

Malaysian PM says missing airliner flew 7 more hours after `deliberate action`

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USPA News - Investigators believe communication systems aboard Malaysia Airlines flight 370 were deliberately disabled before the aircraft turned back from its flight to Beijing and flew on for another seven hours, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said on Saturday. Najib, speaking at a press conference exactly a week after the aircraft seemingly vanished, said primary radar operated by the Royal Malaysian Air Force showed that a then-unidentified aircraft made a turn back over the South China Sea on the morning of March 8 and proceeded on a flight path that took it to an area north of the Strait of Malacca.

The comments confirm media reports in recent days that the aircraft had flown toward the Bay of Bengal, but the prime minister said it was not until Saturday that investigators were able to use raw satellite data to confirm that the aircraft tracked by military radar was indeed Flight 370. "Based on new satellite information, we can say with a high degree of certainty that the Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System (ACARS) was disabled just before the aircraft reached the East coast of peninsular Malaysia," Najib said. "Shortly afterwards, near the border between Malaysian and Vietnamese air traffic control, the aircraft's transponder was switched off." Indicating the events were the result of a person's actions rather than some sort of catastrophic failure, Najib added: "It then flew in a westerly direction back over peninsular Malaysia before turning northwest. Up until the point at which it left military primary radar coverage, these movements are consistent with deliberate action by someone on the plane." Najib said the last confirmed communication between the aircraft and the satellite was at 8:11 a.m. local time on March 8, nearly seven hours after contact had initially been lost over the South China Sea, and about an hour after Malaysia Airlines released a public statement confirming the aircraft had gone missing. But it remains unclear where Flight 370 went and how much longer it may have flown, though investigators are now certain that the aircraft did not crash in the South China Sea. Najib said the satellite data does not allow the investigative team to pinpoint an exact location for where the aircraft was when it last made contact with the satellite, but further calculations may refine the search area. "Based on this new data, the aviation authorities of Malaysia and their international counterparts have determined that the plane's last communication with the satellite was in one of two possible corridors: a northern corridor stretching approximately from the border of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to northern Thailand, or a southern corridor stretching approximately from Indonesia to the southern Indian Ocean," the prime minister said. Although earlier calling the actions on board the aircraft deliberate, Najib also rejected media reports that investigators had concluded beyond a doubt that Flight 370 was hijacked, saying investigators were still investigating all possibilities. He added, however, that authorities have refocused their investigation onto the crew and passengers as a result of the new information. As of Saturday afternoon, 14 countries, 43 ships and 58 aircraft were involved in the search for the aircraft. "This new satellite information has a significant impact on the nature and scope of the search operation. We are ending our operations in the South China Sea and reassessing the redeployment of our assets," Najib added.

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