

No use for TPPA debate in Parliament now
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By Md Izwan

There is no point in debating the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) in Parliament, a Malay business group said today, as criticism poured in over the huge United States-sponsored trade deal which includes Malaysia and 11 other countries.

The Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM) said the terms of the pact can no longer be changed after the contents of the TPPA were agreed to yesterday by the 12 nations after a round of marathon talks in the US.

MTEM chief executive officer Mohd Nizam Mahshar said Putrajaya's promise to the public that the TPPA could be debated in Parliament now rang hollow after Putrajaya agreed to its terms.

"It has not been signed yet but the negotiations and content have been concluded.

"This means there can be no more changes to the agreement, whether Parliament agrees to it or not," said Nizam.

What was left, he said, was whether Malaysia would sign on to the agreement or reject it in total without signing it.

But there was a catch: "No country has ever walked out – not to sign an agreement after negotiations (are) concluded..."

Malaysia yesterday agreed to the terms of the TPPA, a landmark trade pact more than five years in the making designed to boost commerce among nations that produce 40% of global economic output, according to a Bloomberg report.

Its proponents argue that it will boost trade by eliminating tariffs and stream-lining business rules in all member countries.

But its opponents, including those in Malaysia, claim it will lead to pricier medicine, harm government-linked companies such as Petronas, and take away the country's ability to make and enforce local laws on public health and the environment.

In defending the pact, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed said the negotiations agreed to take into consideration almost all of Malaysia's concerns and sensitivities.

Bernama reported that Mustapa said this included areas such as government procurement, state-owned enterprises and Bumiputera issues.

Mustapa said the flexibility accorded to Malaysia included longer transition periods and differential treatment for the country's sensitive areas.

In response to this, Nizam said the two-year period did not mean that Malaysia could change the terms of the pact.

“It means we need to amend and legislate all laws or if need be, our Constitution, to make it comply to the TPPA agreement... ratification does not need Parliament approval.”

Malaysian officials, he claimed, were confusing the public by making them believe the terms of the pact can be changed via parliamentary debate or a ratification process.
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