

Malaysia's air force chief denies saying MH370 detected over Strait of Malacca
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As the search for the missing flight MH370 continues for the fifth straight day, Malaysia's air force chief has denied saying military radar had tracked the lost passenger jet turning back and flying to the Strait of Malacca.

The pro-government Berita Harian daily had quoted General Tan Sri Rodzali Daud as saying military radar at the Butterworth air force base believed it was tracking the Boeing 777-200ER jet until it disappeared at 2.40am last Saturday.

"I wish to state that I did not make any such statements as above. What occurred was that the Berita Harian journalist asked me if such an incident occurred as detailed in their story. However, I did not give any answer to the question.

"Instead, what I said to the journalist was, 'Please refer to the statement which I made on 9 March 2014, during the press conference with the Chief of Defence Forces at the Sama-Sama Hotel, Kuala Lumpur International Airport'," the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) chief said in a statement late last night.

Hours after his statement was carried by the Malay daily, the Reuters news agency flashed a report quoting a military source as saying the RMAF had tracked the flight to the Strait of Malacca which is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

But Rodzali's statement has only covered the Malay daily's report and did not mention the Reuters report.

"I request this misreporting be amended and corrected to prevent further misinterpretations of what is clearly an inaccurate and incorrect report," he said in his six-paragraph statement.

The Malay daily reported the RMAF chief confirming that the RMAF Butterworth airbase had detected the location signal of the airliner as indicating that it turned back from its original heading in the direction of Kota Baru, Kelantan, and was believed to have passed through the airspace of the east coast of and northern peninsular Malaysia.

"The last time the plane was detected by the air control tower was in the vicinity of Pulau Perak in the Straits of Malacca at 2.40 in the morning before the signal disappeared without any trace," he was quoted as saying by Berita Harian.

Berita Harian's report remained on its news portal this morning.

Datuk Tengku Sariffuddin Tengku Ahmad, spokesman for the prime minister's office, contradicted that account in an interview with The New York Times.

Tengku Sariffuddin said: "As far as they know, except for the air turn-back, there is no new development."

Rodzali's statement on March 9, a day after the passenger jet vanished, had said that the "RMAF has not ruled out the possibility of an air turnback on a reciprocal heading before the aircraft

vanished from the radar and this resulted in the search and rescue operations being widened to the vicinity of the waters of Pulau Pinang."

"Currently the RMAF is examining and analyzing all possibilities as regards to the airliner's flight path subsequent to its disappearance.

"However, for the time being, it would not be appropriate for the RMAF to issue any official conclusions as to the aircraft's flight path until a high amount of certainty and verification is achieved.

"However, all ongoing search operations are at the moment being conducted to cover all possible areas where the aircraft could have gone down in order to ensure no possibility is overlooked," he said in the statement last night.

The air force chief also said that information and developments of the search and rescue operations for flight MH370 would be released through official statements and press conferences.

"Our current efforts are focused on finding the aircraft as soon as possible," he said.

Flight MH370 was carrying 227 passengers and a crew of 12 crew when it mysteriously vanished at 1.30am while en route to Beijing. it never arrived. - March 12, 2014.

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