

Underwater Drone Needed For Next Phase Of Search For MH370 - Najib

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By Mohd Razman Abdullah

PERTH, April 3 (Bernama) -- A robotic submarine or underwater drone is needed for the next phase of the search and recovery operation for the missing Malaysia Airlines (MAS) flight MH370 in the south Indian Ocean, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Thursday.

The Malaysian Prime Minister said he had discussed with his Australian counterpart, Tony Abbott, the need to acquire assistance from other countries for such technology.

Najib said such technology was needed once the blackbox pinger battery ran out (in four days) and should the SAR team locate the aircraft, a Boeing 777-200ER.

The underwater drone was among the important matters discussed by the two leaders when they met at the Commonwealth Centre, here, Thursday.

The underwater drone relies on sonar pulses to search the ocean floor and it was used to help locate the Air France Flight 447 that crashed in the Atlantic Ocean in 2009.

"The discussion is about using sonar technology, robotic drone and cameras," he told Malaysian journalists shortly after a joint press conference with Abbott, here.

Najib said the search operation using aircraft and naval ships would continue at the moment although it was a race against time as the battery had only several days left to operate the pinger signal.

He also said Malaysia would send more of its assets to participate in the search in the area but did not provide the details.

The MAS Flight MH370, carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew, left the KL International Airport at 12.41am 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 6.30am 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, Australia.

Najib then announced on March 24, seventeen days after the disappearance of the Boeing 777-200

aircraft, that Flight MH370 "ended in the southern Indian Ocean".

When asked on the news report that claimed foreign aviation investigators would take over on the missing jetliner probe, he said: "Under the international law, Malaysia has the ultimate responsibility on the case."

Najib was also touched by the commitment given by the search team personnel as their morale was still high despite the search having gone more than three weeks.

He explained that his two-day visit to Australia was to thank personally the search team personnel and the Australian government as well as 25 other countries on their efforts to find the jetliner.

Accompanying him during the two-day visit starting yesterday are his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Department of Civil Aviation Director-General Datuk Azharuddin Abdul Rahman, Chief of Air Force Tan Sri Rodzali Daud, Advisor in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamaluddin Jarjis, and Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia Datuk Zainal Abidin Ahmad.

Najib and his delegation are scheduled to leave here Thursday evening for a three-day official visit to Vietnam.

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