

Defence industry needs to be independent to strengthen national defence, says Stride

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Efforts to support the need and preparedness of the country's defence, especially in key areas, like supply of basic military equipment, armaments and maintenance of the Malaysian Armed Forces' (ATM) assets will be successful by strengthening local expertise. - NSTP/GHAZALI KORI

KUALA LUMPUR: The local defence industry needs to rise again and be independent and not rely on outside expertise in its effort to strengthen the country's defence and security, said Science and Technology Research Institute For Defence (Stride) director-general Dr Mohd Yazid Ahmad.

He said Stride was always prepared to work with local defence industry players, especially in carrying out various research and development, as well as training, to reduce dependency on outside sources.

According to him, the ability to be independent is to ensure that the country's line of defence is able to protect the nation's sovereignty using internal resources with minimum or without support from outside sources or foreign defence companies.

"Efforts to support the need and preparedness of the country's defence, especially in key areas, like supply of basic military equipment, armaments and maintenance of the Malaysian Armed Forces' (ATM) assets will be successful by strengthening local expertise.

"Malaysia's defence industry was established in 1960, with the focus, at that time, on developing the capability of maintaining, installing and building ATM assets, leading to the growth and expansion of this industry to several key sectors, including maritime, aerospace, automotive and armament," he told Bernama recently.

Mohd Yazid said the government's support in emphasising the use of locally-made products ensured success of efforts to develop the industry, as well as financial commitment to develop high-tech and quality equipment and systems through research, not only for the local market but also abroad.

"Currently, Stride is also actively conducting studies and research involving academicians and local industry players, as well as forging a strategic relationship between the Defence Ministry and related agencies by providing grants and special funds for research and development purposes," he said.

According to him, Stride, which has been in existence for 54 years, has more than 100 officers and expertise in technical and testing, including testing Malaysia's first high mobility 4X4 armoured car and bulletproof vest.

However, he said, there was a gap between the institution and the industry players who had different perspectives on research or development related to defence products.

"For example, we see no room for improvement of prototypes produced as there is no demand or interest from industry to commercialise them, while the industry thinks that the prototypes produced do not meet the needs of end-users and do not attract investment," he said.

Mohd Yazid said the issue was resolved through the provision of funds and platforms by the government to promote prototypes by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry, which handles the National Technology and Innovation Sandbox (NTIS).

He said Stride also played an important role by becoming the link among the relevant parties to carry out further studies or to test products for quality verification.

On the commercialisation of local innovations, Mohd Yazid said the country had high potential due to various initiatives implemented by the government for defence equipment.

As such, he said, he said industry players needed to diversify their products not only for the sector concerned, but also for public use to increase their marketability and at the same time expand the network of potential customers for the products and services offered.

"The creation of a one-stop data centre for local defence and security products and services acts as an e-Directory to promote defence and security companies and reference for all parties to help boost the industry," he said.

To increase competitiveness and develop a 'talent pool', Mohd Yazid said, there was a need for talent nurturing and skill development whereby science and defence technology should be given emphasis starting from the tertiary level in local educational institutions.

"This is to produce more local experts in specialised fields in this sector and can be used fully for the purpose of developing the industry without relying on foreign defence industry," he added.-- Bernama