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Government stepping in to end strike by 600 Airport Limo drivers

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government will step in to end the strike by Airport Limo (M) Sdn Bhd drivers as their action, if allowed to drag on, could harm the country's image and economy.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the reputation of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport would be affected if passengers and tourists faced difficulties in getting taxis.

The Prime Minister said he sympathised with the drivers but stressed that going on strike was not the answer to their woes.

Speaking after launching the Survey and National Mapping Department's e-Commerce at Wisma Tanah, Dr Mahathir said the drivers should realise that their actions would only inconvenience the people.

"We should not punish other people just because we are at odds with our employer. When you go on strike, travellers are punished. This is not fair.

"Strikes will cause problems to others and affect the economy when tourists cannot find taxis at the airport."

He said the drivers' action would also affect their livelihood, reminding them that KLIA had provided them with jobs.

Dr Mahathir said whenever there were problems, differences should be resolved through negotiations and not by going on strikes.

"Everybody has problems. I also have problems with many people, if I mogok, susahlah," he said, adding that the drivers should reconsider their decision.

The strike, which entered its second day, took another twist when six management staff of the company lodged a police report alleging mismanagement and unprofessional conduct by Airport Limo against their workers.

The 600 limousine drivers had stayed off the roads since Thursday to show their dissatisfaction with the management. They claimed that their welfare was neglected.

Among their grouses were that the company owed them salary and arrears, did not provide EPF and Socso contributions, gave low commissions and did not observe public holidays. They also alleged the company was using high-handed tactics to confiscate the cars.

The strike has not paralysed taxi service at KLIA as metered city taxis and KLASS taxis are allowed to pick up passengers.

The Prime Minister was also asked on the decisions adopted by the National Religious Council on exploitation of Islam for political purposes.

Dr Mahathir said the council was of the opinion that action should be taken against those who misused religion. The Government was looking into several measures to check on this.

Asked whether the use of mosques and campuses for political purposes had increased, he replied:

"Yes, there seems to be. We will have to arrest this."

Dr Mahathir related how terawih prayers at the Subang Airport mosque were exploited by certain people.

"Midway through it, a ceramah is held where they campaign openly for Pas. They disturb the congregation ... the people go to the mosque to pray and not to listen to political speeches.

"This thing happens at this mosque, so when Datuk Abdullah (Deputy Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) advised that mosques should not be misused, they say it is an attempt to separate politics from religion, it is haram."

But Dr Mahathir said the Government's concern was Muslims at the mosques who were prevented from performing their obligations in peace.

To a question that the practice of labelling Muslims as infidels, which first surfaced in Terengganu several years ago, was happening in campuses, Dr Mahathir said this could be expected.

"Samalah ... bapa borek, anak rintek." (It's the same ... like father, like son).

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