

**Najib urged to include defence transparency in GTP**  
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**by SKK Kuek and Nigel Aw**

INTERVIEW An international expert on transparency of defence procurement sees the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) as a golden opportunity for introducing higher transparency in the defence ministry.

Given the advantages of Malaysia - a well-established military, stable and free from upheavals - it has all the reasons to be a standard setter for transparency, accountability and anti-corruption capability in the region, said Mark Pyman, Director of Defence and Security Programme, Transparency International UK (TI-UK).

"The fact that there has been a single government or administration in place for sometime should be no reason as to why this should not be a model nation in this area," he said, referring to the coalition's rule since 1957.

Pyman (right), a former chief financial officer of international oil and gas giant Shell, has been advising various countries on building the integrity of their defense and security forces since he took over the TI-UK post in 2004.

He also sits in the UK's Office of Government Commerce (OGC), an independent office of the treasury to help the UK government deliver best value for its spending.

Pyman gave an interview to Malaysiakini yesterday during his one-week visit to Malaysia to attend a conference on reducing corruption in security and defence to be held tomorrow organised by Transparency International Malaysia Chapter (TI-M).

He lauded Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak for introducing the GTP which has anti-corruption as one of the seven National Key Result Areas (NKRA), and urged him to include defence procurement in the programme.

Holding head up high

"There is no reason why defence could not be part of that programme. There is no reason why the defence ministry can't say we would be just as good as these areas of reform. There is no reason why defence can't lead government in this (anti-corruption) area, I think it would be eminently doable....

"I really do think that a more transparent and proactive defence environment is in the country's interest and adding it officially or unofficially alongside the transformation programme would be an excellent signal," he said.

Although government procurement is one of the priorities under the anti-corruption NKRA, no specific attention has been given to the defence ministry which has been allocated RM2.77 billion under Budget 2012 for development expenditure, including equipment procurement and construction.

On Malaysia's average defence spending which is close to 2.5 percent of the nation's GDP, Pyman said the figure is considered average compared with the international standard, but the details of defense

budget revealed is way below average.

He was shown a copy of the federal expenditure estimation report which has the most detailed information provided to MPs during the budget bill debate.

The part that lists out development expenditure of defense ministry simply categorises items into "construction", "equipment", "modification and repair of army camp/base" and "housing", without further detail.

"That's much less detail than you expect, you would expect pages and pages of detail.

"It will not show you the detail of secret items but it will show you a great deal of detail, for example, the asset purchases expected into the services, and you would expect it by category, and even ammunition or armoured vehicles," he said.

Not only would the budget reveal the proposed purchased items such as ammunition, armoured vehicles or tanks, Pyman said, the original purchase price, maintenance cost and other associated cost would also be shown in a "normal" budget document.

Pervasive corruption

However, according to his experience dealing with various countries, including those having more pervasive corruption than Malaysia, introducing reform in defence procurement is highly possible.

Pyman pointed out that the reluctance to publicise defence procurement is more often caused by historical practice which turns into a "bad habit", instead of corruption or political factors.

"It becomes a bad habit to classify things as secret and this isn't to do with corruption. I think this is a bureaucratic instinct because it's easier to administer things if they are secret."

Apart from public anger or pressure from civil society like what happened in Sweden, Croatia and Columbia, changes in some countries were initiated by those within the system such as a reformist defense minister, senior military officials annoyed by malfunction or inferior equipment, or middle-level officials who want to see a competent military, said Pyman.

Citing Ukraine, a country which has a major corruption problem, as an example, Pyman revealed that the majority of its security forces supported reform within the organisation and put in place an anti-corruption training programme that had trained hundreds of senior officials who had initiated changes in their respective departments.

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