

Bumi interests outweigh trade, say Malay rights groups

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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal and Mohd Farhan Darwis

KUALA LUMPUR, April 18 — Putrajaya must prioritise Bumiputera interests before conforming to set international trade agreements such as the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta), Malay rights groups have said.

Bumiputera car dealers association Pekema as well as Malay rights lobby Perkasa have demanded that the government maintain Malaysia's controversial permit system for imported cars, saying that the current system benefited Bumiputera businesses.

Both groups maintain that the privileges under the import licensing system of approved permits (APs) was a guaranteed Bumiputera constitutional right, and came under the purview of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong,

Pekema president Datuk Zainuddin Abd Rahman said on Monday that the association is seeking royal intervention to block the Najib administration's plans to phase out the AP system for imported cars by 2015.

The AP system has often been cited as a major trade barrier that goes against the spirit of the Afta.

"The AP is included as part of permits, permits under Article 153 of the Constitution, which guarantees Malay and Bumiputera rights along with reserve land, scholarships, government posts.

"The plan to join Afta is irrelevant. Even western countries have means through which they protect their own people, their way," Zainuddin told The Malaysian Insider.

He said that the AP system was the "most successful" system for Bumiputeras, touting it as one of the main accomplishments of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

"(The) AP (system) is the best, it just might need to be fixed or amended."

Perkasa secretary-general Syed Hassan Syed Ali echoed Zainuddin's remarks, saying that Malaysia should follow China's example whereby it did not conform to set international guidelines relating to trade laws.

"The government does not have to follow international demands. The government has to see if it is affecting Bumiputeras, then they have to fight it; Afta has to be changed.

"Asean countries are full of different races; there must be something to protect their own Bumiputera communities," Syed Hassan told The Malaysian Insider.

"We know the government is tied down by international laws, but China can afford not to, they put their country's interests first, why (not) Malaysia?" he asked.

Syed Hassan stressed that AP system must be defended as it benefited Malays and Bumiputeras.

"We must defend what we need to defend. The AP does not bring the government any losses, it benefits the Malay economy.

"The government must think of another way. They cannot always follow international laws," he added.

Pekema told The Edge Financial Daily on Monday that they have requested an official audience with the King, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, to present a memorandum over the matter.

Zainuddin claimed that the phasing out of the AP system was discriminatory, saying that the government would still continue giving out APs until 2020 to government-linked companies.

"The only ones who can cancel the AP are the Agong and the Malay Rulers, so it cannot be cancelled.

"AP owners just have to follow guidelines set by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Revoke it if owners flout any laws," Zainuddin told The Malaysian Insider.

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