

NATION & WORLD

3A MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2014

Plane scheduled to land in Beijing at 6:30 a.m. local time

What happened to Flight 370?

By Scott Mayerowitz
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The most dangerous parts of a flight are takeoff and landing. Rarely do incidents happen when a plane is cruising seven miles above the earth.

So the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 well into its flight Saturday morning over the South China Sea has led aviation experts to assume that whatever happened was quick and left the pilots no time to place a distress call.

It could take investigators months, if not years, to determine what happened to the Boeing 777 flying from Malaysia's largest city of Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

"At this early stage, we're focusing on the facts that we don't know," said Todd Curtis, a former safety engineer with Boeing who worked on its 777 wide-body jets and is now director of the Airsafe.com Foundation.

Military radar indicates that the missing Boeing 777 jet may have turned back before vanishing, Malaysia's air force chief said Sunday as authorities were investigating up to four passengers with suspicious identifications. The revelations add to the mystery surrounding the final minutes of the flight. Air force chief Rodzali Daud didn't say which direction the plane veered when it apparently went off course, or how long it flew in that direction. Some of the information it had was also corroborated by civilian radar, he said.

If the information about

the U-turn is accurate, that lessens the probability that the plane suffered a catastrophic explosion but raises further questions about why the pilots didn't signal for help. If there was a minor mechanical failure — or even something more serious like the shutdown of both of the plane's engines — the pilots likely would have had time to radio for help. The lack of a call "suggests something very sudden and very violent happened," said William Waldock, who teaches accident investigation at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz.

It's possible that there was either an abrupt breakup of the plane or something that led it into a quick, steep dive. Some experts even suggested an act of terrorism or a pilot purposely crashing the jet.

"Either you had a catastrophic event that tore the airplane apart, or you had a criminal act," said Scott Hamilton, managing director of aviation consultancy LeeHam Co. "It was so quick and they didn't radio."

No matter how unlikely a scenario, it's too early to rule out any possibilities, experts warn.

A massive international sea search has so far turned up no confirmed trace of the jet. Vietnamese authorities said late Sunday that a low-flying plane had spotted a rectangular object in waters about 56 miles south of Tho Chu island, but teams were unable to locate the item during overnight searches.

Plane leaves Kuala Lumpur at 12:41 a.m. Saturday

Plane loses contact with ground controllers between Malaysia and Vietnam



Photo courtesy of the Wood family via The AP

Philip Wood, an IBM executive, is seen in July 2013 at Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Family of Texas man on plane comforted by faith

By John L. Mone
The Associated Press

KELLER, Texas — The brothers of a North Texas man who was aboard the Malaysia Airlines flight that went missing over the South China Sea said Sunday their family is leaning on faith and holding out hope for good news about the man they last saw about a week ago.

Philip Wood, an IBM executive who had been working in Beijing over the past two years, had recently returned home from Asia before his next assignment in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Wood came back to Texas to visit his family before relocating to the Malaysian capital, his brother, James Wood said.

The Saturday flight was supposed to be his final one to China's capital.

"This was going to be his last trip to Beijing. It just happened to be this one," James Wood said.

Putin defends separatist drive in Crimea as legal

By John-Thor Dahlburg
and Lynn Berry
The Associated Press

KIEV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday defended the separatist drive in the disputed Crimean Peninsula as in keeping with international law, but Ukraine's prime minister vowed not to relinquish "a single centimeter" of his country's territory.



Putin

Over the weekend, the Kremlin beefed up its military presence in Crimea, a part of Ukraine since 1954, and pro-Russia forces keep pushing for a vote in favor of reunification with Moscow in a referendum the local parliament has scheduled for next Sunday.

President Barack Obama has warned that the March 16 vote would violate international law. But in Moscow, Putin made it clear that he supports the referendum in phone calls



with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Minister David Cameron.

"The steps taken by the legitimate leadership of Crimea are based on the norms of international law and aim to ensure the legal interests of the population of the peninsula," said Putin, according to the Kremlin.

Following an extraordinary Sunday meeting of the Ukrainian government,

Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk announced that he will meet with Obama in Washington on Wednesday on a "resolution of the situation in Ukraine," the Interfax news agency reported. The White House confirmed the meeting.

"Our country and our people are facing the biggest challenges in the history of modern independent Ukraine," the prime minister said earlier in the

day. "Will we be able to deal with these challenges? There should only be one answer to this question and that is: yes."

In an emotional climate of crisis, Ukraine on Sunday solemnly commemorated the 200th anniversary of the birth of its greatest poet, Taras Shevchenko, a son of peasant serfs who is a national hero and is considered the father of modern Ukrainian literature.

Ukrainian riot police block the entrance of the regional administrative building Sunday during a pro Russian rally in Donetsk, Ukraine.

Sergei Grits | The Associated Press

"This is our land," Yatsenyuk told a crowd gathered at the Kiev statue to Shevchenko. "Our fathers and grandfathers have spilled their blood for this land. And we won't budge a single centimeter from Ukrainian land. Let Russia and its president know this."

"We're one country, one family and we're here together with our kozbar (bard) Taras," said acting President Oleksandr Turchynov.

Later, Ukrainians in the tens of thousands massed in the Kiev's center for a multi-faith prayer meeting to display unity and honor Shevchenko. One of the speakers, former imprisoned Russian tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, almost burst into tears as he implored the crowd to believe not all Russians support their country's recent actions in Ukraine.

"I want you to know there is a completely different Russia," Khodor-

kovsky said.

In the eastern city of Luhansk, however, people who gathered in a square to celebrate Shevchenko's birthday were attacked by pro-Russia protesters, and some were beaten up, local media reports said.

Chanting "Russia! Russia!" the demonstrators then broke through a police barricade and took over the local government building, where they raised the Russian flag and demanded a citywide referendum on joining Russia, Channel 5 and other local media reported.

But it's Crimea, a strategic peninsula in the Black Sea, that has become the chief flashpoint in the battle for Ukraine, where three months of protests sparked by President Victor Yanukovich's decision to ditch a significant treaty with the 28-nation European Union after strong pressure from Russia led to his downfall.