

Still no news on 'secret' toll concession deals
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The government has not budged from the pressure to reveal highway concession agreements as nothing new was revealed in a written reply to a question from a member of parliament.

Replying to Wong Nai Chee (BN-Kota Melaka) who asked whether the government would reveal the contents of highway concession agreements, Prime Minister's Department Minister Nazri Abdul Aziz did not disclose anything new.

Nazri said that the concession agreement is under the ambit of the Official Secrets Act because it is attached to a cabinet memorandum discussed during cabinet meetings.

All cabinet meeting minutes are classified as official secret.

"Due to this, it (the concession agreement) is an official secret and action can be taken under the act against those who use the official secret," he said.

He also said that before a concession agreement can be revealed, steps must be taken to re-classify the document.

He pointed out that consent from the concessionaires must also be acquired because there are 'confidentiality' clauses.

"These are clauses agreed upon by the government and the concessionaires to not reveal anything without consulting the other party first," he said.

Nazri added that weight must also be given on implications that may arise from disclosing the documents as they might affect national security.

On Feb 12, Works Minister S Samy Vellu said he would seek the cabinet's nod soon to declassify concession agreements signed by the government and concessionaires of all highways in the country.

What makes a document secret

However, the answer did not say whether the cabinet has reached a conclusion on revealing any of the highway concession agreements.

This is not the first time that Wong has raised this issue on declassifying documents of public interest.

Last week, Wong said documents like environment impact assess reports and tolls agreements should be made public.

"Only information such as defence and security, cabinet and state committee meetings should be kept as secret documents," he said.

Wong who also asked what makes a document an official secret was told by Nazri that it was dependent on the following:

- * information that may cause a great disruption in the country
- * endanger national security, destroy the country's reputation or give a foreign power immense benefit
- * information that might lower the reputation of the country and its government or cause embarrassment or trouble to the administration

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