

Najib admits blunders in MH370 search, says will investigate delay
Malaysian Insider
May 14, 2014

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has admitted that Putrajaya did not get everything right in coordinating the search for missing flight MH370, saying that the missteps caused maximum confusion.

In an opinion piece published by The Wall Street Journal, Najib acknowledged the four-hour delay in launching the search and rescue operation after the plane's disappearance on March 8.

"Despite this, the search began about a third quicker than during the Air France Flight 447 tragedy in 2009. Nevertheless, the response time should and will be investigated," he wrote.

He said there was a focus on trying to find the aircraft "that we did not prioritise our communications".

Following the release of a preliminary report on flight MH370 earlier this month, the government announced that an international panel would investigate the four-hour delay in detecting the plane, which disappeared from radar screens at 1.21am on March 8.

Saying nothing could have changed MH370's fate despite all the efforts, Najib however pledged that Malaysia would continue searching for the plane as long as it takes.

He noted that the area of the search operation remains huge, making the task of locating the plane not easy.

"The lack of definitive proof—such as wreckage from the aircraft — has made the disappearance all the more difficult to bear.

"Without physical evidence, or a clear explanation for why this happened, peoples' attention has naturally focused on the authorities — and Malaysia has borne the brunt of the criticism," he wrote in WSJ.

Putrajaya has been rapped by aviation experts and family members of the 239 people on board the plane over its lack of transparency in handling the crisis, with a preliminary report by the Malaysian government being also widely criticised.

Bill Palmer, an airbus A330 captain who wrote a book on the Air France 447 crash, had compared the report with extensive detail in preliminary reports from other accidents, including the Air France tragedy.

Najib, however, said Malaysia would continue facilitating an independent investigation in order to learn from its mistakes.

"We have already tightened airport security, and investigators are looking for other measures to improve safety," he added.

He said the MH370 saga offered lessons for the global aviation industry.

"One of the most astonishing things about this tragedy is the revelation that an airliner the size of a Boeing 777 can vanish, almost without a trace.

"In an age of smartphones and mobile Internet, real-time tracking of

commercial airplanes is long overdue," he wrote.

Najib urged the International Civil Aviation Organization to moot the idea of real-time tracking of commercial aircraft, as well as to upgrade the capacity of an airplane's black boxes to have sufficient memory to record cockpit conversation throughout a flight.

Najib also called for extended battery life and improved water-resistant capabilities for the emergency locator transmitter, from the current battery life of about 30 days.

He cited the absence of action to improve the aviation industry despite recommendations which followed the Air France crash of 2009.

"The global aviation industry must not only learn the lessons of MH370 but implement them. The world learned from Air France but didn't act. The same mistake must not be made again," wrote Najib. – May 14, 2014.

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