

Why didn't Malaysian military react to MH370 blip on radar screens, ask investigators
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Investigators are puzzled over Malaysian military's inaction in responding to an unidentified blip on their radar screens that was later said to be the missing flight MH370, the New York Times reported today.

It reported that the plane flew past three military radars and over Penang but nothing was done to identify it, which would have helped prevent its disappearance.

"The watch team never noticed the blip, it was as though the airspace was his," a person with detailed knowledge of the investigation reportedly told the NYT.

Still, the report said that this was not the first, nor would it be the last of the long series of errors the Malaysian government has made, which complicated the task of finding the missing Boeing 777-200ER (9M-MRO) with 239 onboard.

Today is the eighth day since the plane disappeared from radar and the trail had gotten weaker as the search expands to Kazakhstan to the vast Indian Ocean.

While no one can say with certainty whether the delays had doomed those onboard the jet, mistakes have accumulated at a remarkable pace, NYT said.

The paper highlighted that MH370 flew over the peninsula without the military realising or identifying it – a damning fact, quoting David Learmount, operations and safety editor of Flightglobal, a news and data service for the aviation sector.

It was also reported that senior Malaysian military officers only became aware of the radar data soon after news spread that MH370 had disappeared.

Yet, the government organised and oversaw an expensive and complex international search and rescue effort in the Gulf of Thailand for a full week.

Only yesterday did Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak admit that satellite data had shown the plane continued to fly for six more hours after leaving Malaysian airspace.

According to the NYT report, a four-person air force crew based in Butterworth watching for intrusions into the country's airspace either did not notice or failed to report a blip on their defensive radar and air traffic radar that was moving steadily across the country from east to west, heading right towards them.

Even the crews at two other radar installations at Kota Baru did not designate the blip as an unknown intruder, while the jetliner continued to fly across the country without anyone watching or alerting a superior or the national defence command, despite the fact that the radar contact's flight path did not correspond to any filed flight plan.

And as a result, combat aircraft never scrambled to investigate.

Instead the radar contact was only discovered when military officials began going through tapes later on March 8, after the plane failed to land in Beijing.

And as the morning unravelled, it became clear that something had gone wrong.

Malaysian air force chief Gen Tan Sri Rodzali Daud (pic) on Wednesday, openly acknowledged the existence of the radar signals for the first time, five days after the plane went missing.

Still, he had said that further analysis was necessary because the radar plots of the aircraft's location were stripped of the identifying information given by the plane's onboard transponders, which someone aboard the aircraft appeared to have switched off.

Given the uncertainty, it is not possible to know yet whether action by the Malaysian government or military could have altered its fate.

The report noted that Najib took pains when he addressed the media yesterday to say that Malaysia had not concealed any information, including military data. – March 16, 2014.

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