

PM: Abduction may be a deliberate act to sour ties

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The kidnapping of a Chinese national and a Filipino from an island in Semporna, Sabah last night may be a deliberate act to sour ties between China and Malaysia, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said.

In a *Twitter* alert, *Bernama* reported Najib as saying that the government "does not rule out the possibility" that the kidnapping was done for that purpose.

"This must be avoided. There may be those who are attempting to drive a wedge between us and China. They may be trying to take advantage of the situation," *The Star* quoted Najib as saying.

"I'm not dismissing any possibilities but the priority now is to obtain the release of the victims," he said.

The daily, reporting from Perth, also noted that Najib said China and Malaysia's ties will remain strong.

Earlier, Chinese ambassador to Malaysia Huang Huikang had given as assurance that the kidnapping is not related to the missing Flight MH370.

Even so, he told reporters at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today that the Malaysian government could intensify security measures in the country to ensure that tourists can travel peacefully and in safety while in Malaysia.

Abu Sayaf involved?

No group has claimed responsibility or sought ransom, but the *Associated Press* quoted Filipino sources as saying that militant southern Philippines group Abu Sayyaf could be responsible.

An unnamed Philippines intelligence official said this is as Abu Sayyaf has carried out several sea-born kidnappings for ransom in the area before.

Philippines maritime security units and anti-kidnapping operatives are now working with Malaysia officials to help rescue the victims, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs was quoted as saying in a statement.

Meanwhile, MCA president Liow Tiong Lai, who was also present at the press conference, said the incident, which occurred as Malaysia continues to search for MH370, will further tarnish Malaysia's image.

"This incident happened at this point of time, (so) it will make things worse for the issue of MH370," he said.

Chinese netizens, celebrities and families of those on board MH370 have continuously lashed out at Malaysia for allegedly not being transparent about the search which is in its 27th day

today.

Victims believed taken to Philippines

Meanwhile *Bernama* has reported Sabah Police commissioner Hamza Taib saying that the victims of the abduction are believed to have been taken to the Philippines.

He added that an **inside job** is suspected as it was not easy for intruders to infiltrate the resort due to its security features.

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