

# PM: Priority is to aid farmers

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## 'No intent to harm Syed Mokhtar's business'

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Tycoon Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary was merely asked to provide financial allocation to help padi farmers and such a request was certainly not meant to cause the collapse of his business empire, the Prime Minister has explained.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is also Finance Minister, said the matter should not be politicised as it was raised with the aim of helping poor farmers.

He added that as Prime Minister, he needed to find a way to help this group.

Anwar said the decision to ask Syed Mokhtar for funds was made after a prior discussion with him.

"I had an amicable discussion with Syed Mokhtar. The intention is to help the padi farmers and not to cause the collapse of his (business) empire," he told reporters after clocking in at the Treasury here yesterday.

Anwar was asked about criticisms hurled at him for asking Syed Mokhtar to allocate RM10mil for poor padi farmers this month and for national rice company Padiberas Nasional Bhd (Bernas) to allocate RM50mil next year.

The Prime Minister said Syed Mokhtar had asked for him to



**Ready to serve:** Anwar clocking in on his first day as Finance Minister at the Treasury in Putrajaya. — RAJA FAISAL HISHAN/The Star

recover the cost of securing Bernas shares and that he (Syed Mokhtar) would later discuss with government officials on the next course of action.

"But I also pointed out to him that in the meantime, since profits were recorded, he should consider helping to ease the problems faced by the farmers.

"Syed Mokhtar agreed to this and that is why the financial commitments were made," he explained.

Anwar added that on his part, he assured Syed Mokhtar that the Transport and Finance ministries would look for ways to help upgrade the Tanjung Pelepas Port.

The Tanjung Pelepas Port is operated by MMC Corp Bhd, which is the flagship company of Syed Mokhtar.

On another matter, Anwar said the role of the ministry's advisers would be determined after consultation with senior officers and its new treasury-general.

He said he would also discuss the matter with former Petronas president and CEO Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican, who would be leading the team.

"I will have to discuss with Hassan the terms of reference, parameters and priorities of the team of advisers.

"Of course, I will also consult the ministry's senior officers and the new secretary-general," he added.

After clocking in, he held a meeting with senior officials. Secretary-general Datuk Seri Asri Hamidin was not present and is believed to be on leave.

In announcing his Cabinet lineup last week, Anwar said he would be assisted as Finance Minister by several advisers led by Hassan.

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