Nations vow to find MH370

UNITED BY TRAGEDIES: Abbott praises Najib, says Australia keen to resolve mystery of missing jet and help kin of MH17 victims

AZURA ABAS
PUTRAJAYA
news@straitstimes.com.my

MALAYSIA and Australia yesterday reaffirmed their commitment in the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, which disappeared enroute from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing in March. Prime Minister Najib Razak and his Australian counterpart, Tony Abbott, who was on a one-day official visit to Malaysia, gave this commitment during a joint press conference after engaging in bilateral talks at the Prime minister’s office here.

“We are fully conscious that we owe it to the affected families of the passengers and crew of MH17 in finding the answers,” Najib said.

Describing Australia as an invaluable friend that showed admirable empathy, Najib said he had kept close contact with Abbott over the search for MH370 and the downing of MH17.

“I have a lot of respect for Abbott as a colleague. His response to those two tragedies was admirable and he has shown admirable empathy for the affected families of MH17 and MH17 victims,” Najib said.

“I have said it before and will say it again, during these difficult times, Australia has proven itself as an invaluable friend, having offered its assistance and cooperation without hesitation,” Najib said.

Abbott said Australia would continue the new phase of the search for MH370 in about a fortnight, using the best available technology.

He said Malaysia and Australia had committed to contribute A$60 million (RM180 million) each in the quest to locate MH370, which is believed to have ended its journey in the southern Indian Ocean.

“As we all know, Malaysia suffered two heavy blows within four months, and no country or government or prime minister should be solely subjected to this cruel twist of fate.

“But, I have to say Malaysia has responded to the MH17 tragedy and the atrocity of MH17 with strength and resilience,” he said, adding that Najib had responded to these issues with wisdom, strength and leadership.

At an earlier function, where he addressed Malaysian officers involved in dealing with both tragedies, Abbott said: “I want to thank my brother, partner, my friend, my colleague, Prime Minister Najib, for his leadership shown on this very testing and challenging issue for his country, my country and for the world.

“Nevertheless, he said, the bitter experience of both tragedies had strengthened the relationship between the two countries considerably.

“I could not have asked for a warmer, wiser and stronger friend and counsellor than Prime Minister Najib,” Abbott said, would do whatever possible to resolve the mystery of flight MH370 and play its part in bringing closure to those who lost their loved ones in flight MH17.

Najib said that Australia had offered to erect a memorial to remember those on board MH370, somewhere on its western coastline.

“Both countries must work together to ensure the remains of these victims are recovered and brought home all victims.”

“We intend to send our team to the crash site as soon as possible, preferably before winter sets in,” Najib said, adding that it was important to recover the remains of the victims and seek justice for them.

On the MH17 tragedy, Najib said Australia and Malaysia were resolved in intensifying efforts and working closely with other international partners, including the Netherlands and Ukraine, to bring home all victims.

“We intend to send our team to the crash site as soon as possible, preferably before winter sets in,” Najib said, adding that it was important to recover the remains of the victims and seek justice for them.

“What we need to do next is to assemble the physical evidence that can be brought to court when the time comes so that it will be proven beyond any reasonable doubt that the plane was shot down. This is why we are very, very keen to re-enter the crash site,” Najib said, adding that the actions of the Ukrainian authorities would need a few weeks to comb the entire area looking for body parts and physical evidence.

Najib said Malaysia demanded a full, independent and transparent international probe into the incident, in accordance with international conventions.

“The objective to bring those responsible (for the downing of MH17) to justice must be realised,” Najib said.

Malaysia lost 43 of its citizens and Australia lost 27 when flight MH17 crashed in eastern Ukraine on July 17.