

03/09/2003

Syed Mokhtar in talks with Government to buy bank

THE Government is in discussion with businessman Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary who has shown interest in buying Bank Muamalat, Finance Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Hashim Ismail said.

He said Syed Mokhtar made the offer "quite sometime ago".

"Even if Bank Negara agrees to the sale, Syed Mokhtar has to make another application to the Finance Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad)."

He was replying to a question from Husam Musa (Pas-Kubang Kerian) in his winding-up speech of the Central Bank of Malaysia (Amendment) Bill 2003 yesterday.

Husam had asked if there was any truth to the rumour that a businessman was interested in buying the bank.

"There is nothing wrong in an individual wanting to buy a bank if he is a capable man," Hashim said.

Later at the lobby, Hashim said there was no application from other parties.

He said this was the first time there was an offer to buy Bank Muamalat. He refused to reveal the offer price.

"If I reveal the price, it would jeopardise the negotiations.

On other issues, Hashim said Bank Negara had also proposed the setting-up of a Syariah Advisory Council to handle banking, financial and takaful matters.

"Currently, financial institutions have their own set of guidelines and rules. We want to standardise the guidelines."

He said the SAC would be the supreme body in giving advice on Islamic banking, financial and takaful matters.

According to him, judges who are well-versed in financial matters will be among the committee members.

He said once approved, a mechanism would be established for its operations.

Hashim said there would also be an International Centre for Leadership in Finance to provide training and research to develop human resources in the banking sector.

He said service was an important area in the banking sector, especially in the era of globalisation.

"They have to consistently improve their service to be competitive," he said.