlines flight as no other such plane is known to have crashed in the area.

Mauritius said it would do all it can to search for more debris after Malaysia appealed to islands near La Reunion to hunt for clues.

The wing part will undergo physical and chemical analysis in the southern French city of Toulouse in a bid to prove beyond doubt that the flaperon once belonged to MH370.

It will be examined with an electron microscope “that can magnify up to 10,000 times” to try to understand how it was damaged, said Pierre Bascary, former director of tests at France’s General Directorate for Armaments.

However, experts have warned grieving families not to expect startling revelations from a single part. “We shouldn’t expect miracles from this analysis,” said Jean-Paul Troadec, former head of France’s BEA civil flight authority.

In order to provide clues on what happened to the aircraft, “the part would need to be at the centre of the accident and the chances are fairly small,” he noted.

Geology expert Hans-Georg Herbig said that the shells encrusted on the flaperon could provide vital clues.

If the barnacles are found to be from the Lepas family, “we can then say with certainty that the accident took place in cold maritime areas to the south-west of Australia,” Herbig said.

Scientists say it is plausible that ocean currents carried a piece of the wreckage as far as La Reunion. But Roland Triadec, a local oceanographer, said La Reunion represented only “a pinhead” in the Indian Ocean and the likelihood of other debris washing up there was low.

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