

PKR says trade pact lopsided, tells government not to rush into it
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The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) currently being negotiated by Malaysia is not a mere trade pact as it cuts through the nation's legal, judicial and economic structures, and democratic institutions, said opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (pic).

"Our national interest and sovereignty is at stake," said Anwar at a press conference at the PKR headquarters in Tropicana, Petaling Jaya, today.

Anwar said the TPPA was an attempt by the United States to impose its economic model which is based on a laissez-faire approach, deregulation and small government.

The TPPA provides free movement of goods and services among 12 countries including the United States, Mexico, Canada, Peru, Singapore, Chile, Brunei, Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia. It aims to create a market of 800 million people with a combined gross domestic product of US\$27.5 trillion.

The TPPA has come under fire for its lack of details on the negotiations. The government maintains that a confidentiality clause under the agreement prevents disclosure.

"There has been no full public disclosure of comprehensive and impartial cost benefit analysis undertaken by the Malaysian government," Anwar said.

He gave one example of how it can work against Malaysia, saying that while the TPPA may theoretically give Malaysian companies access to the US\$500 billion annual US government procurement market, a sizeable chunk of this market is defence-related so it's not covered by the TPPA.

He said Malaysian companies also would not be able to bid for these projects as all the 50 states in the US had their own procurement policies and were not subject to the TPPA.

"There is no obligation for the individual states to observe any free trade agreement, so where's the benefit?" said Anwar.

He also said Malaysia's economic liberalisation should be done at the country's own pace and needs.

"The TPPA at this juncture appears to be more lopsided to the detriment of Malaysia as a whole without significant benefit. PKR would like to reiterate that there is no valid reason for Malaysia to rush into signing the TPPA," said Anwar.

Anwar said Malaysia would be in a stronger bargaining position after 2015 following the formation of the Asean Economic Community to negotiate free trade agreements.

PKR is the latest in a growing number opposed to the country joining the TPPA.

Among them is Anwar's foe and former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who had called the TPPA a restriction on free trade.

Dr Mahathir has argued that free trade agreements have failed in the past because countries have to "regulate trade through agreements rather than free trade".

"If the TPPA is not accepted, then the recalcitrant nations will face restrictions against their freedoms to trade with members of the TPPA," he also warned in a commentary published by government-backed daily The New Straits Times recently. – August 12, 2013.

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