

Anwar hits out at 'missing Najib' in flight MH370 saga
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Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said he would still give credit to Malaysian civil servants and government leaders involved in managing the current search for the Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, but again questioned the silence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak for more than a week after the plane was first reported missing on March 8.

Interviewed by Australia's Radio National on its late night programme last Friday, Anwar hit out at Najib's absence for several days, saying he had failed to "be seen to be hands on" in the incident which has captured global attention.

"In fact, there's a standard joke here: the disappearance of the flight and the disappearance of the prime minister for the first nine days," said Anwar, in the programme which also featured Singapore-based political analyst Bridget Welsh.

"Then he appeared only to give a statement, refusing to entertain questions," Anwar added, referring to Najib's presence at the press conference on March 15 to announce the calling off of search and rescue operation in the South China Sea.

Najib, who read from a prepared statement, had left without taking questions from newsmen.

Anwar, who last served as deputy prime minister with a brief stint as acting prime minister before his dramatic sacking in 1998, was also asked what he would have done if he were to still helm the government.

He replied that the government should have appointed a "competent" person, whether a minister or senior official, to deal with questions over the missing flight.

"There are too many contradictions, virtually every day, people can find fault in the various answers, by the civil aviation authority, the Malaysia Airlines, the Inspector-General of Police, and the minister of home affairs and the minister of transport... and we can't have that... so you have actually lost credibility.

"The system is opaque, and they can get away with it on the local scene, but I think they get hammering from the international media."

Welsh, a specialist in Malaysian politics, said the MH370 incident had put the Malaysian government in the spotlight, showing the authorities up for not responding in a "cohesive, clear and forthright" manner.

She compared the reaction of the Malaysian authorities in the first few days to the way it had been used to when dealing with domestic crises.

"The problem has been that their responses tend to be a denial or a dismissal or using partisan type of attacks, that don't really build credibility even within the society itself," she said.

Welsh added that while most Malaysians had initially given the prime minister the benefit of doubt in dealing with the crisis, such a sentiment has turned to suspicion "because of how the government had been acting in the society domestically as well".

Malaysia has come under severe criticisms from relatives of those on board the missing aircraft, as well as international media and Chinese government officials, over its handling of the crisis.

Among others, critics have pointed out contradictory statements as well as a lack of transparency from the Malaysian authorities. – March 23, 2014.

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