

**New Zealand Offers To Join Search For Missing MAS Plane - Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 10 (Bernama) -- New Zealand has also come on board to help in the search for a missing Malaysia Airlines (MAS) aircraft.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today New Zealand Prime Minister John Key offered to send a P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft to join the search.

"I received a fax from the New Zealand prime minister. They are offering to deploy a P-3C Orion which is specialised in maritime surveillance," he told a news conference after chairing a meeting of the Bumiputera Economic Council at Parliament House.

MAS Flight MH370, carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew, went missing en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing about an hour after taking off from the KL International Airport at 12.41 am Saturday. It should have landed in Beijing at 6.30 am.

Acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said that with many countries assisting Malaysia, the authorities would have the capacity to intensify the search.

So far, the multinational search team had 24 aircraft and 40 ships from Malaysia, China, Vietnam, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and the United States.

Asked about the images of the two passengers who had got on board the missing plane with fake passports, Hishammuddin said the images were released to intelligence agencies for investigation and would be given to the media soon.

Hishammuddin also denied that China was taking charge of the search and rescue operations, saying the special task force that arrived here last night was to assist in locating the missing aircraft.

"We are cooperating very closely on three aspects, namely search and rescue operation, identifying those who travelled on false passports and dealing with the families of the passengers.

"We have been in contact from the outset with China. Now, there is a special task force stationed here to help us on the three aspects," he said.

Hishammuddin urged the media and the public not to spread false and unverified information on MH370, saying it would jeopardise the search and rescue operation.

"This also to be fair to the passengers' families; I do not want them to receive news that is irresponsible, not verified and false information," he said.

Meanwhile, Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) director-general Datuk Azharuddin Abdul Rahman confirmed a report saying that an object resembling an inverted life raft was spotted about 140 kilometres south-west of Tho Chu Island in Vietnam.

"We are sending ships there to verify the object," he told a press conference.

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