

Group wants feedback on FTA talks

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KUALA LUMPUR: A coalition opposing the ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) talks between Malaysia and the US has called on the government to set up a feedback mechanism to bring about greater transparency into the process.

"An open and transparent discussion should be held with all peoples organisations, NGOs, the human rights commission, political parties and workers unions to inform them of developments in the negotiations and to get feedback," the Peoples' Coalition Against US-Malaysia FTA said yesterday.

The government should also conduct a cost and benefit analysis of the FTA, and make public its results, it said.

"The government should be transparent and reveal the contents of the ongoing FTA negotiations," representatives from the 42-member coalition, comprising non-governmental organisations and opposition parties, said at a press conference.

They noted that International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri

Rafidah Aziz has yet to inform the public about the FTA's key implications.

"Only now, after the fifth round of talks, the cabinet ministers are being briefed and requested to give feedback."

Rafidah was reported to have briefed the ministers a fortnight ago on 58 contentious issues holding up the FTA.

The ministers are expected to submit their views to the cabinet either today or next week.

Suaram executive director Yap Swee Seng said if the government is sincere that the FTA benefits the people, it should have no problem keeping Malaysians informed.

"The people have the right to know what's going on if the government is representing the people. I don't see how revealing the contents of the negotiations will jeopardise it?"

Ministry officers could not be reached for comment.

US negotiators were rushing to sign the FTA by the end of next month before its fast track authority runs out at the end of June but this seems unlikely now because of the outstanding issues. Malaysia has said it will not be rushed into signing a deal.