



Government says 'No' to calls for information law

Sixty countries have enacted freedom of information (FOI) law to date as part of the global transparency wave, but Malaysia will not yet join their ranks.

The Leader of the Opposition, **Mr. Lim Kit Siang** (Democratic Action Party - DAP), who has consistently raised the matter without success since 1976 when he failed to move a Private Member's Bill on this, renewed his efforts yet again on 26 September during the question session in the lower House.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department **Dato' Seri Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz** stated that "the need does not arise [...] The government is of the opinion that current legislation is sufficient in allowing and ensuring public access to official information."

Mr. Lim pursued the matter as he named several official reports that have yet to be made public and pointed out that official information should not be considered "government property".

Government-held documents

fall under any one of five classifications under the Official Secrets Act 1972. Heads of departments may place certain documents under the 'open' category and these are available to the public, the Minister said.

Possession of any information classified under the other categories - top secret, secret, confidential and restricted - would lead to a mandatory jail sentence of up to seven years upon conviction under an amendment in 1986.

The government has repeatedly rebuffed requests for FOI

legislation from opposition Parliamentarians, civil society representatives and journalists' groupings.

Its chief argument is that access to information could "affect race relations" within the multi-ethnic population.

Rare exceptions have been made in releasing classified information. The most recent examples were the air pollution index readings during environmental haze in August and the names of holders of approved permits for foreign luxury car imports.