

**Nurul Izzah moots expert study of free-trade deal in Parliament**  
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**By Ida Lim**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 6 — A parliamentary group of experts to study the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) is needed to protect Malaysia's sovereignty and interests, PKR's Nurul Izzah Anwar has said when expressing the opposition party's concerns about the proposed free-trade agreement (FTA).

Besides saying that she will move a motion in Parliament to demand the setting up of the parliamentary expert group, Nurul Izzah also said she will engage with business groups on the TPP.

Although acknowledging that Putrajaya can enter into international agreements and treaties without getting Parliament's approval, Nurul Izzah noted the TPP's extensive scope and scale, which she said markedly exceeds that of previous free-trade agreements.

She said Parliament had not been informed of Malaysia's discussions on the TPP since it entered into negotiations in October 2010, adding that this would deny the people's right to scrutinise the deal.

She also said all free-trade agreements should be based on "fair-trade" principles without compromising things such as public safety and national security.

"Invariably, we are extremely worried that the government will sign the TPP agreement without first seeking public opinion, or being attentive to the concerns and sentiments of the people of Malaysia," the PKR vice-president said in a statement.

"On that premise, we call for a parliamentary expert study group on TPP — formed of Malaysian experts and specialists drawn from around the world — to be immediately convened to look into the nuts and bolts of the FTA," she said.

Nurul Izzah (picture) also said that she will engage those from the Chinese, Malay and Indian Chambers of Commerce, noting the US Embassy had invited business groups and civil society here to take part in the ongoing negotiations of the TPP.

"I fully intend to represent the interests of Malaysians during the upcoming round of negotiations that will be held in Malaysia and will be bringing with me representatives from the respective CCMs to be stakeholders as well," the two-term Lembah Pantai MP said.

In the same statement, Nurul Izzah laid down PKR's concerns on the implications of Malaysia signing the TPP, highlighting the "investor-state" dispute settlement (ISDS) resolution clause which she said would give foreign businesses greater legal rights compared to local businesses.

"In lieu of this, we question the motives of the government for entertaining the notion of joining an agreement that empowers foreign corporations to challenge domestic laws and regulations outside of domestic courts without first exhausting local legal measures.

"This is especially frightening as it allows foreign corporations to circumvent laws and regulations enacted by our government in public interest such as those pertaining to natural

resource, environmental protection, and health policies,” she said.

Another concern listed down was that TPP touches on infringements of Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) — an international agreement by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) — which ranges from pharmaceutical products to digital information online.

She explained that this would cause the cost of buying medicine to go up for both the Malaysian government and citizens, with the TPP possibly hindering freedom of speech and online privacy by requiring Internet service providers (ISPs) to monitor the daily activity of Internet users.

Nurul Izzah demanded that Putrajaya put in place certain safeguards if Malaysia signs the agreement, including bringing the country’s environmental laws up to international standards to protect Malaysia’s diverse ecosystem.

She said there should be strong opposition to the ISDS in line with international best practices, saying these practices should be incorporated into the Trade Policy Statements.

She also urged the Malaysian government to introduce laws that would protect the interests of local Internet users and keep freedom of information with the condition that existing security laws are not breached.

“This TPP may have been in the spirit of ‘free trade’, but is it truly a ‘fair trade’ deal for the citizens of our country?” she wrote.

On Tuesday, the Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM) had also asked that the TPP be debated in Parliament when voicing its objection to Malaysia inking the deal.

At a meeting with International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed last Friday, MTEM said it had given him a list of 16 demands and was expecting a reply from him in two weeks’ time.

One of MTEM’s listed demands was that the Malaysian government give an assurance that the country will not be sued through the ISDS method if the country’s laws and policies reduced the profits of foreign firms.

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

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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