

## **Race irrelevant in TPPA talks, says Mustapa**

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**By Aidila Razak**

Stopping short of condemning attacks on negotiators on racial lines, International Trade and Industry Minister Mustapa Mohamed said that race is irrelevant in the government's stand in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement talks.

Reassuring the critics, he said that as minister he "calls the shots" in the negotiations, which are bound by cabinet guidelines.

NONE"The 21 negotiators are multiracial and chief negotiator S Jayasiri (right) is Indian, but I call the shots.

"Whatever it is, we are bound by government policies. I am in charge and any decision has to go through the cabinet," he said.

Among the loudest critic of the TPPA is Majlis Tindakan Ekonomi Melayu, which has raised issues of sovereignty, bumiputera small medium enterprises and government procurement.

Speaking to reporters after the second ministry open day on the TPPA today, he said that he had a separate one-on-one meeting with MTEM chairperson Syed Ali Al-Attas on Friday to clarify matters.

"We found that we are on the same page on some areas but because of lack of transparency they did not know our position," he said.

These include government procurement matters.

He said that discussions on government procurement are led by the Treasury and that the government is looking to revise its position on this front.

"We will come up with a new position once it is finalised," he said.

He added that on top of today's open day, he had also met 100 stakeholders including Malay rights group Perkasa, the Kuala Lumpur-Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall and small medium enterprises.

"There was a lot of speculation due to leaked documents from another country but we explained that this is not our position. We cannot blame them (the critics)," he

said.

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