

Najib Thanks Aussie PM For Helping To Search For Missing Malaysian Airliner

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By Mohd Razman Abdullah

PERTH, April 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak visited the Pearce base of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) here Thursday to personally thank his Australian counterpart Tony Abbott and others involved in the search for a Malaysian airliner believed to have gone down in the southern Indian Ocean.

Najib expressed his gratitude to Abbott for having agreed to lead the search operation in the southern Indian Ocean and for accepting Malaysia's invitation for Australia to participate as an accredited representative in the investigation.

"At this difficult time, Australia has proven an invaluable friend. The Australian authorities, like so many others, have offered their assistance without hesitation or delay. I would like to sincerely thank Australia for all they have done, and are doing, to find the plane.

"We are also grateful to all those who have brought their expertise to bear on what Prime Minister Abbott rightly called 'one of the great mysteries of our time'," he told a joint press conference with Abbott at the base.

In thanking all those involved in the search operation, Najib said they were giving their all to find the Malaysian Airlines (MAS) flight, MH370.

"Over the past three weeks, hundreds of people have journeyed thousands of kilometres to help. They have searched through stormy seas and freezing fog.

They have sailed through storms to find the plane. We owe them each a debt of gratitude.

"This has been a remarkable effort, bringing together nations from around the world. When MH370 went missing, dozens of countries answered the call for help.

Their commitment will not be forgotten," he said.

Najib said differences had been set aside as 26 nations had united behind a common cause.

"In a time of great tragedy - for the countries with citizens on board and the families whose loved ones are missing - this co-operation has given us all heart. The disappearance of MH370 is without precedent; so too is the search," he said.

Najib met sailors and aircrew at the base and spoke to the commanders of seven nations involved in the search in the southern Indian Ocean.

"They told me of the difficulties of a search like this; of distance, and weather, and of maintaining morale over a long period," he said.

Flight MH370, carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew, left the KL International Airport at 12.41 am on March 8 and disappeared from radar screens about an hour later while over the South China Sea. It was to have landed in Beijing at 6.30 am on the same day.

A multinational search was mounted for the aircraft, first in the South China Sea and then, after it was learned that the plane had veered off course, along two corridors - the northern corridor stretching from the border of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to northern Thailand and the southern corridor, from Indonesia to the southern Indian Ocean.

Following an unprecedented type of analysis of satellite data, United Kingdom satellite telecommunications company Inmarsat and the UK Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) concluded that Flight MH370 flew along the southern corridor and that its last position was in the middle of the Indian Ocean, west of Perth.

Najib then announced on March 24, seventeen days after the disappearance of Boeing 777-200 aircraft, that Flight MH370 "ended in the southern Indian Ocean"

Abbott expressed Australia's commitment to continue the search "even if it takes a long time".

"It is the most difficult search ever undertaken," Abbott told the joint press conference, adding that the search operation was based on small pieces of information gathered from experts based on satellite data.

Najib also mentioned that Malaysia would not give up the search for the missing plane.

Faced with so little evidence, and such a Herculean task, Najib said, investigators from Malaysia, US, UK, China, Australia and France had worked without pause to reveal the aircraft's movement which led the zero-in to the current search area.

"I know that until we find the plane, many families cannot start to grieve.

I cannot imagine what they must be going through. But I can promise them that we will not give up," he said.

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