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Task force to check errant cabbies

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - The Cabinet today ordered the Transport Ministry to set up a task force to contain the problem of errant taxi drivers.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the Cabinet also ordered the Road Transport Department (RTD) to set up a database on such people.

The meeting, which was chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, had decided that the task force would be headed by Transport Ministry secretary-general Datuk Zaharah Shaari.

It will also comprise the secretaries-general of the Entrepreneur Development Ministry and Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry.

"Stern action should be taken against the black sheep who ruin Malaysia's good name by their rude action," said Dr Ling before the Ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.

Asked when the task force would meet and whether stiffer penalties were being considered, Dr Ling said it was up to the body to decide.

He hoped the task force would come up with its recommendations as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, RTD director-general Datuk Dr Mohamad Shahar Sidek said the database would have the names of errant taxi drivers furnished by the police, Commercial Vehicles Licensing Board (CVLB), Entrepreneur Development Ministry, Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry, taxi companies, taxi drivers' associations and RTD enforcement division and the public.

"It will have a record of the violations committed by the drivers such as refusal to use meters, pick up passengers and overcharging. It will also contain the background of the drivers which include their previous convictions."

Mohd Shahar said the department would recommend to CVLB to revoke or not to renew public service vehicle (PSV) licences of those with bad records.

"Commercial vehicle companies intending to employ drivers must also check with us before deciding to recruit the applicants," he said after holding a two-hour closed-door meeting with taxi drivers' associations, police, CLVB officials and the relevant ministries here today.

The meeting was held following complaints that unscrupulous taxi drivers were the cause of the drop in tourist arrivals.

Under Rule 23 of the Motor Vehicle Commercial Transport Rule 1959, the penalty for not using the meter is RM1,000 fine or three months' jail while under Rule 19(1), a taxi driver is liable to a minimum fine of RM1,000 and a maximum RM10,000 or a year's jail or both if convicted of overcharging passengers.

Under Section 108(3) of the Road Transport Act the penalty for tampering with the meter is a RM5,000 fine or a year's jail or both.

RTD has also set up three hotlines - 03-40202221 for the Federal Territory, 03-55403233 in Selangor and 03-88884244 at its headquarters - to facilitate the public to lodge complaints against errant taxi drivers.

He said all taxis must have the hotline numbers displayed.

The taxi drivers are also required to undergo a compulsory six-hour course on road safety, traffic laws and courtesy and have sufficient knowledge about the country.

"We are giving the 300,000 PSV licence holders two years to attend the course and only those who have attended can renew their PSV licences," he added.

