

Pakatan wants a select committee on TPPA

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Several Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers have urged the formation of a bipartisan parliamentary select committee on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), to protect Malaysia's rights.

In making the call, PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar, DAP's Klang MP Charles Santiago, former Kuala Selangor MP and PAS research unit head Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, Kelana Jaya MP Wong Chen, and Institut Rakyat research consultant Azrul Azwar Ahmad Tajuddin said they are unhappy that TPPA is not subject to parliamentary oversight.

"This being the case, Malaysians face limitations in ensuring that our socio-economic rights and the nation's sovereignty are respected and protected.

NONE"The TPPA's overarching legal framework could render domestic laws subservient and put multinational corporations on stronger - if not equal - footing as governments," they said in a joint statement.

This follows their meeting last Friday with the International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) secretary-general Rebecca Sta Maria (right).

While the Pakatan representatives are mindful of the necessary confidentiality that comes with such a framework, they said the bipartisan parliamentary select committee would strive to fulfill the lawmakers' responsibility as custodians of the people's trust.

"We also remind the government of Malaysia that the people's trust is predicated on transparent and responsible disclosure," they said, adding that many issues were also brought up in the one-hour meeting with Sta Maria.

Several groups - including the Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM) - have questioned the government's secrecy in the TPPA negotiations, and MTEM had even walked out on Miti after the ministry refused to provide information on the talks.

Concerns over control of financial markets

The Pakatan lawmakers raised their own concerns, and these include sovereign control over financial markets, investor-state dispute settlements, pharmaceutical

and medical prices and the general anxiety over the lack of transparency and information over the TPPA negotiating texts.

They queried whether the study included a cost benefit analysis on the TPPA, and were told by the ministry about the existence of such a paper tabled to the cabinet in 2010, which is the 2010 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report commissioned by the government.

"We were promised a copy of the said report in two weeks' time, although we were stripped of its negotiating positions."

"The issue financial controls and freedom was also brought up, where Miti gave verbal assurance of no losses, nor dilution of Malaysia's sovereign rights to implement economic and capital control policies by signing the TPPA," the Pakatan lawmakers' statement says.

However, they noted that the recent disclosure of leaked Australian negotiation texts on capital controls - and the existence of such a provision in other free trade agreements that the US has signed - would compel Malaysia to remain highly vigilant of the possibility of losing such rights.

They also raised the issue of healthcare costs, especially on intellectual property rights to pharmaceuticals, and had been informed by Miti and the Health Ministry that they aim to find a balance between promoting innovation and ensuring access to affordable medicines.

The Pakatan leaders added that with time running out - as the next round of TPPA negotiations will be held in July, and the final text is to be concluded in October - they hope that there will be further engagement with the general public and lawmakers on the fundamental principles of sovereignty and the socio-economic impacts of the TPPA.

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