

**TPPA Seen As Building Block Towards Asia-Pacific FTA**  
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NUSA DUA (BALI), Oct 9 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's firmness at the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Leaders' meeting here on Tuesday to not be merely a "yes man" to the TPP agreement (TPPA) conditions is clear indication that the country wants to sign the pact on its own terms.

Prime Minister Datuk Najib Tun Abdul Razak's stand has been to uphold the nation's sovereignty and people's interests before making any important decision that could affect the nation's future.

Some economic analysts are of the view that Malaysia's participation in the TPPA, which comprises 12 member states of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec), will bring more benefits than disadvantages if Malaysia agrees to the TPPA on its own terms and conditions.

They say this is because the TPPA is a building block and platform towards the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) involving 21 Apec countries, and Malaysia's involvement early in the TPPA negotiations has given it an opportunity to ensure the terms of the agreement are in the nation's best interests.

If Malaysia leaves the TPPA negotiations at this stage, it would lose that opportunity and with the FTAAP in place, Malaysia would be forced to accept the regulations, discipline as well as the terms and conditions set by other countries.

Najib had apparently used this opportunity very well at the TPP leaders' meeting here on Tuesday after the 21st Apec Summit ended.

"We came voluntarily because we are a trading nation, one of the largest in the world, that is why we have an interest to come in as a TPPA partner and have the opportunity to set a new FTA framework for the world.

"Because it is now in the process of setting the conditions for free trade in future, if Malaysia is not involved in the process, Malaysia will not have an opportunity to give our input and views in order to shape the future of global free trade," Najib said after the meeting here.

The Prime Minister stressed that Malaysia is one of the members with a right to set the terms and conditions of the agreement, but it does not mean Malaysia will accept everything, adding the country will accept the TPPA based on its national interests.

Najib said the government would explain the TPPA to the people and bring the matter to Parliament for debate before making a decision to sign the TPPA as a domestic process and not be bound to a timeline for finalising the conditions, adding the matter is understood by the 11 other TPP members.

Observers say Malaysia's stand clearly shows it will not sign the TPPA until all its conditions are unanimously agreed to by the other negotiating partners.

The TPPA negotiations seemed to drag on because Malaysia insisted on protecting its

national interests and not be tied down to a deadline for the signing of the TPPA, and would continue to negotiate until its terms and conditions are unanimously agreed to.

Malaysia has no problem with the scope of the TPPA, which covers the traditional FTA elements, but is concerned when new elements are introduced such as relating to competition, labour, environment, government procurement and intellectual property rights (IPR).

In the matter of government procurement, Malaysia is negotiating cautiously, taking into account feedback from interested parties, and its concerns centre around protection of the local industrial community and Bumiputera commercial interests.

On IPR, it is understood Malaysian negotiators will continue to press for terms that will enable Malaysians to continue to enjoy affordable medicines and health care.

On worries that the TPPA would be a new form of colonisation by the United States, the government has stressed that it would not accept any violation of its national sovereignty, but this should not be a major concern as in the TPPA, "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed."

If Malaysia does not sign the TPPA, it could lose the markets for the products from its small and medium enterprises as well as its palm oil, rubber and other commodity producers.

It could also lose easy access to innovations and new technologies from smart partnerships with TPP members, while US and Canadian investors might focus on TPP countries such as Vietnam, with Malaysia isolated from the trading bloc.

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