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China spearheaded fresh criticism Sunday of Malaysia's handling of a missing airliner drama, saying it "squandered" precious time and resources by releasing dramatic information on the plane's fate a full week after it vanished.

Prime Minister Najib Razak revealed a day earlier that an investigation indicates Malaysia Airlines flight 370 was deliberately diverted and flew for several hours after leaving its intended flight path.

He stopped short of saying it was hijacked, but the news indicates the plane had not crashed or blow up shortly after take-off as widely feared, but that something more sinister was afoot.

The startling revelation after a week of confusion and competing theories prompted questions over why it took Malaysian authorities so long to reveal the new data, and whether they had missed an opportunity to intercept the diverted plane.

"It is undeniable that the disclosure of such vital information is painfully belated," a scathing editorial by China's state-run Xinhua news agency said, noting the "excruciating" seven days it entailed for relatives of the missing.

It suggested Malaysian officials were guilty of an "intolerable" dereliction of duty.

Two-thirds of the passengers on board the flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing were Chinese.

There was particular anger and frustration that Malaysia had taken so long to cancel massive search operations by several countries in the South China Sea if it already knew the plane appeared to have doubled back and flown towards the Indian Ocean.

Najib did not announce the end of search operations in the South China Sea until Saturday. The plane disappeared off civilian radar over the South China Sea between Malaysia and Vietnam on March 8.

"And due to the absence -- or at least lack -- of timely authoritative information, massive efforts have been squandered, and numerous rumours have been spawned," the editorial said.

Najib revealed Saturday that the Boeing 777's communications systems were switched off - one after the other, suggesting a conscious act -- before the jet veered westward, flying onward for several hours either south into the Indian Ocean or north towards South and Central Asia.

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"As the leader of the international search and rescue mission, Malaysia bears inescapable responsibility," the editorial said.

Similar outrage was vented on Malaysia's active social media, and on Weibo -- China's version of Twitter.

"The Malaysian government's behaviour in this affair can be summed up in one word: 'deceptive'," said one typical Weibo comment.

Immigration officials also were embarrassed by revelations that at least two people used stolen European passports to board the plane. Interpol has said they were believed merely to be illegal migrants trying to reach Europe.

Malaysia air force chief General Rodzali Daud admitted early in the drama that an unidentified object -- now determined to have been MH370 -- was plotted moving across Malaysia and toward the Andaman Sea.

He said at the time it was not intercepted because it was not deemed "hostile".

Malaysia has denied there was any lapse in its air defense, as well as accusations it was slow to share information due to national security concerns, saying it needed days to "corroborate" radar data before going public.

But security and aviation experts continued to question why so many resources were deployed in searching the South China Sea for so long, and how the Malaysian military had failed to identify the plane as it crossed back over the country.

"It is an astonishing failure of security," said Ajaj Sahni, executive director of India's Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi.

"And it seems an astonishing failure of technology in every aspect that something like this could happen."

Terence Fan, an aviation expert at the Singapore Management University, said Malaysia's crisis management was flawed and had tested public confidence.

"Why did they need days to 'corroborate' from their own radar images that the airplane could have turned west?" Fan said.

"Couldn't they have known from day one that the different communications systems on the aircraft were turned off at different times?" he added.

Questions also have been raised over why it took Malaysian authorities a full week to search the home of the pilot and co-pilot after such a baffling disappearance.

No information has yet emerged to implicate either of the men.

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