

Dr M wants transparency in TPPA talks, says pact is unequal
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By Rita Jong

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (pic) wants Putrajaya to come clean on negotiations for the new trade pact, the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), joining the chorus who say it was unequal and an American attempt to open up domestic markets in small countries.

The former prime minister also said the government should ignore the October deadline for the trade talks that now involve 12 Pacific Rim countries, adding China should also be included in the pact.

"We talk a lot about transparency. Let us see transparency regarding the TPP negotiations. The October ultimatum should be ignored. And let China be included," the influential leader said in his chedet.cc blog yesterday. An edited version of his blog posting was also published by the Umno-controlled New Straits Times newspaper's online site last night.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's government is committed to the talks that began more than two years ago and expected to be wrapped up by the time United States President Barack Obama visits Southeast Asia this October.

But many groups have opposed the negotiations and have asked for details of the pact, saying it would lead to increased competition and also price rises for drugs as enforcement of patents would disallow the use of generic drugs.

The next round of TPPA talks is scheduled in the Sabah state capital of Kota Kinabalu starting July 18, 2013.

In his blog posting, Dr Mahathir pointed out that the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) had pushed for trade negotiations to be done in secret and without debate publicly or in government.

"I don't think it is such a good practice, if indeed that is the practice.

"Let us see the record of trade and other agreements negotiated by the Malaysian Government. They do not seem to favour Malaysia much. In fact they seem to result in Malaysia accepting unfavourable terms," he wrote, citing the water agreement between Malaysia and Singapore some 50 years ago.

Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister between 1981 and 2003 also noted the country had bought the F/A-18 fighter aircraft from the United States when it actually just wanted to buy the Russian-made MiG-29s.

"I suppose the people who made this decision know why they must have the F/A-18. Unfortunately, the agreement to purchase did not include the source code and without the source code, the F/A-18 can only fly on missions approved by the United States.

"Until then these very expensive fighter planes can only be used for show at LIMA," he said, adding these were 'very expensive toys'.

The fighter jets were bought in 1993 when Najib was the then defence minister in Dr

Mahathir's Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir also railed against the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA) over cars made in member countries, saying Malaysia's Proton was made with 90 per cent local content and cost higher than non-Asean (Association of South East Asian Nations) cars assembled in the 10-member trade pact.

"While these cars flood the Malaysian market, hardly any Proton is seen in (other) Asean countries. The negotiators may think they negotiated a good deal but I just don't think so. We are simply opening our markets to countries with closed markets," he said.

The former prime minister also touched on Malaysian negotiators who had lost the case for sovereignty over Pulau Batu Puteh to Singapore but yet could not negotiate for a new bridge to replace the Causeway between both countries and settle pension fund issues.

"But we have given up our railway land worth billions to Singapore for practically nothing. And now we must ask Singapore's permission to build our high speed train.

"Look at all the agreements we have entered into and you will find practically none of them favours us," Dr Mahathir said in his posting.

Despite that, the former prime minister said his successors now want to accept the TPPA conceived by the US, adding, "This is another attempt by America to let their huge corporations penetrate the domestic markets of the small countries, in particular Government procurements.

"When the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariff) failed, they invented WTO (World Trade Organisation) for the same purpose. That also failed. They then invented Apec. Still they cannot achieve their objective. They introduced bilateral free trade agreements. Then they promoted a Globalised World, a world without borders in which their money can go anywhere, destroy economies and then pull out.

"In case we have forgotten they did this in 1997 and 1998.

"Still they cannot get at Government procurement. And now they invented TPP, a partnership of unequal, of the strong to take advantage of the weak," Dr Mahathir said.

He pointed out the pact was legally binding and any agreement breach would see the Malaysian government sued by US corporations for billions.

"I have my doubts about our ability to convince the international arbitrators or court. We cannot even convince the World Court over Pulau Batu Puteh.

"They will have the best lawyers. We will exhaust all our funds to pay our less experienced lawyers. At the end we will lose and pay indemnities and fees running into billions. And we will continue to pay until we comply. And when we comply, we will lose more money," Dr Mahathir added.

The octogenarian leader, who still travels the world and offers his views on many issues, also noted Malaysia had its domestic issues such as the New Economic Policy (NEP) that promoted affirmative action.

"Anyone who talks about the New Economic Policy (NEP) is labelled racist by our officials.

When the currency rogues attacked us the purpose was to gain control over our economy. We resisted that because we were still free then.

"But after we sign the TPP we will be bound hand and foot. No more capital control. We will be colonised again. President Sukarno was right about neo-colonialism," he added.

Dr Mahathir also charged that MITI was set to agree on the TPPA and would not entertain counter arguments. "It wants to do this secretly. We don't punish people who make agreements detrimental to the interest of this country. So there was nothing to lose.

"But this is my country as much as it is the country of the officials and politicians. If people secretly do harm to my country I have a right to complain," he said. – July 13, 2013.

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