

Beijing: Najib's disclosure painfully belated
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China sharply criticised Malaysia today for its handling of an investigation into the disappearance of a commercial aircraft with 239 people aboard nine days ago.

The criticism came as a Malaysian police source ruled out a connection between the pilot's political affiliations and the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH 370.

China's official state news agency *Xinhua* said valuable time was lost due to the "lack of authoritative information" about what happened to the aircraft, which had radically changed course and had its communication system deliberately turned off.

"It is undeniable that the disclosure of such vital information is painfully belated - more than seven excruciating days after the 227 passengers and 12 crew members lost contact with their beloved relatives and friends," it said in an editorial.

"And due to the absence - or at least lack - of timely authoritative information, massive efforts have been squandered, and numerous rumours have been spawned, repeatedly racking the nerves of the awaiting families."

Most of the passengers on Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 were Chinese citizens, en route to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur when the plane lost contact about an hour after takeoff on March 8.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak revealed last Saturday, one week later, that the aircraft's communications had been deliberately shut down and the flight diverted from its north-easterly path to the west, toward the Indian Ocean.

"It is noteworthy that the latest revelation does shed fresh light on the possible whereabouts of the missing plane and will help narrow down the scope of search and thus ratchet up the chances of finding it," *Xinhua* said.

It accused Malaysian officials of "either dereliction of duty or reluctance to share information in a full and timely manner".

Boeing, Rolls-Royce and US also slammed

The editorial also chided aircraft manufacturer Boeing, engine maker Rolls-Royce and "intelligence superpower the United States" for not doing a better job of investigating and informing the public.

"No excuse stands before the fate of the 239 people for any party to slack its duty, spare any efforts or withhold any helpful information for whatever reason," it said.

"With time ticking away and the fate of Flight MH370 still shrouded in mystery, it is vital and imperative that the Malaysian side works more thoroughly and efficiently and other major information holders - not least the United States - be more open and forthcoming.

"The 239 lives deserve no less."

A Malaysian police source said today there were no indications that the political affiliation of the missing plane's pilot had anything to do with the aircraft's disappearance.

Zaharie Ahmad Shah, 52, the pilot of flight MH 370, is a member of opposition party whose leader, Anwar Ibrahim, was convicted of sodomy a few hours before the aircraft took off from KL International Airport early on March 8.

The decision upset supporters of Anwar, who see the case as politically motivated.

"So far there's no evidence politics was involved in this incident," said the police officer, who requested anonymity.

Last Saturday, police searched the homes of Zaharie and co-pilot Fariq Abdul Hamid, 27, after Najib said the plane's communication system was intentionally disabled and the aircraft flew for as long as seven hours toward an unknown destination.

Police Inspector-General Khalid Abu Bakar said officers took possession of several objects in the houses of Zaharie and Fariq, including Zaharie's flight simulator, to help in the investigation.

Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said Kuala Lumpur has requested satellite data, radar data and provisions for ground, sea and aerial search from countries along two possible flight corridors where the missing plane could have travelled.