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Hamid-army

ARMY TO GET PRIORITY EQUIPMENT UNDER SEVENTH PLAN

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- The army, which needs to replace its ageing Emergency-era equipment and facilities, is expected to get more funding for its military procurement programmes under the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said today the increased allocation would enable the army to carry out its modernisation plans to boost its mobility and firepower, and also to develop training facilities and bases.

Priority purchase plans for the army included main battle tanks (MBT), armoured personnel carriers, logistic vehicles and communications systems and helicopters for its aviation unit, he told reporters after visiting the Armed Forces Cooperative head office here.

"There is a need for MBTs. We have looked at various offers with attractive packages that include technology transfer and offset programmes," he said.

Bidders for the MBT deal include companies from Poland, Switzerland, Slovakia and South Korea. The Seventh Malaysia Plan will be unveiled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at next month's Parliamentary session.

Syed Hamid said the development programme of the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) was nearly completed while the Royal Malaysian Navy's (RMN) modernisation was on right on track with orders for two missile frigates from Britain and two Italian-made corvettes. The government is also committed to the Patrol Vessel project to build up to 27 ships.

He said, "the service that still needs a lot of upgrading and modernisation is the army."

In terms of firepower, weapon systems and mobility, the army was still at an early stage of transition from a counter-insurgency force to a conventional force with a respectable capability to defend the country, he said.

However, Syed Hamid said for a full-blown conventional force capability, the army would need to undergo changes, including new equipment.

He said besides the army, the RMN and RMAF also needed to replace their ageing fleet of helicopters.

However, he said not much would be allocated immediately for new weaponry and other related equipment for the armed forces under the Seventh Plan.

"There would be an increase from the previous Malaysia Plan but the increase would not be that much for the purchase of new equipment as most of it would be utilised to fund the modernisation programmes approved for the previous plan but had to be carried forward," he said.

These "carried forward" projects have to be completed and most of the new programmes would receive funding under the Plan's Mid-Term review, he said.

Syed Hamid said the choice of new equipment would have to be carefully considered to ensure the country got the best out of the purchases. --

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