

Malay business group says no to free trade deal, wants debate in Parliament
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By Ida Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 — The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) should be debated in Parliament, the Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM) said today when voicing its objection to Malaysia's inking of the free-trade agreement.

MTEM claimed the government had not carried out a detailed and comprehensive study on the agreement, besides alleging that there was a lack of meaningful engagement and consultation with the relevant parties.

"This negotiation and agreement did not receive the mandate from Parliament. It should be debated in Parliament in depth," its chief executive officer Mohd Nizam Mahshar said in a press conference today.

He also voiced MTEM's fears that local companies will have trouble competing with companies from larger TPP member countries such as the US.

"If they want to compete with local companies, it will not be fair...We know and we believe that after the free-trade agreement, SME (small-medium enterprises) will be impacted greatly," he said.

"It's not a level-playing field. It's a lopsided negotiation," he later said.

Nizam said the ongoing TPP negotiations are carried out in secret and claimed that the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI)'s refusal to disclose the agreement documents went against the principles of accountability.

"For what reason are you doing this in secrecy?" he asked.

Nizam also said MTEM had met with Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed and his officials last Friday.

He showed reporters a list of 16 demands by MTEM, saying that Mustapa will reply to them in two weeks' time.

In the list of demands, MTEM said that a study on the economic and social impact of the TPP must first be published before the government continues its negotiations.

It said the TPP should not subject Malaysia to international tribunals or courts, which it said would override the country's own legal process.

It also sought the Malaysian government's assurance that the country will not be sued through the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) method if the country's laws and policies reduced the profits of foreign firms.

MTEM also asked how foreign firms could be prevented from taking the ISDS route if government projects are awarded to local companies instead.

Among other demands, it said the country's future policies should be directed at helping the

local firms, whether they are SMEs or government-linked companies (GLC), insisting that this should not be viewed as a trade barrier.

The TPP has yet to be signed.

If signed, it will see free trade carried out between Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, New Zealand, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Chile, the US and Canada.

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