

More questions over toll deals

Press and politicians find papers incomplete or too technical to understand in short time

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KUALA LUMPUR: Confusion reigned at the library in the Works Ministry on the second day after toll agreements in the country were declassified.

Politicians and reporters, who had turned up as early as 7.30am to get access to the documents although the library opened at 9am, were dismayed to find that much of the contents were either too technical, incomplete or that they just had no time to digest the information.

With public viewing in the morning restricted to only five people at one time for a maximum of two hours and one document each, reporters had to rely on information supplied by politicians, who were given priority to read the agreements.

As at lunchtime, only one reporter had managed to read an agreement relating to the New Pantai Expressway but complained that she could not fully understand the content or compensation formula.

In the evening, however, 15 people were allowed in at one time after Works Minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed gave the directive to the library to expand the facility.

There was also grumbling after some of the reporters, who had turned up early for their turns to look at the documents, got bumped down in the queue as politicians had made an earlier booking with the library.

Among the "incomplete" documents were the deals for the SMART Tunnel, which only came with the first 118 pages without any appendix or schedules, and the Shapadu toll agreement, which was only 16 pages long. None of the agreements also carried with any subsequent exemption or additional clauses.

Petaling Jaya Utara MP Tony Pua, who led a DAP delegation, said the Damansara-Puchong Highway was making excessive profits and called for the Government to stop compensating the operator.

The highway operator had initially set its toll rate at RM2.10 but reduced it to RM1.60 in the last adjustment in

2007.

"Under the agreement, the toll charge will rise to RM3.10 in 2016. In its financial prospectus, the highway operator has stated that the construction cost was RM1.327bil and that the 30-year projected profit was RM18.865bil.

"Between 1997 and 2006, it was to have made a profit of RM1.22bil, nearly the construction cost. So, their collection to date has more than paid for the highway and what they are collecting for the next 20 years, is excess profits," he said, adding that to allow Kesas to raise toll charges by more than 10% every two years until 2022 was also excessive.

Pua called on the Government to nationalise the highways to lighten the financial burden of the people and keep toll charges minimum.

Serdang MP Teo Nie Ching said the agreement with Penang Bridge almost guaranteed profit for its highway operator, adding that this was unfair because the bridge had been opened since 1985 whereas the agreement only started from 1993.



Busy reading: Visitors to the library going through the toll agreements at the Works Ministry in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.