

## **Miti briefings on TPPA mere 'propaganda', says DAP rep**

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Klang MP Charles Santiago has slammed the Ministry of International Trade and Industry's (Miti) briefings on Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), describing it as a mere propaganda exercise.

He said this is because the briefings are held with people who have no idea what the agreement is about and have not read it.

“He is busy announcing briefing sessions and says all the nice things, but criticisms raised gets no response. What they are doing amounts to propaganda,” he told Malaysiakini today via text messages.

Among others, he said the unanswered questions include whether Malaysia will be implementing a five-year data protection for biologic medicines as International Trade and Industry Minister Mustapa Mohamed had stated, or an eight-year or equivalent protection as US Deputy Trade Representative Robert Holleyman said is meant in the agreement.

A longer data protection period would enable pharmaceutical companies to keep out competition to their own biologic drugs for a longer period of time, hence allowing them to prop up higher prices.

A government-commissioned study cites a price difference of between 15 to 30 percent between biologic drugs and their bio-similar alternatives, using the EU as an example.

Charles also asked for future briefings to also feature TPPA critics, so that they can respond Mustapa's statements at the session and help provide a fairer picture of the agreement to the audience.

When the allegations of propaganda were put to Mustapa (photo) however, he pointed to the university students who had attended a briefing this morning.

“They're here. This morning I had about 20 questions and some of them didn't agree. We have been very open.

“He (Charles) has been part of the TPPA caucus. He has been part of the process,” he said, referring to the 15 meetings he had had with the bipartisan parliamentary caucus.

### **Concerns over prices of medicine**

Asked about Charles' demand for a TPPA briefing session together with critics of the trade agreement, Mustapa said the focus now is on the briefing next month with parliamentarians.

He said it has been difficult to arrange a suitable time for the session, as it would take the whole day.

Mustapa was speaking to Malaysiakini after holding a half-day briefing session with a group mainly comprised of private university student council members.

Among the questions asked during the session included concerns about the prices of medicine, and whether Malaysian companies can cope with foreign competition under TPPA.

One student highlighted that prices had gone up under the GST scheme despite the government's assurance that it would not burden the people, and asked how would the government ensure that TPPA would deliver its promises of economic prosperity.

Mustapa in his reply conceded that the government's promises regarding GST has not been fully kept, pointing out that the prices of cars have gone down although the prices of some other goods have gone the opposite direction.

Nevertheless, he said the tax scheme is necessary to diversify Malaysia's economy and reduce its dependence on oil revenues.

As for the price of medicines, Mustapa said there would be no change in Malaysia's patent policy, so there should not be any increase in the price of medicine as a result of the agreement.

He is referring to the 20-year patent protection and five-year data protection that currently apply for conventional drugs. The two protections may run concurrently and overlap.

Nevertheless, there would be other factors that would play a role in the prices, he said.