

Dewan Rakyat Approves Motion on Malaysia's Participation in TPPA
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 27 (Bernama) -- The Dewan Rakyat today approved a motion allowing Malaysia's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, moving the country a step forward towards signing and ratifying the trade accord bringing together 12 nations.

The motion was carried with 127 votes for and 84 against.

Twenty-four MPs spoke during the debate on the motion tabled by International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed yesterday at the two-day special sitting of the house. The Dewan Negara will debate the motion Thursday.

The motion, among other things, proposed that the Dewan Rakyat approve Malaysia's participation in the TPPA as it would strengthen the country's competitiveness at the regional and global levels.

The Dewan Rakyat approval backs the decision of the government for Malaysia to be a part of the TPPA member countries after the talks were concluded on Oct 5, 2015 in Atlanta, United States, following more than five years of negotiations.

Mustapa, in winding up the debate, said the TPPA was not a trade pact drafted solely by the United States as Malaysia also participated in the drawing up the international agreement.

He said Malaysia was also involved in preparing the draft of the TPPA, among others Chapters 6, 21 and 24 in relation to cooperation and capacity building of small and medium enterprises and development as well as other important chapters not contained in any other trade agreement.

"As such, the assumption that Malaysia made use of the United States template (in drafting the agreement) is not true," he said.

Mustapa said Malaysia would not be influenced by the capitalist system if it were to sign the TPPA and it would also not change the national economic system because Malaysia's was a mixed economy.

He said the negotiations on the TPPA were not a one-man show but involved many parties, and the matter was brought before the Cabinet more than 40 times over a span of five years.

Besides Mustapa, five other ministers who were involved in the implementation of the TPPA also winded up the debates for their respective ministries.

They included Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot Jaem, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam and two ministers in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar and Nancy Shukri.

Riot, in winding up his debate said eight labour laws under the ministry would need to be amended after Malaysia signs the TPPA.

These include the Trade Unions Act 1959 (Act 262), which will allow foreign workers to hold office in unions with certain conditions.

Wan Junaidi said that a national committee would be set up to monitor and implement the environmental chapter outlined in the TPPA.

"The purpose of this committee is to discuss the implementation of the commitments concerning the environmental chapter under the TPPA, including all other Free Trade Agreements," he said.

Regarding allegations that mining companies were given huge powers under the TPPA which could lead to the government being sued, Wan Junaidi said the country's natural resources such as minerals could not be easily be exploited, as there were certain obligations that had to be observed by all TPPA countries to preserve natural resources, based on the existing environmental laws.

"Therefore, any mining activity must go through the approval process set by the existing laws and regulations," he said.

Responding to issues relating to healthcare, Dr Subramaniam said the TPPA did not prohibit Malaysia from taking measures to protect public health, including making available cheaper generic drugs.

For the implementation of intellectual property rights obligations relating to pharmaceuticals, he said Malaysia had a transitional period of four to five years after the TPPA had been enforced.

Winding up the debate for the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Abdul Wahid, among other things acknowledged the difficulties it had faced in finalising the agreement, which involves the super powers.

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