

US Embassy unmoved by plea to halt US-Najib TPPA talks

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The United States Embassy in Malaysia appears to have shot down a plea by the opposition for the US to stop negotiating with Malaysia on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA).

Opposition leader Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail yesterday said there was a conflict of interest because the US is also probing Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and those close to him for corruption.

When asked for comment, the US Embassy however indicated that TPPA talks will not be derailed.

“We will continue to work with the Malaysian government on TPPA issues and welcome their participation in Atlanta,” an embassy spokesperson told Malaysiakini via email.

Atlanta is where the second round of TPPA talks this year are being held.

The New York Times (NYT) had reported last week that a US grand jury has opened a corruption inquiry into Najib and several individuals close to him, quoting unnamed sources.

The US Justice Department, which reportedly handles the investigation, had declined to comment on the report according to the NYT, while the Malaysian police had said that it has yet to be notified of such an investigation.

The Prime Minister’s Office has also declined to comment

The TPPA is a multinational free trade agreement in which the US is a main proponent. Apart from Malaysia, other countries involved in its secretive negotiations include Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Mexico and Canada, among others.

International Trade and Industry Minister Mustapa Mohamed said the draft agreement will be made public a month from now if the Atlanta talks end in Malaysia’s favour.

For now, all that is known about the agreement comes from leaks of the purported draft.

For TPPA’s critics, one contentious component of the draft agreement is that it incorporates a system for investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), which could supposedly affect a country’s ability to enact public interest laws - such as to control the use of tobacco - by forcing governments to pay hefty compensation for corporations that stand to lose from such legal changes.

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