

PM WANTS PROBE INTO PRICIER FOOD

Anwar also wants new enforcement, monitoring methods on rice supply

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DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim wants an investigation into reports of increased food prices despite cheaper rice and poultry.

In his speech at the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly

here, the prime minister also highlighted the need for the authorities overseeing the supply of local white rice to improve enforcement and monitoring.

"I do not deny that there are cases of increased food prices.

"I was told that food prices have increased although the price of rice is going down.

"The price of sugar is under control. The price of chicken is

lower compared with two or three years ago," said Anwar, who is also finance minister.

He said the price of sugar in Malaysia was the lowest in South-east Asia.

"(When the prices of controlled items are cheap) there are still problems since smuggling will increase," he said.

Anwar cited as an example Pulau Sebatik, Sabah, where only a third of the population was Malaysian while the rest were Indonesians.

"However, the supply of cooking oil, rice and sugar, among

others, is for the entire island.

"That is why targeted subsidies are important and a new taxation approach that does not burden (the people) is needed.

"This is to ensure fairness so that the super rich will not get subsidies," he said.

Anwar said there was a need for new enforcement and monitoring approaches to ensure there was sufficient local white rice.

"During a *Jualan Rahmah* programme in Permatang Pauh, I asked a trader why she was still selling *beras campuran* (mixed rice) at RM30 since there was lo-

cal white rice priced at RM26.

"The woman said that although she learnt that the stock (of local white rice) was available, she could not find it in the shops."

Anwar said he was informed that some 150,000 metric tonnes of local white rice had been distributed to the market, but that was not enough to meet demand.

He added that he had instructed the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority and Farmers' Organisation Authority to focus their efforts on rural areas to ensure people could get local white rice.