

**Najib admits to missteps in search for MH370**  
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has admitted to missteps in the search for MH370, and urged other countries to learn from the incident.

He said the mistakes were made despite Malaysia doing its best in “near impossible circumstances” to pull together a multinational search effort that has since involved 26 countries.

“But we didn't get everything right. In the first few days after the plane disappeared, we were so focused on trying to find the aircraft that we did not prioritise our communications.

“Also, it took air traffic controllers four hours to launch the search-and-rescue operation,” Najib wrote in an opinion piece published in the Wall Street Journal last night.

While pointing out that the search effort got started faster than the six hours it took in the Air France Flight 447 crash in 2009, he said the delays would be investigated.

Najib urged the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which has been meeting since Monday on ways to implement global aircraft tracking, to press forward with the agenda.

The UN body's meeting concluded this morning with a resolution to back the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) initiative to find suitable tracking solutions by September that its members can adopt voluntarily.

In the meantime, ICAO will draft binding international standards to track aircraft even in areas without radar coverage - a process that is likely to take years.

Najib said transponders and Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting Systems (Acars) that can't be disabled in mid-air should be considered.

In addition, he also backed the European Union's proposal to increase the battery life of black box pingers from 30 days to 90 days, and to increase the recording time of cockpit voice recorders (CVR) from the current standard of two hours.

“When MH370's black box is finally recovered, the most important portion of the cockpit conversation - the minutes and hours after the plane first vanished - won't be available.

“Given that a standard iPhone can record 24 hours of audio, surely the black box should

have sufficient memory to record cockpit conversation for the full duration of any flight," he said.

The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has wants CVRs that can record the last 20 hours of conversation in the cockpit, which pilots' unions see as an increased intrusion in workplace privacy.

Better emergency locator beacons needed

Najib also urged improvements in emergency locator beacons, noting that they do not work well underwater and last only 24 hours.

"These changes may not have prevented the MH370 or Air France 447 tragedies. But they would make it harder for an aircraft to simply disappear, and easier to find any aircraft that did. Which would help reassure the traveling public and reduce the chances of such a drawn-out disaster reoccurring.

"The global aviation industry must not only learn the lessons of MH370 but implement them. The world learned from Air France but didn't act. The same mistake must not be made again," he said.

MH370 took off from KL International Airport on March 8, but then deviated from its original course to Beijing when it was in between Malaysian and Vietnamese airspace.

Its transponder and Acars system were disabled to prevent accurate tracking of its position, but experts believe it crashed somewhere in the South Indian Ocean, based on analysis of satellite data.

The tragedy has often been compared with the Air France Flight 447 because the two cases shared many parallels, with with the MAS Boeing 777-200ER being the only other modern jetliner to suddenly "vanish".

These include the lack of a distress call, confused initial response from air traffic controllers and rescuers, uncertainties over the location of the crash site due to inadequate tracking, the search area being vast, deep and remote oceans, and a long and expensive underwater search operation.

French investigators of the Air France incident had made several recommendations to improve global aircraft tracking and to make it easier to recover black box data, but only one recommendation was adopted for implementation, in 2018.

The new rules seek black box pingers to last 90 days, and additional pingers attached to the aircraft that can be detected further away, compared with the black box pingers, so that the crash site can be located quickly.

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