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THE MAKING OF DEFENCE WHITE PAPER



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The preparation sees the Defence Ministry taking an inclusive, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach in engaging key stakeholders and the public, write **B.A. HAMZAH** and **C.C. KUIK**



The Defence Ministry must have the right tools, strategies and skills to protect the country's national interests. FILE PIX

DEFENCE Minister Mohamad Sabu tabled the Malaysian Defence White Paper (DWP) in Parliament on Monday.

The DWP is the result of nine months of hard work, wide consultation between government agencies, and extensive meetings with the defence and security circles, and members of the public.

This document is not a one-night stand.

Throughout the preparation, the Defence Ministry took an inclusive, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to engage key stakeholders and the public.

Earlier this year, the ministry established a technical team consisting of members of the ministry's policy planning division and related departments, representatives of all three services of the armed forces, researchers of the Malaysian Institute of Defence and Security (MIDAS), as well as academics in the field of strategic studies from local universities.

The technical team discussed the directions and details of the DWP with stakeholders who are related and non-related to the ministry.

They listened attentively to the views from the public and private sectors, including open commentaries by specialists.

Some 21,000 respondents participated in an online survey conducted by MIDAS.

Four meeting-of-the-mind gatherings, known as the "Perwira Dialogue", which involved

experts, officers from ministries and agencies, military veterans, as well as members of civil societies and non-governmental organisations, gathered views on issues ranging from big power relations to Southeast Asian security, defence industry and people in defence.

A high-level roundtable ministerial meeting was held early in the process to discuss the rationale, as well as receive input and buy-in from the relevant ministries.

The ministry also organised special meetings with former defence chiefs and secretaries-general on several occasions to solicit their insight, advice and support.

The ministry took extra effort to explore and ensure an extensive engagement beyond the government.

For instance, it set up a special booth during the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition this year (Lima 2019) to allow visitors to contribute ideas to the DWP.

The inputs from all these multiple channels were debated and deliberated in-depth at various fora, including eight rounds of workshops and numerous rounds of technical team working sessions. Some issues were brought to high-level meetings at the ministry level.

The defence minister, his deputy, the secretary-general, the chief of defence forces and service chiefs expressed their views on several occasions.

Ministry officials also engaged defence attaches at foreign em-

bassies in Kuala Lumpur for dialogues, exchange of views and to learn from their experience in preparing open documents on defence.

Australia, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, shared their DWP experiences by sending leading defence experts to interact with the technical teams at separate knowledge-sharing sessions.

All in all, the making of the DWP involved a complex process of inclusive engagement and buy-in.

The purposes of the paper are three-fold — engaging the public and stakeholders on defence, evaluating the changing security environment and exploring ways to enhance Malaysia's defence readiness and resilience as a maritime nation.

As a government paper and not just a ministry's paper, the DWP is a blueprint on building a national policy on defence and security that cuts across ministerial turfs. As a public document, the DWP seeks the people's support for an affordable budget, while emphasising that defence is a responsibility of all.

The people must be vigilant about unconventional threats such as terrorism and cyberattacks, alongside traditional security risks.

Security should not be taken for granted. Raising the people's awareness on these issues and the role of the armed forces is crucial. Defence, after all, is for the people, with processes requiring the participation of and by the people.

As emphasised by Deputy Defence Minister Liew Chin Tong, the DWP aims to clarify to the people the primary and secondary roles of the military, safeguard its wellbeing, along with setting the directions for force development and reforms.

Externally, the DWP reaffirms Malaysia's commitment to contributing to peace and stability, while enhancing our wide-ranging defence partnerships with neighbouring countries and close partners.

It underscores three key messages: the principles of non-alignment and not taking sides, inclusive cooperation and shared security.

The DWP makes no mention of

who our enemies are. Instead, it contains a set of guiding principles for the armed forces to enhance its combat preparedness to undertake missions effectively.

The challenge is for the government to ensure that the ministry has the right tools, strategies and skills to support its capabilities to protect core national interests.

The adequacy of military power is also a function of adequate resources and political commitment.

B.A. Hamzah and C.C. Kuik teach strategic studies at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, respectively



It is crucial to raise the people's awareness on the role of the armed forces.