

Najib tours Perth military base as Australia says search for MH370 will go on
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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is to tour the military base being used as a staging post in the multinational hunt for flight MH370 today as Australia said there are no imminent plans to abandon the search.

Kuala Lumpur's handling of the crisis sparked by the disappearance of a Malaysia Airlines jet carrying 239 people on March 8 has been widely criticised, especially by distraught relatives of the 153 Chinese nationals aboard.

In contrast, Australia's mobilisation since it was handed increased responsibility in the search effort has been praised and Prime Minister Tony Abbott said he was proud of the way the country had handled the situation.

"Provided we continue to conduct this search and recovery exercise with the kind of professionalism, dedication and intensity that we have had over the last three weeks or so, I think it has got to be good for our reputation," he told ABC radio.

Australia has far more experience than Malaysia of search and rescue operations, routinely monitoring huge tracts of ocean, and Najib will tour the Pearce air base near Perth to see the eight-nation operation first hand and meet those involved.

Despite extensive scouring of the remote southern Indian Ocean off Perth where Malaysia believes the jet went down, no debris that would indicate a crash site has so far been found.

Adding to the frustration for relatives of those on board, Malaysian police chief Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar said yesterday a criminal investigation into what caused the flight to veer far from its intended route between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing had so far been inconclusive.

Abbott, who will accompany Najib today, said the exhaustive quest for answers would continue, although he cautioned that it could not go on forever.

"Obviously, at some point we would decide that we have recovered whatever we are going to recover from the ocean but that point is, as yet, quite a long way off," he said.

A British nuclear submarine with underwater search capabilities reinforced the hunt yesterday, joining planes and ships scouring 237,000 square kilometres of desolate seas, but they again reported seeing nothing of interest.

Australia's Joint Agency Coordination Centre, which is handling the search effort, said eight planes and nine ships would be involved today as they further refined the area they are looking at to 1,680 kilometres west north-west of Perth.

The weather is forecast to be good, with visibility of 10 kilometres.

Australia's Ocean Shield naval vessel, which is fitted with a US-supplied "black box" detector, is expected to arrive in the area tomorrow, but it faces a daunting task and the search zone needs

to be narrowed for it to have any hope of finding evidence of the doomed jet. – AFP, April 3, 2014.

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