Beat: Business

High-energy objects; penetrated and downed MH17, official repor

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USPA News - The crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which went down in a separatist-held region of eastern Ukraine earlier this year, was caused by "high-energy objects that penetrated the aircraft from the outside," according to a preliminary report released on Tuesday. The preliminary report, by the Dutch Safety Board, said that puncture holes in the aircraft`s wreckage suggested that small objects penetrated the aircraft in the cockpit and forward sections.

Holes were also found on the cockpit floor. Through analysis, the damage to the body of the aircraft is consistent with `high-energy objects` piercing the aircraft from the outside, they said. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak responded to the report by stating that, "this leads to the strong suspicion that a surface-to-air missile brought MH17 down, but further investigative work is needed before we can be certain." The preliminary report confirmed MH17 was flying in unrestricted airspace at an altitude of 33,000 feet (10,058 meters) with two other aircraft in close proximity to it. However, the Malaysian airliner was flying above restricted airspace as noted in the then-most recent note to airmen (NOTAM). Airspace at the higher altitude was considered safe and Air Traffic Control (ATC) had cleared both the aircraft`s route and altitude. The analysis of the Flight Data Recorder (FDR) and the Digital Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) indicates that both devices stopped working at 13:20:03 GMT. The Dnipropetrovs`k air traffic control (DNP) center tried to reach the aircraft through radio transmissions from 13.20:00 GMT, but there was no response. Air Traffic Control confirmed that no distress call was made by the airliner. An aircraft in close proximity to MH17 was asked if they had a visual of the airliner, but responded that they were not able to see anything and that the Malaysian aircraft was no longer visible on their aircraft instruments. "It seems that its target started falling apart. ... It disappeared. ... Nothing. We see nothing." Tuesday`s report did not give a specific cause of the crash, other than that the source was external. "There are various resources at their [investigators] disposal, including flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder. These sources indicate that flight MH17 proceeded as normal until it ended abruptly," Joustra said. The CVR depicted the situation as normal in the cockpit, with no warnings or alerts for any possible aircraft malfunctions, making a technical cause unlikely. There was also no indication from the crew that they were in distress or had problems with the flight, according to the investigation report. The forward parts and cockpit were found close to where the aircraft had its last interaction with ATC and the last recorded FDR point. The front of the aircraft broke off first with the middle and rest of the aircraft found to the east, the investigators said. The distribution of the wreckage, over a large area, has allowed investigators to conclude that the aircraft broke up while in flight. The Dutch Safety Board believes that additional evidence will emerge and therefore will publish its final report one year from the date of the crash, Joustra said. A Malaysian team was also sent to Ukraine on Monday to help complete the investigation, according to Razak. "We owe it to the families, who are in our thoughts today," he said. The United States, along with many other Western countries, have claimed that an SA-11 surface-to-air missile fired from separatist-controlled territory was responsible for the downing of MH17, but separatists have denied being responsible. Russia has suggested a Ukrainian fighter jet was to blame. Soon after the crash, the U.S. government noted in an assessment that Igor Strelkov, the self-proclaimed defense minister of the Donetsk People`s Republic, which controls the area, had claimed responsibility for shooting down a military transport plane on the day of the crash. When it became evident that the aircraft was a civilian airliner, the post was deleted. Separatists also deleted references to posts that boasted about the group being in possession of a Buk SAM system. The U.S. further analyzed published recordings of phone calls in which separatists allegedly become aware that the downed aircraft was a passenger plane. "Audio data provided to the press by the Ukrainian security service was evaluated by Intelligence Community analysts who confirmed these were authentic conversations between known separatist leaders, based on comparing the Ukraine-released internet audio to recordings of known separatists," the assessment said. Additionally, the U.S. government pointed to a video posted online which showed an SA-11 on a transporter traveling through the Ukrainian city of Krasnodon back into Russia. "The video indicated the system was missing at least one missile, suggesting it had conducted a launch," the U.S. said. Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 crashed near the city of Torez in eastern Ukraine on July 17, killing all 298 passengers and crew in the world`s deadliest aviation disaster since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. The plane was flying a route from Amsterdam Schiphol Airport to Kuala Lumpur International Airport. According to Tuesday`s preliminary report, the nationalities of the victims were deduced by the passports that were used to board the aircraft, but some held more than one nationality, which caused confusion in media reports. The official report lists 193 Dutch victims, 43 Malaysians, 27 Australians, 12 Indonesians, 10 Britons, four Germans, four Belgians, three Filipinos, one Canadian, and one New Zealander. Forensic experts have so far been unable to recover all bodies from the crash site due to ongoing fighting in the area. A total of 228 coffins have been flown back to the Netherlands for identification, but some of the coffins contained only partial remains, and it is unclear how many bodies remain unaccounted for. The remains of 193 victims have so far been identified.

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