

Provide better service, taxi operators told

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By Balbeer S. Jessy

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today asked taxi operators to improve their services rather than look for excuses to raise fares whenever there is an increase in the price of fuel.

"The increase in the price of fuel must not be used as an excuse by taxi drivers to increase fares. On the contrary, they must find ways to be more efficient," said the Prime Minister.

Speaking to reporters after launching Prophet Muhammad's birthday celebrations at Merdeka Square here, he said it was vital for taxi drivers to improve services because this was not only in the interest of the public but also for their own benefit.

"If the taxi service in our country is good, more people will use it and this will benefit taxi drivers and not the public only," he said.

Dr Mahathir said fuel price was not the sole determining factor in the operational costs of taxis.

Other factors such as the prices of vehicles and spare parts have to be taken into account.

"Fuel costs constitute a small percentage of the operational costs. We must find ways to reduce costs; if we can do this, then the nation will become more efficient and will be able to compete with others," he said.

To a question, the Prime Minister said the Cabinet meeting yesterday did not discuss any proposal for a fare hike, adding that the matter was still being studied by the Public Enterprises Ministry.

Its Minister, Datuk Dr Yusof Nor, said last Saturday that his ministry had agreed in principle to allow an increase in taxi fares subject to a list of conditions.

He said the conditions to be imposed on taxi drivers had been discussed at the Commercial Vehicles Licensing Board level and would be discussed further by the Cabinet.

However, he said the rates have yet to be decided and

their implementation depended on the agreement of all parties and the compliance of the conditions by the operators.

Dr Mahathir said that everytime the price of fuel went up by five per cent, the price of everything else increased by five per cent. But when prices fell, the prices of goods remained unchanged.

Saying this was a problem in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir added that in some other countries, whenever costs went up, they found other ways to be more efficient.

Citing Japan, he said when the price of fuel went up, the Japanese always found ways to be more efficient. In the process, they became so efficient that they could compete with other countries.

"Similarly, when the yen appreciated, Japanese goods were still cheap and could compete with their competitors. We must have this attitude and study why costs keep rising whenever there is a price increase (in fuel)," he added.