

MH17 criminal probe to last till year-end, says Najib
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By Elizabeth Zachariah

The criminal investigation into the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 is expected to continue until year-end, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today.

Speaking at the MH17 national memorial ceremony in Sepang today, he said the five-nation joint investigation team (JIT) had a "clear picture" of the cause of the crash on July 17 last year but was still scrutinising and investigating all possible scenarios in detail.

"But the criminal investigation will continue for now.

"JIT is expecting investigations to continue until at least at the end of 2015," he said.

"It has to be known that the purpose of the criminal investigation is to bring those responsible for the unfortunate incident to face justice and all prosecution mechanisms are being considered," he said at the ceremony, which was held at the Bunga Raya Complex at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

Flight MH17 was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when it was shot down in eastern Ukraine last July 17, killing all 298 passengers and crew members on board.

Najib said JIT would ensure that those responsible for the "unforgivable incident" would be brought to face justice.

"I will do whatever it takes to find those responsible," the prime minister said, adding that it was important for the next-of-kin to be informed so they could find closure and move on with their lives.

There were 44 Malaysians on board the ill-fated flight when the plane was shot down, allegedly by Russian-backed rebels.

Ukraine claimed that the airliner was shot down in the conflict-torn area by separatist fighters using a BUK surface-to-air missile supplied by Russia. Russia has denied the charges, pointing the finger at Ukraine.

Najib today noted that he had to make a difficult decision in the early days of the incident to negotiate with rebel leader Alexander Borodai to ensure that investigators could retrieve the bodies of the victims and the black boxes of the aircraft safely.

"It is unprecedented in Malaysian history to negotiate with a rebel but it was done with the intention of recovering the bodies and the black boxes," he said.

Najib also said that the technical investigation team, led by the Dutch Safety Board (DSB) and made up of experts from the Netherlands, Malaysia, Ukraine, the US, Russia, UK and Australia, is expected to submit its final report on the incident in October.

A draft of the report has been submitted to the Accredited Representatives of each country involved in the investigations on June 2.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai had previously said these countries had 60 days to examine the report and provide feedback to the Dutch authorities.

In a press conference following the memorial today, Liow echoed Najib's sentiments, saying that Malaysia was committed in wanting those responsible for the tragedy to be brought to justice.

"While the journey to search for answers has not been easy, we are committed.

"I would like to see this trigger-happy criminal be brought to justice," Liow added. – July 11, 2015.

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