

07/01/1999

Speed monitoring device ruling shelved (HL)

Cheah Chor Sooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet has postponed indefinitely the enforcement of a ruling on mandatory installation of speed monitoring device for the 5,000 express and tour buses in the country.

It wants the parties concerned to work out a new schedule for its installation.

The postponement of the Jan 1 deadline would enable the Road Transport Department; the company entrusted to install the device, VSM Technology Sdn Bhd; and bus operators to initiate a solution without disrupting the operations of buses and earnings of bus companies.

Speaking to reporters before chairing his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said he hoped the parties concerned could carry out their tasks successfully.

"It should be worked out in the most painless way.

"If an operator has 20 buses, he can take 20 weeks to fix the device on his buses at any of the 13 installation centres nationwide.

"We hope they can achieve the objective in a reasonable manner and make this the last postponement," he said, adding that the public would be informed of the new deadline once an agreement had been reached.

On Dec 27, the Transport Ministry gave a temporary reprieve for express buses not fitted with the device to operate during the Hari Raya period.

However, RTD director-general Zakaria Mohamed Taib said bus operators must nevertheless make an effort to fit the device in their vehicles during the reprieve period.

The tamper-proof speed monitoring device ruling was mooted two years ago as an alternative to the speed limit device which was found to have several defects, but implementation was delayed because of teething problems with the equipment.

In February, the Transport Ministry directed tour and express bus operators to install the devices immediately, after the Cabinet agreed to various measures proposed by the ministry aimed at reducing accidents.

In a last-ditch attempt to defer the Jan 1 deadline, the Pan-Malaysia Bus Operators' Association recently sent a letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to intervene.

Its chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah said the association was not opposed to the ruling, but was requesting a deferment of the deadline as 90 per cent of bus companies were facing financial problems owing to the economic climate.

To date, only 100 of the 6,000 express buses, excursion and factory buses plus other public transport vehicles have been fitted with the device, which costs about RM1,000.

Asked to comment on the reluctance of bus operators to install the device as a result of the high cost incurred, Dr Ling said:

"The association should comply with the ruling as the price is very reasonable.

"It will cost less than RM3 a day for one year (to install the device). It is not a big deal spending RM3 a day as it only amounts to a small portion of a company's cashflow."

Dr Ling said school and factory buses running Hari Raya Aidilfitri balik kampung services would be exempted from the installation ruling.

"We realise that all transportation modes are insufficient during the festive season so we will not disrupt the balik kampung process.

"Moreover, we are not thinking at this point of time to fix the device on short distance vehicles like stage, school and factory buses," he said.

On the success rate of the device in preventing crashes after its installation in police and military trucks, Dr Ling said:

"We have not fully ascertained this, but we have conducted certain tests by downloading the information from some of the vehicles.

"We found that many of the drivers slowed down as they knew somebody was watching them."

Contrary to the speed limiting device which only limits how fast the vehicle is going, the speed monitoring device is able to record the speed and driving habits of the driver, thus facilitating investigations into crashes.

The device will emit a warning sound each time an express bus driver exceeds the stipulated speed limit. It will also record the number of offences in its memory.

(END)