

**Umno MP red cards Dr M for tackling Najib**  
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A day after celebrating his 89th birthday, Dr Mahathir Mohamad last Friday unleashed a harsh tackle on Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak on the requirements of a strong leader.

The former premier was commenting on Najib's comparison between Brazil's 7-1 defeat to Germany in the World Cup semifinals and the need for a country to have sound leadership.

Mahathir claimed that a strong leader would reject the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) and not crumble in the face of foreign pressure.

But Umno MP Nawawi Ahmad (left) has given the octogenarian a red card in defence of his boss.

Speaking to Malaysiakini, he stressed that Najib did not cave in to pressure when US President Barack Obama visited Malaysia in April.

"Najib had stressed that he will only accept the TPPA on our (Malaysian) terms.

"Even though Obama came to pressure us, Najib did not budge in defending the interest of this country," he added.

The Langkawi lawmaker also disagreed with Mahathir's statement that Najib's administration could only be strong if it rejected "100 percent" the TPPA.

"Mahathir has his opinion, Najib also has his opinion. This is a matter of national interest and Najib needs to play a balancing act," he said.

Nawawi likened the situation to holding a "kenduri".

"Imagine in a big community, if we are alone, how can we hold a kenduri? It cannot happen if no one wants to help us.

"We cannot stay a small country with an isolated economy, it will be our lost while China, Japan and other countries engage in free trade," he pointed out.

Furthermore, Nawawi said BN backbenchers have been well briefed on the TPPA and are aware of its pros and cons.

Thus the government has yet to consent to the agreement until issues such as opening up Malaysia's market and protecting contracts for bumiputera are ironed out.

'Not all free trade is bad'

Meanwhile, PKR's Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli, when asked to weigh in on Mahathir's pressure on Najib, said he was worried opposition against the TPPA may extend to forms of free trade by "right wing elements" seeking to protect vested interests in the country.

He said Malaysia is a trading nation and will be signing more free trade agreements (FTA) with other countries in order to thrive, thus a blanket opposition towards free trade in general would be detrimental to Malaysia's economy in the long run.

Asked whether he agreed with Mahathir's statement that a strong leader ought to reject TPPA, Rafizi replied that the statement is synonymous with the former prime minister's dictatorial approach.

He reiterated that the decision should not rest on a leader, whether strong or weak, but reached through public consultation.

"Mahathir's criticism of the government's approach to TPPA so far is actually not much different from what Najib is doing all along, which is not to consult everyone, which is to decide by himself.

"The only difference is that Mahathir thinks Najib's decision is wrong - that's all.

"Whereas we are advocating a completely different way, in a manner that some other countries have approached free trade agreement negotiations," he added.

'More transparency needed for TPPA'

However, Rafizi acknowledged that the TPPA's problem lies in its lack of transparency.

Rafizi said if Najib has nothing to hide, he should be going back and forth to listen to the people and allay their concerns.

"The nation depends on free trade, so I have a problem if the language or the opposition towards TPPA is jingoistic in nature, protectionist in nature and against free trade in nature.

"Yet at the same time, as a sovereign nation, we must make sure that any free trade agreement must protect our rights and our interest and so on.

"This is where the process is extremely dubious. Our opposition to TPPA is because everything is in 'cloak and daggers'," he told Malaysiakini.

He said there are strategic issues with TPPA that have not been properly discussed with the Malaysian public, and the decision should not rest with only a handful of people.

One example, he said, is that there should be a national discourse on how TPPA would affect trade relations with China, since the agreement is set up to rival Chinese economic clout.

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